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# INFORMATION COMMUNICATION AND IDRC

No. 3, May 1995

## Towards integrated program delivery ISS Division faces a new challenge

To say that these are challenging times is a gross understatement. Federal government departments and agencies have just undergone a major program review that has resulted in the restructuring of a significant number of government programs and structures. The federal budget tabled last February contained deep cuts to federal programs, including ODA, within which IDRC budget resides. The IDRC budget was reduced by 14 percent for the FY95-96. The challenge for us now is how this reduction will be absorbed, while maintaining the quality of our program and the effectiveness with which it is delivered.

Within the ISS Division, we are in the middle of reviewing our program priorities, and assessing the full implication of the recent budget decisions. This is a stressful undertaking, for all of us within the Division were comfortable with the belief that our program over the years has been responsive to the development agenda in the various regions of the world. However, we must now realize that we will not be able to respond to all of the interesting and exciting initiatives presented to us, nor support all of the ongoing programs.

On the other hand, this fiscal reality does present us with a new opportunity. We are forced to examine the environment or context in which we work and question how we can be more efficient and effective with greatly reduced financial resources. We must consult with our partners and colleagues in the developing regions of the world and hear not only

what we should be doing, but how we should deliver our program. The process is indeed a challenging one, but it is also a positive one, for the outcome will surely result in a more dynamic and responsive information and communication sciences program.

However, we are by no means beginning with a blank canvas. As we move into the new fiscal year, there are two basic principles which will provide our programming framework. They are:

- A move towards broader-based, multidisciplinary support as a means of increasing program effectiveness. These *Integrated Program Initiatives* are being implemented through teams of staff.
- A move towards "*strategic positioning*", i.e. increased focus on a smaller number of priority topics or "*problematiques*" so that the Division's resources can be targeted for greater impact over a 3 to 5 year time frame.

At this time, three information-related *problematiques* have been identified:

- How to apply information and communication systems and technologies to strengthen sustainable resource management, focusing on two selected ecosystems - dryland areas and tropical rainforests;
- How to strengthen local-level communication and participation to create social change; and
- How to redress the growing imbalance in access to, and benefits derived from, information and related CIT by different sectors of society.

In the months ahead, I shall be using this forum to communicate our progress and the final decisions reached regarding the changes in the Division's program based upon the stated principles and *problematiques*.

This is the third issue of the Division's newsletter, and I am delighted to have two important external contributions. Dr. Dominique Babini, Information Officer, CLACSO, is the project leader for one of the major global network initiatives on development research, IDIN. This successful project is an excellent example of the Division's experience with information networks, and we must learn from and build upon this experience. Mr. James Mullin, former Vice-President, Program, IDRC, addresses key information issues in South Africa. In future issues, the Division's strategy for program delivery in South Africa will be presented. Mr. Mullin has made an important contribution to the formulation of this strategy.

I shall use this forum to inform and discuss the future program directions of the Division. I want to emphasize the term "discuss". This "forum" is open to you and I would like to hear from you. We have covered a great many topics in these three issues. What do you think of what we have had to say? What words of advice do you have to offer us? Your views, reflections, suggestions will be greatly appreciated. Please, talk back!

-- Martha B. Stone, Director  
General, ISSD

# Information Issues in South Africa

-- James Mullin --

In May 1994, the long era of white minority rule in South Africa finally ended. One of the many profound changes which the new Government of National Unity will usher in will be a move away from government based on secrecy towards a more open system, which will promote flows of information as a key step in changing the paths of development of South Africa's society and of its economy.

The new government must face up to many severe economic problems, including:

- a very high unemployment rate, particularly among black people;
- a highly skewed income distribution pattern, with annual per capita incomes for whites of about US\$12 000 and for blacks of about US\$600;
- low levels of education throughout much of the workforce and an education system in need of radical reform;
- a high concentration of ownership in the domestic economy which contributes to the dominant position occupied by large enterprises;
- a massive need for investment to meet such basic needs of the majority of the population as housing, sanitation and other social services;
- an "apartheid-determined economic geography", which has non-whites living in areas distant from existing sources of employment; and
- a traditional policy stance in previous governments which has neglected the role of technology and technological change in the promotion of economic efficiency and competitiveness.

