


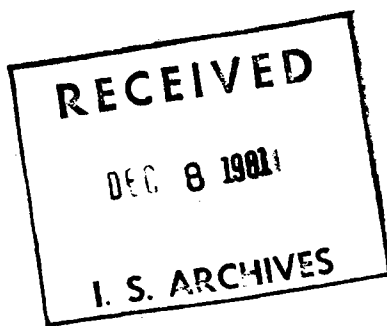
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Improving Accessibility to Development Literature: Some
Activities of the International Development Research Centre
(IDRC)



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ABSTRACT

Article on information science activities, supported by Canada's International Development Research Centre, which result in improved bibliographic control and document delivery of socio-economic development literature of the Third World. Discusses socio-economic cooperative information systems, the strengthening of national information infrastructures and a project whereby remote on-line access to selected development-oriented data bases is provided to the Canadian research community.

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Introduction

In 1975, the DEVSIS¹ Study Team prepared a report on the feasibility of a global information system dealing with socio-economic development literature. In the course of its study, the Team surveyed the availability of development literature and determined that forty percent of it consisted of commercially available monographs and periodical articles. The remaining sixty percent comprised a wide variety of material which is "usually very difficult, if not impossible to obtain, and very seldom comes under bibliographic control" [1]. The latter category, items which are issued outside commercial publishing houses and which receive very limited dissemination, consists of feasibility and pre-investment studies, consultant's reports, working papers, reports of commissions, research results, etc., and is usually prepared by or for governments, research institutes or international agencies. It is sometimes referred to as "non-conventional", "unpublished", "grey", "invisible" or "fugitive" literature.

¹ Development Sciences Information System

Such documents describe existing conditions in developing countries, development goals, programs and projects, and evaluate the consequences of development actions.

The fugitive literature of a given country is primarily of interest to individuals involved in the development policy-making and planning for that country. It is, however, also relevant to the needs of planners in other countries in the same region, to planners in countries in different geographical regions but at similar levels of economic development, or to persons involved in comparative studies between regions or countries.

The following is a description of some activities supported by the International Development Research Centre which involve the identification, recording, dissemination and document delivery of the literature, primarily the fugitive literature, which deals with the economic and social development of the Third World.

The International Development Research Centre

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is a public corporation created in 1970 by an Act of the Canadian Parliament to stimulate and support research for the benefit of the developing countries. IDRC was one of the first organizations to devote its resources primarily to supporting projects which are identified, designed, carried out and managed by research personnel in developing countries and which meet the needs they, themselves, determine to be priorities. IDRC's activities are in four program areas - agriculture, food and nutrition sciences; social sciences; health sciences; and information sciences.

Information science projects supported by IDRC focus on the mechanisms to record and disseminate existing knowledge so that it can be applied to the economic and social advancement of the world's developing regions. These projects include:

- a) support for the development of, and participation in, regional and global cooperative information systems that respond to areas of development priority;

- b) establishment of specialized information analysis centres with a specific subject focus;
- c) assistance for the development of national information infrastructures in selected countries;
- d) training relevant to the needs of IDRC-supported programs; and
- e) improvement of information handling tools, e.g. development of computer software and thesauri [2].

Those activities which impact the accessibility of the development literature, socio-economic development information systems and the development of national information infrastructures, as well as a project to respond to the information needs of the Canadian development research community, will be discussed in more detail.

Socio-Economic Development Information Systems

IDRC was one of the six international organizations participating in the DEVSIS Feasibility Study which recommended the establishment of a global Development Sciences Information System (DEVSIIS). In the six years since this study, a global DEVSIS has not yet evolved. During this time, however, significant developments have been made in the establishment of regional socio-economic development information systems. In addition, since 1978, a DEVSIS-type activity has existed within the United Nations in New York.

a) Regional Systems

Currently, IDRC is providing technical and financial support to regional DEVSIS activities in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa.

The Latin American Information Network (INFOPLAN) which began in 1979, operates out of CEPAL (Comisión Económica para América Latina), the United Nations regional organization in Santiago de Chile. At present, it involves the cooperative efforts of the Ministries of Planning of six Latin American countries (Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Peru and

Venezuela) to build a data base of references to Latin American socio-economic planning information and to provide information services to development planners. INFOPLAN produces a printed index, Planindex [3], which contains abstracts of documents entered in the system.

CARISPLAN, the Caribbean Information System for Economic and Social Planning, is a sub-regional sub-system of INFOPLAN. It is located in the CEPAL Office for the Caribbean in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. CARISPLAN also began in 1979 and is involved in strengthening national information centres in the Caribbean, and in promoting the exchange of information among them for use by the Caribbean development planning community. It has prepared CARISPLAN Abstracts [4], an index to the development literature produced by the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee, a subsidiary body of CEPAL, and to the development literature from Antigua, Barbados, Cuba, Guyana, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago.

The regional development information system in Africa is PADIS-DEV, the economic and social component of PADIS, the Pan-African Documentation and Information System. In January 1980, PADIS was created under the aegis of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa, with the

financial support of several United Nations agencies, IDRC and the African Development Bank. PADIS is a cooperative, decentralized information system whose first phase includes PADIS-DEV. The long term goals of PADIS-DEV are the establishment of an information system to ensure access to the socio-economic development literature produced in Africa; the provision of information services to individuals and institutions in African countries working on economic and social problems; and the strengthening of African national information infrastructures. The first issue of Devindex-Africa [5], published in October 1981, contains abstracts of selected ECA documents. Plans are for a quarterly index which will contain abstracts of documents reported by the national and sub-regional participating centres.

