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Minutes of the MINISIS Users' Group Meeting

International Development Research Centre
Ottawa, Canada
26-28 November
1979

Present: See the attached list of participants.

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Opening Statement

The first MINISIS Users' Group meeting was opened by the Chair, Mr. Vernon Jorssen, Associate Director of the Information Sciences Division, who thanked the participants for their attendance.

Welcoming Address

A welcoming address was given by Mr. John Woolston, Director of the Information Sciences Division. Mr. Woolston discussed the nature of the projects undertaken by the International Development Research Centre, and by the Information Sciences Division in particular, and traced the history of the development of the MINISIS software package.

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted as distributed.

IDRC Presentation

Mr. Robert Valantin, Head of the Outreach Programme, presented IDRC's plans for MINISIS for the coming year. One major project is the production of a French version of the documentation. Another important development is the conclusion of distribution agreements with several software organizations. This will permit IDRC to concentrate its resources on development and on work with developing country institutions; the distributors would handle incoming requests from institutions in their territories (in developed countries). In certain exceptional cases, IDRC will reserve the right to deal with some institutions in developed countries which are particularly non-profit and whose work is in support of developing countries. Of course, IDRC will continue to support those institutions which have direct contracts with IDRC.

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MINISIS
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MINISIS is at present installed at the Centre National de Documentation Agricole (CNDA) in Tunisia and IDRC is planning to implement MINISIS at le Service Presidentiel de l'Informatique in Zaire. Other potential sites in Africa are the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa and the Centre National de Documentation (CND) in Morocco. IDRC has recruited two staff members who will provide software support to French-speaking Africa: Ms. Monique Duguay, who is posted at IDRC in Ottawa, and Mr. Dirk Janssens, who will be posted at CNDA in Tunis.

In the Far East, negotiations are underway with the Technology Resource Centre (TRC) in the Philippines and with KORSTIC and Seoul National University in Korea. In addition, negotiations are underway with the Secretariat of the Aga Khan in Paris - a mission will be going to the Secretariat in December to present a demonstration of MINISIS. At present, MINISIS has not been licensed to any commercial service bureau. As in the case of the United Nations/Franklin Institute/Data-tek arrangement, whereby the Franklin Institute makes the MINISIS system available to the United Nations through a commercial service bureau, the licensees are free to use any computer they choose but must maintain the confidentiality of the software. The software may not be moved from a designated computer without IDRC approval.

Mr. Terry Gavin, Systems Manager, gave an account of the latest release of the MINISIS documentation. At that time, IDRC was congratulated on the quality of the documentation which was presented to all participants. Delegates were shown how the documentation is maintained and distributed on software release tapes. IDRC committed itself to maintaining the documentation to always reflect the current software.

Ms. Faye Daneliuk, Head of Future Systems, gave a presentation on the Process Encyclopedia, a project undertaken by IDRC in cooperation with Statistics Canada, Ottawa. This project undertook to study the feasibility of an information system on economic activity by creating a data base to collect information on economic unit processes.

The Process Encyclopedia was cited as an example of an application where MINISIS was being used in a non-library environment at IDRC; another such example was a mailing list application. IDRC is in the process of converting its present mailing list so that it can run using the MINISIS software.

Software maintenance policy was discussed. Two types of software maintenance were defined: (a) bugs which require immediate attention, and (b) enhancements. Because of the requirement for a common system, enhancements made by other users must be officially included in the system if IDRC feels this will benefit other members of the Users' Group. IDRC needs to know of problems encountered by users. Procedures and responsibility for correcting errors are explicitly outlined in the licensing agreements. Problems identified will be analyzed and repaired as soon as possible. In some cases where there are urgent problems, "patches" may be made available with updates to

follow. Responsibility for bug fixes in all cases will lie with IDRC, although where the user is licensed through a distributor, the distributor will be the first line of support. Since most initial user problems are the result of misinterpretation of documentation, distributors should be able to solve these problems. Problem-solving priority will be decided by IDRC, which will correct bugs before developing enhancements. Problems must be reported to Mary Campbell at IDRC by whatever is the most convenient method; she will then direct it to the attention of the appropriate person in the Computer Sciences group. IDRC was congratulated on the reliability of its software.

Discussion of Version C

Version C of the software was introduced. It contains three new modules - DATADEF (for data base management), KWLOADER (keyword loader) and THLOADER (thesaurus loader). Improvements were made to the QUERY and PRINT modules. In particular, QUERY now offered right truncation for generic keys and a facility for browsing through a thesaurus or inverted files. Minor new features were included in the INDEX, ENTRY, MODIFY, RELEASE and COMPUTE modules.