The government has a delicate balance to maintain as it seeks to promote development among the disadvantaged majority while keeping the first-world elements of South Africa's national economy functioning to provide the economic resources necessary for much of the Reconstruction and Development Program. In this scenario, information policy will need to embrace at least:

- policies for the information needs of good governance within a substantially changed structure of government (including nine new provinces and a large number of

municipal and community organizations which have traditionally been cut off from information flows);

- policies for the information needs of the Reconstruction and Development Program;

- policies for the needs of the formal economy; and

- policies for the needs of the informal microenterprise sector on which major expectations for job creation are being placed.

In each policy area, there is a need to assess the capacity to introduce, manage and adapt to South African needs, information technologies of all levels of complexity. For example, it may be that modern information technology will be the only route which offers the possibility of a rapid improvement of access to information by previously disadvantaged communities. However, in the short term, new officials in government run the risk of being overwhelmed by the many proposals they are receiving for high-tech solutions to all of their information problems.

The Government of South Africa is now under pressure, from within the democratic movement, to act on information issues but, as was demonstrated by a recent IDRC Mission (see Harfoush and Wild, *National Information Management Project, South Africa, Report of the Preparatory Mission, Johannesburg, May 16-31, 1994, pp. 9-10*), it is not yet organized to respond. There are many opportunities for organizations with credibility in South Africa, such as IDRC, to help. And the first help needs to arrive soon.

*Mr. Mullin is the former Vice-President, Program, of IDRC and was leader of an international mission which drafted a report for the Mass Democratic Movement entitled, "Towards a science and technology policy for a democratic South Africa (IDRC, 1993)". In recent years his consulting practice has led him to work extensively in South Africa, particularly on problems of small and microenterprises. Mr. Mullin can be reached at: [jmullin@idrc.ca](mailto:jmullin@idrc.ca).*

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*The Information Sciences and Systems Programs aim to stimulate social and economic advancement by providing equitable, timely and efficient access to scientific, technical and other knowledge, and by promoting its effective application to the problems of development. IDRC offices are located in Ottawa, Cairo, Dakar, Johannesburg, Montevideo, Nairobi, New Delhi and Singapore.*



# *The electronic road to Cairo*

## *International Conference on Population and Development*

September 1994 reconfirmed Egypt as the cradle of civilization with its capital, Cairo, hosting the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). Labelled "the most difficult delivery of his life" by the Egyptian Minister of Population and Family Planning, himself an obstetrician, during the closing remarks, ICPD will be remembered by most people for its unparalleled international debates on abortion and the opposing views of traditional religious forces and progressive activists, which have received major press coverage.

From an organizational point of view, ICPD was once again characterized by special efforts to enable the broadest contribution of institutions and individuals interested in its issues, as seen at UNCED in Rio and UNCHR in Vienna. The Cairo Conference provided both official delegates and non-governmental organizations with the possibility of improving their contributions to the debates thanks to the information and communications infrastructure available and to the dedication of individuals working for the democratization of information. IDRC played a significant role in this respect by supporting an NGO project which focussed on providing ICPD participants with electronic access to official ICPD and NGO documents and position papers, and on offering means to interact among themselves and with the rest of the world.

Implemented by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and NGONET in partnership with UN and Egyptian bodies, and coordinated by the Third World Institute (ITeM), the project provided a computer facility at both the official conference site and at its parallel NGO Forum. Linked to the UN POPIN

ophor and to the rest of the world via the Internet, users could:

- search and retrieve official ICPD and NGO documents on UN and APC-NGONET databases;

- send and receive electronic mail messages via the APC-NGONET network;
- access, read, and add information to APC electronic conferences to ensure dissemination worldwide;
- use the computer and printing facilities to produce the latest information to share with others; and
- for participants with no access to the official conference site, "lobby" by sending messages to reach delegates to express views on issues under debate.

In addition to the remote users linked to over 50 APC networks worldwide, an estimated 350 on-site ICPD participants made use of the services offered during the conference by the project's information and communications facility. User and training assistance was provided by an international team of electronic network and documentation specialists and some 27 locally-trained volunteers selected by the Egyptian NGO Steering Committee for ICPD. The team included NGO experts from ITeM (Uruguay), IBASE (Brazil), GreenNet (England), ENDA (Senegal), Baraka (Palestine) and Neahtawanta (USA). Major contributions were also provided in Egypt

by the Cairo Demographic Centre, the Information and Decision Support Centre, the Egyptian Universities Council and the Ministry of Population and Family Planning. The input of the International NGO Planning Committee for ICPD, the UN NGO Liaison Service, UNFPA, UNPD and POPIN, and technical support of Chasque, AlterNex and IGC is greatly acknowledged.

