The International Development Research Centre is a Canadian public corporation created in 1970 which is financed by the government and which is governed by an international board of 21 governors. The main offices are in Ottawa, Canada, with regional offices located in Singapore, Cairo, Nairobi, Dakar, and Bogota, and a new office planned for New Delhi.

The primary objectives of the Centre are to stimulate and support research into the problems of the developing regions of the world and into the application of scientific and technological knowledge to the solution of these problems. IDRC does this principally by supporting research projects in Third World countries and since its inception more than 1,300 projects have been initiated. This work is the responsibility of the five program Divisions of IDRC which are Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Sciences; Social Sciences; Health Sciences; Information Sciences and Cooperative Programs.

IDRC recognizes that information recording, processing and dissemination are essential for research to achieve the ultimate goals of enhancement of the world's store of knowledge and of application of the results to the social and economic advancement of countries. The Information Sciences Division is responsible for this program of work within IDRC and has supported the creation of international and regional information-sharing and cooperative networks in development-related fields. Agris, the worldwide agricultural information network coordinated by FAO, is an example. Technonet is another example. IDRC funding is employed to help information services become established after which there must be a national or other institutional commitment for continued support.

In addition to the support of information projects, IDRC has also sponsored the development of information tools which help standardize information practices and facilitate the sharing and exchange of information which in turn reduce duplication of effort and increase information dissemination. Where expedient, IDRC has also stimulated the application of computers and micrographics to information processing, and it is in this context that the software package MINISIS was developed.


Dr. C.A. Godfrey*
IDRC, Ottawa, Canada
MINISIS is a generalized information management and retrieval software package which was first released by IDRC in 1979 to operate on low-cost, yet powerful, minicomputers. The software is written in the SPL programming language of Hewlett-Packard 3000 computers and can only be used on these computers. Currently 22 program modules (processors) are available which aid the database manager to define data elements in the database and in the views of data available to users, to control user security and to maintain the data files and which allow users to enter and modify records, to conduct powerful and fast searches, to sort records and generate reports with user-defined formats, and to perform computations. No programming knowledge is required to use the processors, and functions are available both online and in batch. Multiple character sets, multilingual dialogue and multilingual thesauri can be used and installations currently exist in English, French, Dutch, Arabic, and Thai. Characters must be represented by 7- or 8-bit codes, however.

MINISIS was developed primarily for use by small- to medium-sized libraries and information centres, but can and is being used for a wide range of applications and databases to over one-half million records in size. Records and data elements are variable in length and the system makes efficient use of disc space and other computer resources. Current applications and outputs include library acquisition and cataloguing, bibliographies, abstract journals, project and research information, mailing lists and marketing information, land registers, trade and other types of directories, legal information, patents, archives and correspondence registers. Although programming is not usually required and needs special skills, some users have developed special programs which are available to other users. Examples are modules for serials administration in libraries, thesaurus construction and an interface to Telidon, a videotex system with special graphics facilities.

As of May, 1983, there are more than 70 MINISIS installations in 23 countries.

MINISIS is supplied directly by IDRC free-of-charge to non-profit and government institutions in developing countries upon request and after conclusion of a licensing agreement. Two weeks of training are given at the time of installation at the user site for database managers and users. Commercial distributors market MINISIS to for-profit institutions in most developed countries. The software is maintained by IDRC for all users and new versions incorporating recent enhancements are released annually. For example, large-scale SDI capabilities are being added to version F for 1983. A newsletter is distributed and a user group meets annually to discuss MINISIS and its applications. Past meetings have been held in Canada, Tunisia, Switzerland, Morocco, and the 1983 meeting will be held in the Netherlands. It is anticipated that the 1984 meeting will be held in Asia where the user community has expanded rapidly with installations now in Iraq, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and Korea.
KIEL has held a MINISIS licence since 1980 and has helped supply the package to the College of Agriculture at Suweon. Recently university libraries have become interested and, therefore, KIEL has invited IDRC to make a series of preliminary visits to interested organizations to discuss MINISIS.

IDRC welcomes this opportunity for cooperation and hopes that a community of MINISIS installations will develop in Korea that can share information and experience with the assistance of KIEL as advisors.

The motto of the earlier KORSTIC was "Right information for the right user at the right time in the right form". To achieve this challenging goal, information specialists and librarians must have access to powerful information tools. MINISIS is one such tool which IDRC is pleased to contribute to the information communities in Korea and other countries.