Presentation on IDRC Work Plan

Another release of MINISIS Version C is scheduled for February 1980. This release will contain a security feature at the data base level, and an enhancement of the GARBAGE module to handle partial garbage collection. The ISOCONV module will be enhanced to convert AGRIS ISO format tapes to MINISIS, and other improvements will be made to DATADEF, ENTRY and to the JOIN intrinsic. A subsequent version of MINISIS will be released in late June or early July, which will include transaction logging and error recovery based on log files. It will also contain key selection and further improvements on INDEX and the PROJECT intrinsic.

Individual users offered various ideas on enhancements. IDRC noted the suggestions and encouraged users to volunteer to develop new processors, offering to provide the necessary advice on how those new processors could be hooked into the MINISIS system.

User Experience with MINISIS

The users present reported their experiences with the MINISIS system and all expressed satisfaction.

Mr. Gilles Chiasson of the Sports Information Resource Centre, Ottawa, reported that since MINISIS was installed at SIRC in 1978, 30 000 records had been input into a data base of sports-oriented publications. This data base is currently available through a commercial data base service.

Mr. David Watson reported for the Ontario Education Communications Authority, Toronto. They have recently installed their hardware and plan to convert data previously stored in ISIS format at an outside site to MINISIS. One application will consist of a data base of learning materials, including television programs.

Mr. Dirk Janssens and Mr. Ahmed Gharbi reported for the Centre Nationale de Documentation, Tunis. Mr. Janssens has been converting the ISOCONV program to process ISO tapes in AGRIS format, and will assist with the translation of MINISIS documentation into French. CNDA is interested in obtaining Arabic terminals and will be assisted by the Arabic University in Tunis.

Mr. Jean de Chantal reported for the IDRC Library. IDRC will be offering search services for the ILO/FAO/UNIDO/UNESCO/IDRC data bases to external clients free of charge. Experience has shown that librarians are competently interacting with the computer themselves and are depending less on computer staff.

Mr. Edwin Krauss of the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, described his association with the United Nations. The Franklin Institute is an independent research organization which arranged with a Philadelphia-based service bureau, Data-tek, to donate computer time to the Information Services Unit, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations. Ms. Anne DiLauro of the ISU reported on their progress in setting up a data base of 2 000 records formatted to the specifications of the DEVSIS international information system. They are interested in preserving unpublished material and reports.

Mr. David McBain of Health and Welfare Canada, Ottawa, reported that they had acquired MINISIS in the spring and are successfully experimenting with data definitions and formats.

Dr. C. Godfrey gave an in-depth presentation on the experiences of the Agricultural University Library, Wageningen. Their decision to acquire MINISIS was made in October 1978. They engaged a software house to assist with the implementation. They hope to have between 20 and 30 terminals in their decentralized libraries within the next year. Eventually their holdings will consist of 50 000 acquisitions, 50 000 serials, 500 000 monographs and 400 000 documents. Wageningen has partly translated the MINISIS dialogue into Dutch, and will soon begin to write new modules for circulation and serials. The circulation module should manage between 200 000 and 250 000 loans per year; implementation should take place early in 1981. Systems analysis for the serials module may be completed by mid-1980. They plan to continue using the services of the consulting bureau, but are concerned with the local shortage of Hewlett-Packard expertise.

Mr. Brian Denton gave an account of the experiences of the International Labour Office, Geneva, with MINISIS. The system is being implemented to replace the ISIS system which was developed at the ILO in the mid-1960's. Most of the present work concerns the conversion of existing data bases from ISIS format to MINISIS. Some of these data bases are a registry file, LABORDOC (their main

bibliographic data base which is commercially available in North America through a data base service), a mailing list, equipment procurement, conventions and a number of other smaller applications. The ILO expressed interest in using the Wageningen serials and circulation modules as part of the total MINISIS system. ILO may provide screen formatting for users by the end of 1980.

Question and Answer Session

Standards for applications programming: Some users have already been involved in writing new programs. The following situations may therefore arise:

- i) A user writes a stand-alone program which does not call MINISIS intrinsics (eg. a photocomposition interface). In this case, the user retains all rights to his program, but may choose to share it with the rest of the Users' Group, or allow IDRC to distribute it (IDRC may choose whether or not to support the program).
- ii) A user writes an application program calling MINISIS intrinsics. Legally this program becomes the property of IDRC, who may a) officially include the program in the system and distribute and maintain it; b) unofficially distribute the program without being committed to support it; or c) inform other users that such a program exists, and may be obtained from its creator.
- iii) A user makes changes to existing programs, either minor insertions or major additions. The revised program becomes the property of IDRC, which may refuse to maintain it, or accept it for official distribution and maintenance. Alternatively, if the change consists of a specialized procedure added to a program, IDRC may choose to distribute the program to other users with a dummy call to the new procedure, and inform users where the procedure can be obtained.