For Egypt ICPD was indeed a success ... a difficult but major delivery. Its benefits will not only be found in the Cairo declarations but also in the outcome of the IDRC-sponsored project. State-of-the-art computer equipment was donated by the project to the NGO Steering Committee which has been stimulated to implement a national electronic NGO network. Also, through sensitization of the Egyptian authorities and the ICPD organizers, a major and permanent Internet connection upgrade was installed in Cairo enabling more citizens to drive on the electronic road of information services.

— Gilles Cliche, IDRC Regional Office, Cairo; [gclache@idrc.ca](mailto:gclache@idrc.ca)

## *GlobeSAR regional workshop*

A regional workshop was jointly organized by the National Research Council of Thailand and the Canada Centre for Remote Sensing to discuss the results of the first year of GlobeSAR Project (see *Information, Communication and IDRC*, no. 2). The workshop, held in Bangkok, 28 November - 2 December 1994, was attended by 14 countries, including both GlobeSAR Project participants and other Asian countries.

The workshop included presentation of the Radarsat Program and introductions to Radar technology and to Canadian Radarsat; reports on research progress in

the areas of land use monitoring, agriculture, forestry, hydrology, and geological applications; non-participant country reports on the state of remote sensing in their respective countries; ELADA 21/ Geoscope presentation (see *Information, Communication and IDRC*, no. 2); Radarsat Validation Program; and Application Development and Research Opportunity Program. The workshop proceedings will be distributed to participants this spring.

Many of non-GlobeSAR participants expressed their interest in joining the GlobeSAR project or its possible extension. Those who have already participated would like to see the program strengthened in the near future.

— Djilali Benmouffok, ISSD; [dbenmouffok@idrc.ca](mailto:dbenmouffok@idrc.ca)

## Bellanet -- a global electronic forum

Development assistance agencies find themselves today facing two inter-linked imperatives: a pressure to work more effectively and the necessity of dealing with the implications of dramatic technological changes. The *Bellanet* initiative responds to these demands by establishing mechanisms for better collaboration among donors and between donors and their clients. The initiative has been developed by IDRC, the MacArthur Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, SAREC and the World Bank in consultation with other agencies.

A number of development assistance agencies met at Bellagio, Italy, in November 1993 and again in September 1994, and agreed to collaborate in a three-year pilot project, *Bellanet: a Global Forum for Sustainable Development Research and Capacity Development*, to assist donors and others in the development community to improve their performance, individually and collectively, in program planning, implementation, and evaluation, through the better sharing of ideas, information and experience.

*Bellanet* will support electronic communications which will allow donors to share ideas, exchange information and develop partnerships on a timely, cost-effective and confidential basis. It will also provide support, both technical and substantive, to special interest discussion groups and to more formally structured electronic conferences on system-wide issues such as research investment for development, special topics such as biodiversity or energy, and development assistance to particular countries or regions. *Bellanet* will use

existing physical networks and gateways to allow interconnection among participating organisations, and to provide access to information sources, organizations and networks beyond the *Bellanet* participating agencies, including the emerging electronic networks which are being put in place through donor assistance in developing countries.

The *Bellanet* initiative will be governed by an International Steering Committee, consisting of representatives of collaborating donors. An Advisory Group on Information Needs will ensure relevance and linkages with the recipient community in developing countries. An International *Bellanet* Secretariat will be housed principally at IDRC in Ottawa and also at UNEP in Nairobi. Participation is open to the entire development assistance community in the form of financial support, in-kind technical and information support and exchanges of ideas.

At the end of three years, it is anticipated that the *Bellanet* electronic forum will have facilitated a number of collaborative initiatives, will have created a network of donors and others who share new ideas and program plans, will have produced a body of experience of lessons learned and will have been able to demonstrate that it saved donors time and money, while helping to provide better results.

For further information please contact: **David Balson**, Executive Director, *Bellanet International Secretariat*, c/o IDRC, P.O. Box 8500, Ottawa, Ontario K1G 3H9 tel: (613) 236-6163 ext. 2436; fax: (613) 563-3859; [dbalson@idrc.ca](mailto:dbalson@idrc.ca).

