MINISIS Application for Libraries and Information Services

by

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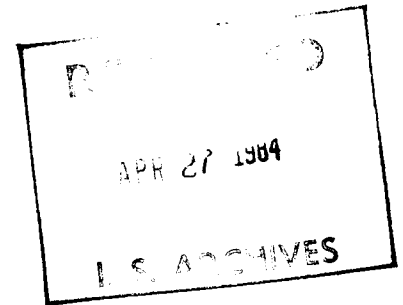
The International Development Research Centre is a Canadian public corporation created in 1970 which is financed by the government and which is governed by an international board of 21 governors. The main offices are in Ottawa, Canada, with regional offices located in Singapore, Cairo, Nairobi, Dakar,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

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 program-
ming 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 applica-
tions and outputs include library acquisition and cataloguing, biblio-
graphies, 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 con-
clusion 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.

KIET 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, KIET 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 KIET 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.