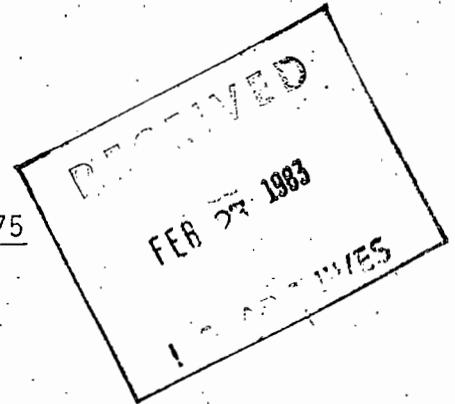


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DEVISIS FEASIBILITY STUDY

Status report as of 5 February 1975



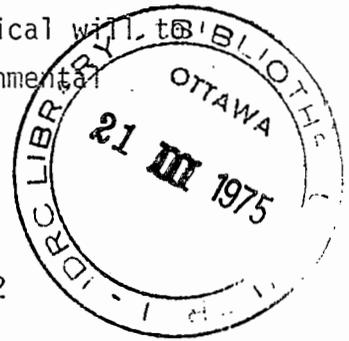
1. Origin of the proposal

The present work is based on a document issued by the International Development Research Centre in January 1974 (IDRC-doc-041), but it draws also on various previous initiatives - particularly the recommendations of the International Symposium on Development Information Clearing Houses (Berlin, 1969) and those contained in Chapter VI of Sir Robert Jackson's Study of the Capacity of the United Nations Development System (1969). It also draws partly on the experiences of the OECD Development Centre in the 1960's in organizing information services for developing countries.

In the IDRC document, it was suggested that a co-operative international system should be built to collect, retrieve and disseminate information about the social and economic aspects of development. It would be called the Development Sciences Information System (DEVISIS). This would be a "mission-oriented" system, the mission being development. Information would be admitted in the system according to its relevance to the "mission", and thus it would cut across many different "disciplines". Analogies were drawn with the International Nuclear Information System (INIS) managed by the International Atomic Energy Agency and involving the participation of its Member States; this system is now in full operation. Analogies were also drawn with the International Information System for Agricultural Sciences and Technology (AGRIS), a similar system which has just been brought into operation by FAO.

The IDRC proposal contended that the technical problems had now been solved for INIS and AGRIS, and that DEVISIS could be built once its scope had been defined and provided there was the political will to provide the necessary financial resources and an intergovernmental institutional structure.

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Like INIS and AGRIS, DEVSIS would contain descriptions of documents that deal with subjects relevant to its defined mission. A search in DEVSIS would yield references to those documents that treat the particular subject identified in a specific, often quite narrow, enquiry. The searches could be carried out either in a computer or, manually, in printed indexes. They would be backed up by a service to enable the enquirer to obtain the full texts of the documents that were identified as a result of his search.

## 2. The Ottawa Conference

In June 1974, an international meeting was held in Ottawa under the joint sponsorship of:

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC)  
The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)  
The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural  
Organization (Unesco), within the framework of its  
UNISIST program

Thirty-four representatives attended from twenty-eight organizations. The Chairman was Mr. Raymond Aubrac of FAO.

The Ottawa meeting recommended that DEVSIS should be designed to respond to the priority information needs of developing countries, but noted that it would also be useful to all individuals and institutions concerned with the development process, including those at governmental, academic and international levels in both developed and developing countries.

It was recommended that the system be managed within the United Nations family with the cooperation of all Member States, as well as the cooperation of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with development. It would be built within the conceptual framework of the UNISIST.

As with INIS and AGRIS, the preparation of input to the system would be a decentralized operation, this input being merged at a central point. The products of the system would be disseminated through a network of distribution points.

The Ottawa meeting called for the conduct of a feasibility study to be carried out by the creation of a Study Team working under the guidance

of a Steering Committee. The results of this study would be conveyed to the international community and, particularly, to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations with a view to eventual implementation.

### 3. Sponsorship of Feasibility Study

At present the study has five co-sponsors

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

The International Labour Office (ILO)

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco)

These act in consultation with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. All six organizations are represented on the Steering Committee.