## Pan Asia Network program

The Asia Regional Office of IDRC has launched its Pan Asia Networking (PAN) program. The PAN program aims to promote the development of information networking and communications technology in the Asian region, strengthening capacities of government agencies, research institutions, universities, non-governmental organizations and the public at large to share, access and use data and information more effectively. Consolidating a strong information communication system to facilitate information sharing for ongoing research and policy development benefits everyone, minimizing duplication of resources for research and development.

PAN provides access to regional and national information and connects with the Internet. The PAN content focus includes the following areas, which derive from IDRC's mandate of working with developing countries on the implementation of Agenda 21: biodiversity, natural resources management, managing social and economic change in communities, adoption of sustainable technologies and health of communities.

The PAN program responds to the needs expressed by Asian research and development institutions. A survey was conducted in sixteen cities of ten Asian countries by two teams of consultants. They held workshops, consultations and interviews with key ministries, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, network service providers and network users to assess the current conditions of data communications in the region.

The consultant's report, entitled *Pan Asia Networking: an Asian Survey* (see p.10 for details), summarizes the telecommunication networking framework in each country, along with network development trends, in particular Internet connectivity and local requirements. The future needs, plans and aspirations of the workshop attendees, and others interviewed, converge on one point: the need to speed up the evolution of information networking in the region.

— **Maria Lee-Hoon Ng**, IDRC Regional Office, Singapore; [MariaNgLeeHoon@idrc.org.sg](mailto:MariaNgLeeHoon@idrc.org.sg)



# International Development Information Network

## linking social science research

What can we do to help social science researchers from developing regions get in touch with colleagues working elsewhere, so that they can share experiences, knowledge and information about development problems?

This question was raised by a group of development specialists of the Inter-Regional Coordinating Committee of Development Associations (ICCDA). ICCDA was created in 1976 as an academic, non-governmental organization, representing more than 800 social science research and training institutes, and comprising five regional associations: the Association of Development Research and Training Institutes of Asia and the Pacific, Kuala Lumpur; the Association of Arab Institutes and Centres for Research in Economic and Social Development, Tunis; the Latin American Social Science Research Council (CLACSO), Buenos Aires; the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa, Dakar; and the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes, Tilburg. The members believed that exchange of ideas among development specialists would eventually lead to shared visions on common problems and to consensus building in the international agenda.

As a mechanism of a cooperative network for information exchange the International Development Information Network (IDIN) began operations in 1976. During the first decade it received strong support from the Development Centre of OECD. Databases with profiles of development research institutes and databases with description of ongoing development research projects in different regions were created. Regional directories of current research were published and distributed worldwide.

IDIN partners requested IDRC's and OECD's support to decentralize opera-

### — Dominique Babini —

tions to the regional associations. Within a three-year period (1988-91) each of the five associations received hardware, software and training to build its own regional base in member research institutes. A second period (1992-95) was further approved by IDRC to create regional information networks and develop inter-regional activities with participation of all associations. The general coordination of the network was entrusted to CLACSO. During this period IDIN has:

—moved towards more value-added products, required by development specialists. Inter-regional research reviews have been prepared on such topics as "Democratization, adjustment and governance" and "Ethnicity, cultural identities, integration processes, nationalism and

tensions due to racial or ethnic conflicts" (both to be published by IDRC);

—merged regional databases, consolidating a global database which soon will be available on the Internet;

—organized inter-regional training activities for information staff of IDIN/ICCDA; workshops have been organized on marketing and promotion, value-added products and quality control of databases; and

—supported inter-regional research studies on user needs and on marketing of IDIN services to ensure input for decision making within the network.

All IDIN inter-regional activities are coordinated by electronic mail within an electronic conference facilitating inter-regional communications, discussions and decisions. In one week a problem can be discussed by all five regional members and decisions approved. Some time ago, with traditional communication systems, it would have taken at least two to three months to get to some agreement from all members, located at Dakar, Buenos Aires, Kuala-Lumpur, Tilburg and Tunis.

Based on communications technology available today for developed and developing regions as well, IDIN is now in a transition towards a more interactive network where researchers, who are at the same time users and producers of knowledge, have to change their attitude from passive users to more active participants of inter-regional telenetworking groups where production, dissemination and use of knowledge are integrated and communications are oriented towards more problem solving.