Before writing an applications program, a user should submit an analysis to IDRC, so that IDRC can make recommendations or suggestions, and inform the user if someone else is already working on the same subject. Writers of programs are not forced to follow IDRC's advice; on the other hand, IDRC is not obligated to support a user's enhancement. IDRC recommended that programs be written in SPL, but will not prevent programmers from using other languages.

Programmers wishing to use MINISIS intrinsics in new applications could use the INTRINS file distributed with the software; they were warned that intrinsics' names are fixed and cannot be changed. At the moment, no standard conventions exist for applications programmers to use when naming new procedures, or changing syntax tables to accommodate such procedures. IDRC committed itself to establishing such a set of conventions, and documenting a recommended programming style for writing new applications.

Terms of Reference for the Users' Group

The role of the Users' Group: It was established that the Users' Group would play an advisory role to IDRC on matters relating to enhancement of the MINISIS system, but will not be making policy decisions. IDRC's role is that of licensor, as well as user, and its mandate is to assist developing countries. IDRC will in all cases take note of advice given, and respond in a manner which would be beneficial to the Users' Group as a whole. It was pointed out that Section VII of the licensing agreement stipulates: "cooperating to enhance system" and "obligation to consult with Users' Group".

Future meetings: It was suggested that parallel sessions should be run at these meetings because some delegates would be technically oriented while others would be policy oriented; however, the question of expense in sending more than one delegate arose. The question of parallel sessions was put to a vote and it was decided that parallel sessions would be introduced wherever it was possible. It was agreed that a preliminary agenda would be issued so that users can suggest changes in format.

It was suggested that certain short-term matters be looked at every year at these meetings, i.e. what are the users presently doing, what is being planned, upcoming licenses, financial situation of the support program (since an ideal of the Users' Group is that this program be self-supporting). Other matters arising that should be discussed at future meetings were transportability of MINISIS to hardware of other manufacturers, and the effect of MINISIS on the sale of Hewlett-Packard computers. It was felt that Hewlett-Packard should provide more than passive support, and that some indication of their long-term plans would be helpful.

Mr. Gharbi of CNDA, Tunis, invited the group to hold its next meeting in Tunisia and recommended September or October as a probable date. It was agreed that IDRC and CNDA would arrange an agenda for the next meeting. It was also agreed that for future Users' Group meetings the host country would provide the Chair. Simultaneous translation will be provided in Tunisia by the host country.

Newsletter

It was suggested that there be a minimum of two newsletters per year. The first newsletter would contain the highlights of the November Users' Group Meeting. Users must send their contributions to IDRC if they wish their contributions to be included in subsequent newsletters. Concern was expressed that some of the larger users would communicate with each other and not with the smaller members of the Users' Group, to the detriment of the developing country users. The MINISIS Newsletter would therefore be the instrument to be used to ensure that each member of the Users' Group be informed of developments by other organizations.

Closing Statement

The Chair expressed his satisfaction with participants' interaction at the meeting and thanked them for their efforts during the discussion periods. It was agreed that the Users' Group should meet at least once a year.

PROPOSED AGENDA
MINISIS USERS GROUP MEETING
26-27-28 November 1979

Monday, 26 Nov.

Rapporteur

a.m.	Opening Statement - V. Jorssen Welcoming Address - J. Woolston Adoption of Agenda - V. Jorssen IDRC Presentation: Plans for MINISIS Implementation plans - R. Valantin Documentation - T. Gavin Process Encyclopaedia - F. Daneliuk Mailing List - J. Nesbitt Software Support Policy - R. Valantin	T. Gavin
p.m.	Discussion of modifications included in Version C - M. Campbell Presentation on IDRC work plan (modifications and future enhancements) - F. Daneliuk	J. Nesbitt

Tuesday, 27 Nov.

a.m.	User experience with MINISIS - New developments - All Users - Brief presentations on user applications, particular requirements, etc.	R. Valantin
a.m./p.m.	Question and Answer Session: Technical Problems, suggestions, etc.	M. Campbell
p.m.	Question and Answer Session: - I. Bhoi Legal/Contractual problems, - R. Robertson suggestions, etc.	