### 4. Steering Committee

This has been established by the co-sponsors; the membership is listed in Annex A. Unesco acts as convenor for meetings of the Steering Committee using money that has been made available through a grant from IDRC. Altogether six meetings of the Steering Committee are foreseen over a period that might run into the early months of 1976.

The first meeting of the Steering Committee was held at Unesco, Paris, 16-18 October 1974 under its Chairman Mr. Paul-Marc Henry. The second meeting has been scheduled for 28-29 April 1975.

At its first meeting the Steering Committee dealt with various organizational problems and debated the priority information needs of policy-makers and planners in the developing countries. The Committee adopted a "Provisional Criterion for the Selection of DEVSIS Inputs" (Annex B) which will need further elaboration as the feasibility study proceeds.

The Steering Committee also called for the appointment of the Study Team and recommended that Mr. John E. Woolston (IDRC) be appointed as its Director.

## 5. Study Team

An agreement has been reached under which ILO will host the Study Team in its new headquarters building in Geneva; IDRC has made a grant of \$105 000 to cover ILO's direct expenses for this purpose.

The Study Team will be made up of a core of full-time or nearly-full-time persons, with consultants coming in for shorter periods. The Study Team is expected to operate at full strength for a period of 4-6 months, and at partial strength in preliminary and termination phases.

IDRC has agreed to make available the services of Mr. John Woolston as Director of the Study Team. He will begin his work in Geneva on or about 24 March 1975, and except for some residual responsibilities for IDRC, will be actively involved in the work until September.

Unesco has agreed to make available the part-time services of Mr. Mahdi Elmandjra who, however, will retain his base in Paris. Mr. Elmandjra will be particularly concerned with the organization of DEVSIS and will be the Study Team's principal adviser on the procedure for bringing DEVSIS to the attention of the world community through the various organs of the United Nations family. Mr. Elmandjra's systems expertise will also be available to the Study Team.

Unesco has also agreed to make available the expertise of its UNISIST team under the direction of Dr. Adam Wysocki. Dr. Wysocki is active in helping to secure the participation of different countries and organizations in the Study Team; he will also act to ensure that the Team's proposals are consistent with the concepts and principles of UNISIST, thus securing compatibility with other information systems on the world scene.

In recent weeks, Dr. Wysocki has been consulting with the governments of Socialist countries with object of securing the services of an appropriate individual to work with the Study Team.

The ILO has made available the services of Mr. G.K.Thompson, Chief of its Central Library and Documentation Branch, who is already active in Geneva and is in charge of the preparations for the arrival of other Team members. Mr. Thompson is now preparing a first issue of a DEVSIS Newsletter and is making contacts with various interested organizations. Through Mr. Thompson and his colleagues, the Study Team will benefit from the ILO

experience in operating the ISIS information-retrieval service which has many features that may be transferable to DEVSIS.

The IDRC, both from Ottawa and from its regional offices (Bogota, Beirut, Dakar and Singapore), has been active in making preparations for the DEVSIS Study and in identifying individuals to work with the Team. It expects to make available the services of Ms Kate Wild who has been responsible for IDRC's local ISIS operation and who has been associated throughout with IDRC's involvement in DEVSIS.

At present (5 February), final selections have not been made for the remaining full-time members of the Team. However two strong candidates have been identified in Latin America and an offer has been made from the Lebanon. Other nominations are expected very soon, and final selections will be made towards the end of February.

The IAEA and the FAO have promised the co-operation of their INIS and AGRIS personnel for advising the Study Team on technical problems.

Mr. Woolston is drafting a proposed work program and schedule for the Study Team. This will be submitted to the Steering Committee at its April meeting.

## 6. Contracts

To prepare necessary data for the Study Team, IDRC awarded a contract to Aslib (London, England) in the Summer of 1974 for the estimation of the volume of material that is likely to qualify for admission to DEVSIS (and the identification of the principal sources of such material). The results of this work are scheduled to be available at the end of February 1975.