More information on IDIN is available from the IDIN Coordinating Office, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO), Callao 875, Buenos Aires; fax: 54-1 812-8459; [babini@clacso.edu.ar](mailto:babini@clacso.edu.ar)

### ISSD Gopher

*ISSD is pleased to announce the availability of an Internet Gopher server. Initially, this server will provide information relating to the Information Sciences and Systems Division of IDRC, including electronic copies of all issues of this Newsletter, the International Network for Development Information Exchange (INDIX); as well as various types of information about the MINISIS software that is developed, disseminated and supported by IDRC. You can reach the ISSD gopher server by accessing: [issd.idrc.ca](http://issd.idrc.ca) from a Gopher or Mosaic client.*

— Terry Gavin, ISSD;  
[tgavin@idrc.ca](mailto:tgavin@idrc.ca)

# *The International Red Cross Movement embraces modern information technologies*

Since the announcement in the first issue of *Information, Communication and IDRC*, dramatic progress has been made within the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in Geneva as well as within the National Societies which form the "Federation".

The emphasis of the Library and Information Science Network (LISN) project to date has been on establishing an appropriate information infrastructure within the Federation's Secretariat in Geneva. This has involved the creation of an Information Resource Centre (IRC) which has become the focal point of information dissemination activities within the Federation; the establishment of key databases in order to have better, more accurate, information accessible in a quicker manner; and the general upgrading of computer facilities and services to allow for the decentralisation of information collection and handling.

The establishment of this firm foundation has been vital for the Secretariat to put into effect procedures and mechanisms that allow the handling of informa-

tion effectively, resulting in a usable institutional memory. The LISN project has permeated into the regular activities of the Federation and in particular has had effects on the Operations Division - the Division responsible for administration, implementation and monitoring of international humanitarian relief efforts in the time of natural disaster - thereby improving the organization's communications for disaster management.

The databases cover the following topics: National Societies, their activities and services; Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement publications; disaster appeals and responses from National Societies; fund raising activities within National Societies; youth activities within the Movement; and Federation policies and doctrines. The IRC staff are working closely with the Telecommunications Group to find ways to make the information in the databases accessible via a global network. They are involved in briefing field delegates, providing country profiles, acting as focal point for all information about the National Societies and responding to a variety of questions on all issues concerning disaster management and development.

The Federation's Telecommunications Service is giving special emphasis to data communications and the development of a global network linking National Societies and delegations. In this context, a Unix Sun workstation and server were purchased within the framework of the LISN project to allow for the establishment of an Internet host and reference service. The aim is to transmit key information more quickly, and to encourage co-operation and exchange of information between National Societies and with the Federation. As a parallel activity to the development of Internet connectivity, the Federation is continuing to develop the wide area radio (HF) network, which spans from Eastern to Western Africa and from Caucasus to ex-Yugoslavia.

The planned activities of the project include:

- an appropriate package to manage human resources, with the rapid increase in the number of field delegates required for operations (95 delegates were recruited for the Rwanda refugees operation in a two-week period), it is essential that good, easy-to-use tools be provided to facilitate this process;
- a prototype logistics package for use in times of natural disaster for use by Federation and National Society staff; and
- an inventory of tracing databases currently used in National Societies to establish a standard tracing system. This is a key area for the Federation and one that has a direct impact on the victims of disasters.

The project has been extended to December 1995 to allow these and other advances in information handling and communication techniques to be completed for the betterment of the Federation and the Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement.

— Ronald Archer, ISSD;  
rarcher@idrc.ca

## *Participatory communication training planned for Africa*

In November 1994 IDRC held a regional meeting of about fifty representatives of West and Central African NGOs at the Institut panafricain de développement at Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The objective was to prepare a development communication program in the region, based on the needs and priorities identified in the field.

Following these activities, the participants selected, as the research and experimentation theme, training in participatory communication for grass-root non-

formal education. Women and young girls were identified here as the priority target groups.

After the meeting, a program monitoring committee was also set up to guide the program of development communication. This will be based in Africa with a regional program secretariat. A print document and a video are currently under production.

— Guy Bessette, ISSD;  
gbessette@idrc.ca



## Information for social policy making

Social policy making requires integration and analysis of information and data from several sources. Recognizing that the policy and information environments are rapidly changing, the network or information system in the traditional sense will evolve into a more dispersed net, a loosely structured yet working coalition of "points of contact". Improved information technologies allow greater access to information and ease in delivery, but innovative ways of identifying sources of needed information and of repackaging data efficiently and effectively to match needs of the users must still be researched and tested.