Tuesday, 27 Nov.
(con't)

Rapporteur

p.m.	Tutorial on writing applications programs and using the intrinsics	- R. Lee	J. Chau
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Wednesday, 28 Nov.

a.m.	Terms of reference for the Users Group Newsletter	F. Daneliuk
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Morning sessions are to be from 9:00 to 12:00 with coffee break from 10:15 to 10:30

Afternoon sessions are to be from 1:00 to 4:30 with coffee break from 3:00 to 3:15

26 November - Cocktail evening

IDRC Executive Lounge - 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

27 November - Concert evening

National Art Centre - NAC Orchestra, conducted by Mario Bernardi -
8:00 p.m.



MINISIS USERS GROUP MEETING

CHAIRMAN Mr. Vernon JORSSSEN
Associate Director, Computer Sciences
Information Sciences Division
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

RAPPORTEURS (Staff members of the Computer Sciences Group, IDRC)

Mr. Terry GAVIN - 26 November (a.m.)
HP 3000 Systems Manager

Mr. John NESBITT - 26 November (p.m.)
Head, Administrative Systems

Mr. Robert VALANTIN - 27 November (a.m.)
Head, Outreach Services

Ms. Mary CAMPBELL - 27 November (p.m.)
Technical Assistant

Mrs. Joan CHAU - 27 November (p.m.)
Programmer/Analyst

Ms. Faye DANELIUK - 28 November
Head, Future Systems

MINISIS
USERS

Mr. Dirk JANSSENS
Centre National de Documentation Agricole
30, rue Alain Savary, Tunis, Tunisie

Mr. Ahmed GHARBI
Centre National de Documentation Agricole
30, rue Alain Savary, Tunis, Tunisie

Mr. Brian DENTON
International Labour Office
CH 1211, Geneva 22, Switzerland

Mr. Edwin KRAUSS
Franklin Research Center
The Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Philadelphia, Pa. 19103

Head Office / Siège social: 60 Queen Street, P.O. Box 8500, Ottawa, Canada K1G 3H9
Telephone: (613) 996-2321 • Cable: RECENTRE • Telex: 053-3753

MINISIS
USERS

Dr. Charles GODFREY
Agricultural University Library
1A Gen. Foulkesweg, Wageningen, The Netherlands

Mr. Gilles CHIASSE
SIRC Manager
National Sport and Recreation Center
333 River Road, Vanier City, Ontario

Mr. David McBAIN
Monitoring and Criteria Division
Environmental Health Centre
Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, Ontario

Mrs. Anne DILAURO
Information Services Unit
Department of Economic and
Social Affairs
Room DC 594
United Nations
New York 10017

Mr. David WATSON
Manager, Management Systems
The Ontario Educational Communications Authority
P.O. Box 200, Station Q, Toronto, Ontario

Mr. Jean de CHANTAL
Centre Librarian, IDRC

Mr. Barton KRAUSS
DATA-TEK
Suite 400
1211 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pa.

SPEAKER AT OPENING
SESSION

Mr. John WOOLSTON
Director, Information Sciences Division, IDRC

OBSERVERS

Mrs. Barbara BEARDSLEY
ONTERIS, Research and Evaluation Branch
Ontario Ministry of Education, 880 Bay Street,
Toronto, Ontario

Mr. Paul LANDUCCI
SERIC
120, rue de Javel, 75015 Paris, France

Mr. Maurice BOURLIER
SERIC
120, rue de Javel, 75015 Paris, France

OBSERVERS
(Cont'd)

Mr. William PAGE
Structural Analysis Division, Statistics Canada
R.H. Coates Building, 24th Floor, Ottawa, Ontario

Mr. Jos. BOSMAN
RAET
Groningensingel 1, P.B. 4077,
6803 EB Arnhem, The Netherlands

Mr. Tony HIDALGO
Hewlett-Packard Ltd.
1020 Morrison Drive, Ottawa, Ontario

Mrs. Gisèle MORIN-LABATUT
DEVSIS Manager, IDRC

Mr. Keith SOLEY
Systemhouse Ltd.
Metropolitan Life Building,
99 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario

Mr. Colin TOWNSEND
Systemhouse Ltd.
Metropolitan Life Building,
99 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario

Mr. Jake KNOPPERS
Public Archives,
395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario

Mr. Nicholson WARMAN
Public Archives,
395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario

LEGAL STAFF
OF IDRC

Mr. Inder BHOI
Senior Legal Officer

Mr. Robert ROBERTSON
Assistant Counsel

OTHER STAFF
OF IDRC

Mr. Richard LEE
Programmer/Analyst
Computer Sciences

Ms. Monique DUGUAY
Programmer/Analyst
Computer Sciences