The objectives of these regional systems include the identification, collection, recording and dissemination of development literature following internationally recognized procedures and standards. They aim to provide access to the development literature emanating from the region and for the exchange of this information with other regions. To avoid duplication of effort, the territorial formula is applied: each participating centre is responsible for identifying and

collecting the relevant materials produced in its own territory (usually a country), and for recording them in a standardized format. Outputs are printed indexes referencing the documents contained in the system and, in the case of computerized systems, magnetic tapes in ISO 2709 [6] format which are available to the participating countries and for exchange with other regions.

All of these activities serve to improve the bibliographic control of the socio-economic literature of developing countries and allow planners and researchers to have access to citations relevant to their needs. This alone is not sufficient. It is extremely frustrating for an individual to retrieve citations to what appear to be interesting documents but to have no means of acquiring copies of the items themselves. Therefore, each system has a document delivery component and will supply on request copies of all unclassified non-conventional documents indexed in the system. These are usually on microfiche as it is cheaply duplicated, is easily stored and can be airmailed in a standard envelope, thus avoiding slow delivery and customs problems.

b) Development Information System (DIS)

For the past three years, IDRC has given some financial support to the operation of the Development Information System (DIS), a DEVSIS-type activity in the Information Systems Unit of the United Nations Department of International Economic and Social Affairs. A data base of some 5,000 unpublished UN documents has been compiled and from it Development Information Abstracts (DIA) [7] is generated.

The preface of DIA states that the aim of DIS is "to provide access to the studies, mission reports and project reports generated by the United Nations Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development and the Centre for Human Settlements, so that the information contained therein can be re-used effectively by member governments, United Nations officials, and other institutions active in the field of economic and social development". These studies and reports are of particular importance because they contain the substantive information generated during the course of projects - information which rarely appears in the formally published final project reports.

DIS can supply microfiche copies of the documents of the UN Centre for Human Settlements and photocopies of the other reports referenced in its data base. Should a document be restricted, DIS will apply to the country in which the work was carried out to seek permission for release of the document to the requestor.

National Information Infrastructures

For a country to be a responsible participant in a cooperative information system, such as those described in the previous section, it must possess a strong information infrastructure. IDRC is providing support to selected developing countries to enable them to gain bibliographic control of the information produced in their countries, thus allowing them to be effective partners in regional networks. One such country is Jamaica.

The Government of Jamaica has established a plan [8] for a national framework to coordinate all its information services. In this context, IDRC is supporting the strengthening of the National Library of Jamaica (NLJ) and the building of a socio-economic information network. The NLJ has started work on the production of a National Union Catalogue and a Union List of Serials and on the establishment of a National Referral Service. Plans are underway for the creation of a documentation centre in the National Planning Agency (NPA), the focal point of the socio-economic network. The NPA Documentation Centre has been identified as the Jamaican national coordinating centre

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for CARISPLAN, and it will identify, collect, record, store, and make available those documents to be reported to CARISPLAN.

The strengthening of a country's library and information infrastructure and the resulting improved bibliographic control and access to documentation are, of course, of prime benefit to the country involved. However, there are additional benefits to other countries who will also be able to access the socio-economic literature of that country.

Development Data Bases: Use in Canada

In addition to supporting projects to create socio-economic development data bases and to strengthen national information infrastructures, IDRC also funds a pilot project to provide Canadian researchers with remote on-line access to selected development-oriented data bases. This project is called Development Data Bases: Use in Canada.

Using MINISIS, its own generalized information management package, IDRC has compiled three in-house data bases focusing on development literature: BIBLIOL, DEVSISL and SALUS. BIBLIOL contains the holdings of the IDRC Library, a collection serving the interests of the Centre itself. Approximately sixty percent of the references are to documents not available through commercial channels, the majority of which are produced in developing countries. DEVSISL is an experimental data base designed to test the methodologies proposed in the DEVSIS Study Team report [1]. It consists of references to Third World development

literature produced in Canada and also includes experimental input from the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, the USSR, Morocco, Indonesia, the Philippines, Pakistan, India, Tunisia and Bangladesh. SALUS contains references to literature on low cost rural health care and health manpower training in developing countries. Many of the references are to unpublished reports from institutions in the Third World.

For the past two years, IDRC has made these three data bases, as well as the data bases of four UN agencies¹, available via MINISIS and the IDRC computer, to some fifty-five Canadian research institutions. These include universities, government departments and not-for-profit institutions. Thus, the Canadian research community is being alerted to the existence of a significant amount of socio-economic literature emanating from developing countries.

¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); and International Labour Office (ILO).

Should a library or documentation centre decide to acquire copies of the documents retrieved upon interrogation of these data bases, it is usually possible to do so. The published literature is, of course, available through normal commercial channels. IDRC maintains a microfiche collection of the documents referenced in SALUS and of all of the non-conventional Canadian literature referenced in DEVSISL. For non-Canadian material in DEVSISL, application can be made directly to the appropriate national participating institution for assistance in acquiring copies of documents. The IDRC Library is willing to offer assistance to project participants in securing copies of documents referenced in BIBLIOL. Depending on the nature of the document participants can obtain it either as an interlibrary loan or as a microfiche copy.

The IDRC data bases are currently accessible on-line to Canadian institutions only. However, it is possible in some cases for non-Canadian institutions to acquire SALUS or DEVSISL on magnetic tape in the ISO 2709 format for machine-readable bibliographic description [6].

Conclusion

IDRC's programs in socio-economic information systems help to solve two of the problems associated with the literature of developing countries: lack of knowledge of its existence and its limited availability to users. As a result of increased bibliographic control through the creation of data bases and printed indexes, and of improved systems of document delivery, better access is provided to the world's development literature.

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