In an effort to solve the problems of matching information services with requirements for social policy making, information systems must focus on the design of experimental research activities which can serve as guides for new

systems, and provide a means of evaluating the impact of social policy making on equity.

Examination of the information requirements of policy makers at the central, local or community levels was seen as a good entry point for subsequently determining the information needs of practitioners and researchers. On the assumption that social policy information needs to be available to all groups, a first step was the review of the groups and organizations involved in social policy making and those who influence these activities. From our experience it has been recognized that policy makers require the support of intermediaries - advisors, brokers - who can analyze and assemble alternative scenarios based on the information received, while taking into consideration political and other factors which influence decision making.

Information for social policy making should strengthen linkages across sectors, particularly health, education, labour and employment, and social welfare. This should also be matched by increased capacity to monitor developments in policy and in practice. The linkage between social policy information and research activities is also seen as crucial as this can provide a two-way channel for information on information needs of policy makers to researchers, and information on research results to policy makers.

These ideas were elaborated in the paper I presented at a workshop held in Ottawa, October 1994. *Social Policy in a Global Society*, a collection of the papers presented at the workshop is available from IDRC Books (see p. 10).

— Fay Durrant, IDRC Regional Office, Montevideo; [fdurrant@idrc.ca](mailto:fdurrant@idrc.ca)

## Network of networks in Latin America

The Network of Networks in Latin America, a three-year project, was initiated in 1992 to improve communication and access to information on a multidisciplinary basis, as an important factor in the regional integration and development process in Latin America. Specifically, the project activities have been aimed at improving the flow of information among the managers and selected end users of the regional networks through: computer-based communication, the development and distribution on CD-ROM of the databases produced by the regional networks; and production of a manual and other guidelines on marketing of information products and services.

Fourteen coordinators of the member networks met in Montevideo last November to evaluate the progress of the project. Although the project runs until August 1995, it has accomplished many of its objectives. Computer-based com-

munication was stimulated by the training provided by AlterNex in December 1992, and CEPIS, CLACSO and CEPAL have since established their own electronic nodes to the Internet. A marketing manual was prepared by CIDE/REDUC and distributed to the network coordinators at the meeting. A dossier on information management and repositioning of information systems is being finalized by CEPAL/CLADES on the basis of re-

gional seminars conducted over the past two years. The CD-ROM of databases of the networks has been produced by BIREME in its experimental edition, and 550 copies have been distributed to the coordinating centres and national focal points of the network.

Warren Thorngate of Carleton University, Ottawa, participated in the meeting as the evaluator of the project and suggested areas for action, particularly increasing the degree of discussion of the computer conferences. Areas of action highlighted for the remainder of the project are: more systematic exchange of experiences among the networks; development of a methodology for full text CD-ROM; definition of the management structure of the Network of Networks, and access to information of the networks via the Internet.

— Fay Durrant, IDRC Regional Office, Montevideo

### Fourth edition of the DAI CD-ROM

The fourth edition of the DAI CD-ROM can be ordered from: the Coordinating Unit for INDIX  
IDRC P.O. Box 8500,  
Ottawa, Canada K1G 3H9  
fax: (613) 563-3858,  
Internet: [indx@idrc.ca](mailto:indx@idrc.ca).

## The IDRC Development Data Bases Service on the Internet

For the benefit of the worldwide research community involved in development activities, the IDRC Library provides online access to nine development information databases through its *Development Data Bases Service (DDBS)*. DDBS has been operating since 1980 using IDRC's own software MINISIS.

DDBS currently consists of three IDRC-owned databases: *BIBLIOL* (the online catalogue of the IDRC Library) *IDRIS* (project information of several organizations including IDRC, BOSTID, FINNIDA, IFS, and JICA) and *ACRONYMS* (acronyms related to IDRC activities); and six databases of publications and holdings from selected organizations: UNESCO, FAO, ILO (LABORDOC), UNIDO, USAID and WHO. Three new databases are being considered for addition this year, among which PADDEV from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa will give the DDBS a wide scope of publications emanating from the African continent.