IDRC has also received an unofficial indication that the IAEA will accept a contract to study the application of "Optical Character Recognition" for the processing of DEVSIS input. If this technical device is successfully tested, it would greatly facilitate the preparation of input at centres that do not have computer facilities.

## 7. Regional Initiatives

The UN Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has been holding a conference (3-7 February 1975) to study the development-information needs of its region and to put these in the DEVSIS context.

The results of the meeting will be available in the next few days. IDRC, which is represented at the conference by Ms Kate Wild, has indicated that it would give consideration to an application from ESCAP for financial assistance in its preparations to participate in DEVSIS.

The UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) has already made proposals for a regional effort to handle information about the social and economic aspects of development. These proposals originated from the Director of an ECLA subsidiary organization (CLADES), who has now put these in the DEVSIS context. The Executive Secretary of ECLA has applied to IDRC for a grant of \$175 000 to cover DEVSIS preparations in his region and to mount a pilot operation. A decision on this application will be taken by IDRC's Board of Governors in March 1975.

#### 9. National initiatives

Many organizations around the world are attempting to bring under bibliographic control some segment of the universe of information that would be handled by DEVSIS. In some countries, this is done by governmental or quasi-governmental institutions, in others it is done by academic organizations, such as Institutes of Development Studies. It is the intention of the Study Team to draw on the experience of such activities and, as far as possible, to make DEVSIS compatible with them.

A typical, and perhaps exemplary, operation is that carried out by the Nederlands Documentatiecentrum voor Ontwikkelingslanden which details the Dutch development literature in a service known as NEDO-abstracts. Indeed it can be said that the Netherlands already has a national DEVSIS operation.

IDRC is making preparations to issue a service similar to NEDO-abstracts to cover the Canadian development literature that issues from 1 January 1975.

Composition of DEVSIS Steering CommitteeChairman

Mr. P-M. HENRY  
OECD

Vice-Chairman

Mr. M. ELMANDJRA  
Unesco

Chief S. OLUWOLE AWOKOYA  
Lagos, Nigeria

Members

Mr. Scott ADAMS  
Washington, D.C., United States

Mr. Gleb B. KOSSOV  
Moscow, U.S.S.R.

Mr. E.-J. von LEDEBUR  
Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany

Mr. E. ORTEIZA  
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Mr. Louis A. SHAPIRO  
UNDP

Mr. H. STANDTKE  
Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs  
United Nations

Mr. K.K. SUBRAHMANIAN  
Ahmedabad, India

Mr. Ponna WIGNARAJA  
UN Asian Institute for Economic Development  
and Planning, Bangkok

Mr. John E. WOOLSTON  
IDRC

Dr. A.B. ZAHLAN  
Beirut, Lebanon

\*\* Vacancy\*\*  
(to be filled by International Labour Office)

Assessors

Mr. E.J. BRUNENKANT  
International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. R. AUBRAC  
FAO

Assessors

Mr. G.K. THOMPSON  
International Labour Organisation

Dr. A. WYSOCKI  
Unesco/UNISIST

Mr. Hans DRUCKS  
United Nations, Geneva

5 February 1975

PROVISIONAL CRITERION FOR THE SELECTION OF DEVSIS INPUTS

The criterion for the admissibility of information to DEVSIS shall be its potential value for, and relevance to, economic and social development policies and programmes - and thus ultimately to make a contribution to the establishment of a new international economic and social order.

Information shall be admitted if it deals with:

1) Development needs

Interpreted broadly to include specifications of particular needs as well as material descriptive of economic and social conditions especially (but not exclusively) in developing countries.

2) Development strategies and policies

Including theoretical material related to the development process, as well as particular strategies and plans defined to respond to the needs of particular situations or particular countries.

3) Development tactics

Including development administration, the financing of development programmes, investments, operational experience.

4) Development consequences

The impact of programmes and descriptions of the economic and social results of development actions.

EXCLUSIONS

Information shall be excluded from DEVSIS if it is:

- 1) either trivial or redundant;
- 2) purely technical and therefore more properly belonging in a specialized sectoral information system;
- 3) (temporarily) If it deals with a topic that relates only to a developed country situation.