Originally, the use of DDBS was limited through Datapac to trained librarians from Canadian non-profit organizations

who understood the complexity of search strategies. With the advancement of computer technology, we can now ensure that anyone with an interest in information about the Third World could easily gain access to DDBS and conduct searches comfortably. The data is now available through guided menus and, most recently via the Internet. "Guest" users can freely log on to DDBS, using the telnet address *ddbbs.idrc.ca* (password "guest") and obtain data on IDRC's activities through the IDRIS database, as well as finding out about the holdings of the Centre Library which can be consulted on location or borrowed through other libraries. Meanwhile, our current 250 corporate users (NGOs, academic and government) from forty countries around the world can access the databases and be kept up-to-date with the latest developments through *Communiqués* and continuous support from the Centre Library staff.

We invite all interested parties to give DDBS a try and to give us their comments and suggestions. *For further information, please contact: Alain Lamirande, Centre Library; alamirande@idrc.ca.*

## Canadian researchers discuss development communication

Last November in Montreal IDRC and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters organized the first meeting of Canadian researchers and practitioners in development communication.

The primary goal of this meeting was to allow Canadian intervenors in the field of development communication to meet and exchange information on their various experiences, on research or intervention projects, as well as on the progress of approaches in this field. At the end of the meeting, the participants stressed the importance of such national discussions

in the field of development communication and proposed some types of follow-up activities.

Some forty representatives from the university community, NGOs, the private sector and government participated in these discussions. Martha B. Stone, Director General of the Information Sciences and Systems Division, IDRC, chaired the working sessions. As a follow-up to this meeting, a newsletter and a video have been produced and are available from the Association.

— Guy Bessette, ISSD

## The Benefits and Costs of Information

One of the research programs being supported by IDRC is investigating how to define and measure the impact of information on development (*see Information, Communication and IDRC, no. 2*). During the review of existing tools that might be applied in this field, it became apparent that there was a conspicuous omission. What was needed was a practical guide to assist information managers identify and calculate the costs and the benefits of operating information systems and services. Having this type of data available could improve decision making on resource allocation in the information infrastructure. The value of such a management tool becomes more and more evident given the increasing competition for diminishing funds, and the need therefore to demonstrate the returns (financial and otherwise) on investments.

The concept of Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA) is not new to economists. But a BCA guide designed specifically to serve the needs of the information community, particularly in developing countries, is another matter. So IDRC invited an experienced information scientist, Forest Woody Horton Jr, Vice-President of FID, to write a practical BCA handbook with the information professional in mind. The book, *Analyzing Benefits and Costs: a Guide for Information Managers* has just been published by IDRC (*see p. 10*). The guide, an in-depth treatment of BCA, is written in nontechnical language and makes extensive use of illustrations, models, and case studies drawn from the information domain. Special software is also included to help users with BCA calculations. The presentation ensures that the BCA concepts and methodology are understandable, and that they can be adopted readily by different levels of users. The guide is an important new management tool for information managers wherever they are located.

— Paul McConnell, ISSD;  
*pmcconnell@idrc.ca.*



# REDATAM+ and GIS

## for decision-support systems in Africa

A two-day workshop in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in October 1994 marked the beginning of the project *REDATAM and GIS for Decision-Support Systems Development in Africa*.

The goal of this project is to establish a solid technical and human base for the development of REDATAM/GIS applications in regions of Africa. REDATAM is a statistical database software package which permits the analysis of large databases (e.g. censuses and/or surveys) using a microcomputer. A new release of REDATAM will support the interface with GIS packages. Decision making in such areas as health and education services planning, tourism development, water supply can be supported by computer applications based on REDATAM and GIS software.

Representatives of five countries - Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Cameroun and Egypt met at l'Unité d'enseignement et de recherche en démographie de l'Université de Ouagadougou. Professor Brent Hall and Robert Bowerman of the University of Waterloo provided technical consultation and presentations of REDATAM/GIS applications.

Through the workshop participants familiarized themselves with recent developments of REDATAM+ and GIS tools and applications and with specification of application development methodology, reviewed specific REDATAM/GIS application problems in each participating country, and succeeded in fostering personal contacts and the atmosphere of collaboration.

Workshop participants presented their plans for REDATAM/GIS application development and particular areas of interest:

The focus of the project in Ghana will be the population growth in the Eastern region and related issues of women's health, fertility, children mortality, and

women's education.

--For Burkina Faso one of the focus points for applications will be population migration due to urbanization;

--Cameroun's focus is environmental issues in relation to population. Water and energy supply are application domains for the project;

--Mali will concentrate on problems pertinent to all of the countries in the Sahel such as health care, family planning and education; and

--Egypt has started the development of sample applications for the Ministry of Family Planning and urban planning authorities and will organize training courses in using REDATAM for government institutions and NGOs.

It is expected that sample applications developed during this project will confirm the usefulness and validity of the software for supporting decision making. Participating countries will have basic infrastructure for developing computer applications for decision makers. A training course planned for June 1995 will help the project participants to exchange their experience and learn the state-of-the-art software tools for decision support systems development. Dissemination of applications should promote awareness of availability and usefulness of the information technology.

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### *Africa strategy reviewed*

Information is a key tool for ensuring sustainable development -- the need for decision makers and policy formulators to acquire accurate and timely information that would enable them to make informed decisions has been emphasized time and again. In an attempt to respond to the information needs of Africa in a more systematic fashion, IDRC initiated a major consultation process by conducting a series of workshops involving African information specialists and development practitioners who identified specific information needs of the Continent.

The resulting *Africa Strategy* has been adopted by the Information Sciences and Systems Division of IDRC as a tool for directing and coordinating its project activities and for setting its program priorities in Africa. The strategy articulated ten specific objectives which would help direct assistance to information activities in Africa. (See *Sharing Knowledge for Development: IDRC's Information Strategy for Africa*, IDRC, 1989.)

Five years after the strategy had been implemented, ISSD reviewed all the project activities it has undertaken in Africa to assess the extent to which its activities have been in line with the stated objectives. The findings of the review shed some light on the nature of information-related projects the Centre has been supporting in Africa over the past five years and identified possibilities for future emphasis. It also confirmed the effectiveness of adopting a coordinated and systematic approach to supporting development activities on the basis of the needs identified by people from developing countries themselves. The full account of the review was published in the October 1994 issue of the *Journal of Information Sciences*.

— Martha Melesse, IDRC; mmelesse@idrc.ca



## New publications

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Brandon, Ed, and Anne Di Lauro. The MIBIS manual: preparing records in micro-computer-based bibliographic information systems. Ottawa: IDRC, 1994. CA\$34.95.

Camara, Alioune B. RESADOC: the Sahel memory base. *IDRC reports*, 22(2): 15-16, July 1994.

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Durrant, Fay. Role of information in social policymaking: Latin America and the Caribbean. In *Social Policy in a Global Society*. Ottawa: IDRC, 1995. CA\$35.00.

Garton, A. et al. Pan Asian Networking: and Asian survey. Singapore: IDRC, 1995. (A copy may be obtained from the IDRC Asia Regional Office, Tanglin, P.O. Box 101, Singapore 9124.)

Harfoush, Nabil and Kate Wild. National information management project, South Africa: report of the preparatory mission, Johannesburg, May 16-31, 1994. Johannesburg: IDRC Regional Office, 1994. (A copy may be obtained from IDRC, P.O. Box 477, WITS 2050, Republic of South Africa.)

Horton, Forest Woody, Jr. Analyzing benefits and costs: a guide for information managers. Ottawa: IDRC, 1994. CA \$15.95.

Gilbert, John, David Nostbakken and Shahid Akhtar. Does the highway go south? *Intermedia*, 22(5):9-11, October/November, 1994.

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Stone, Martha B. Assessment indicators and the impact of information on development. *The Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science*, 18(4):50-64, 1994.

Stone, Martha B., and Michel J. Menou. The Impact of information on development. *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science*, 20(5): 25-26, June/July, 1994.

IDRC publications may be obtained from: IDRC Books, PO Box 8500, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1G 3H9; fax: (613) 563-0815; order@idrc.ca.

## Training manual for AIDS communication

Guy Bessette, Senior Program Officer, ISSD, together with Iain McLellan, communications consultant, has put together a training document for IEC-AIDS at the Télé-Université du Québec. This is intended to provide advanced training to African communicators working with the local population in

the prevention of HIV. The document is divided into four modules dealing with planning, facilitating and assessing the IEC-AIDS activities, as well as with the use of media. Tape cassettes for each of the modules are included.

The document was produced as part of PROFIS, the Programme de formation à distance en IEC-Sida. Coordinated and managed by the Télé-Université with the participation of the national programs to combat AIDS of

Benin, Cameroun, Congo, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Niger and Senegal, PROFIS is a project of the Canadian Program to combat AIDS in Francophone Africa, coordinated and managed by the Centre de coopération internationale au santé et développement de Laval University and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency. For further information, please contact: Dr. Pierre Viens, CCISD, Laval University.