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The International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Library

by

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INTRODUCTION

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Library is an example of how one institution has chosen to be part of the development of new technology and to use it to its full advantage. The paper will focus on the activities of the IDRC Information Sciences Division and in particular, the Centre's Library. Special emphasis will be placed on outlining the Library's Development Data Bases services.

IDRC is a public corporation, founded in 1970 by the Canadian Parliament. (Revised Statutes of Canada, 1970). Its purpose is to stimulate and support scientific and technical research by developing countries for their own benefit. The Centre is governed by an international board which ensures developing country input at the policy-making and decision-making levels. The three working languages of the Centre are English, French and Spanish. Headquarters of the Centre is in Ottawa with regional offices in Bogota, Cairo, Dakar, Nairobi, New Delhi and Singapore.

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 which they, themselves, determine to be priorities (Sly, 1982).

The activities of IDRC are carried out by five program divisions: Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Sciences; Communications; Health Sciences; Information Sciences and Social Sciences. In addition, there are two divisions for collaborative programs, the Fellowships and Awards Division and the Cooperative Programs Division. The latter Division promotes collaboration between scientific research groups in developing countries and their counterparts in Canada. The Library is administratively part of the Information Sciences Division although its mandate is to serve the Centre as a whole.

CENTRE LIBRARY

The objectives of the Library are to facilitate access to information about Third World development. This objective is met by the three main functions of the Library which are:

1. To provide reference and information services to IDRC staff and projects, the Canadian development community, and as resources permit, other development communities;
2. To act as a test-bed for technological, methodological, and bibliographical developments and standards that may be appropriate for adoption by the international community and for implementation within IDRC projects; and
3. To provide advice and training in these developments and standards to developing countries.

The Library's collection of approximately 42,000 titles and more than 4,000 serials titles, is a current one, built around the needs and objectives of the Centre as a whole. A large part of the collection originates in developing countries and is obtained through exchange agreements with over 700 institutions throughout the world.

MINISIS

Library management and information retrieval are supported by MINISIS, a generalized information management system developed at IDRC to run on the Hewlett-Packard 3000 series of minicomputers. To facilitate access to the Library's material, items are catalogued, classified and indexed using the Unisist Reference Manual for Machine-Readable Bibliographic Descriptions, the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Macrothesaurus for Information Processing in the Field of Economic and Social Development. Access to the collection is provided through COM (Computer-Output-Microform) fiche indexes for personal author, corporate author, title, serial title, and corporate author authority listings. On-line searching of the Library's data base, BIBLIOL, provides numerous access points, including access by subject and by institution name. MINISIS was developed primarily for use in information systems and libraries, but is flexible enough for a variety of non-bibliographic applications. It is functionally compatible with the ISIS family of information systems (Valantin, 1981).

In the IDRC Library, MINISIS is used for acquisitions, cataloguing, indexing, and information retrieval. Other users such as the Agricultural University in Wageningen, the Netherlands, have developed modules for circulation and serials check-in (Godfrey, 1980). In addition, the Agricultural University assisted IDRC in the development of a module for Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI). The International Labour Office (ILO) Library in Geneva is developing a user-interface module to facilitate access to MINISIS by users directly without an intermediary such as a reference librarian.

The MINISIS software is used in over 92 institutions in 34 countries, both developed and developing. Institutions in developed countries can obtain MINISIS from Systemhouse Limited which is the North American distributor.

DEVELOPMENT DATA BASES SERVICE

Another of the services the IDRC Library provides is the Development Data Bases: Use in Canada service. This service started in 1980 as a two-year project to make available on-line to Canadian government and not-for-profit institutions, the Centre's data bases, as well as the data bases it receives from international organizations. Due to the success of the Development Data Bases project, it was incorporated as part of the regular users' services of the Centre Library in 1982. The service is, in essence, provided free of charge to more than one hundred institutions across Canada (Audet and Henry, 1982). Libraries which are interested in obtaining on-line access to the service should contact the Centre Library.

IDRC was, and still is, the only institution in Canada to acquire bibliographic data bases compiled by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Office (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Recently, the data base of the United States Agency for International Development (AID) was added to the service. In November 1984, users will have access to a combined project information data base, IDRIS, (Inter-agency Development Research Information System) containing information from IDRC, the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC), the German Appropriate Technology Exchange (GATE), the International Foundation for Science (IFS), and the Board on Science and Technology for International Development (BOSTID).

In addition to the international data bases, users have access to five in-house data bases: BIBLIOL (the holdings of the IDRC Library); DEVSIS (literature emanating from Canada on the economic and social aspects of Third World development); ACRONYM (acronyms pertaining to Third World development); PINS (information on IDRC projects) and SALUS (literature on low-cost rural health care and health manpower training in developing countries). The last data base contains over 10,000 references, most of which are available in microfiche through the IDRC Library. The citations in the data base are published as volumes of the bibliography **"SALUS; Low-Cost Rural Health Care and Health Manpower Training"** which began in 1975.

WORD PROCESSING

The Library was one of the first units in the Centre to use effectively word processing machines. MICOM's are now used throughout the Centre and in many of its regional offices. The MICOM's can be used also with either of the Centre's HP computers. In addition to MINISIS, the Library has access to the Centre's financial management system, FINMIS, and its project management information system, PROMIS. As the telecommunications capabilities improve throughout the world, on-line communication with our regional offices will become routine. Presently, only the Singapore and Bogota offices are linked to the Ottawa headquarters using their MICOM machines but we anticipate Nairobi becoming linked in 1984. Direct on-line access to the headquarters computer will be a reality towards the end of 1984 for the Singapore office.

These developments open a range of exciting possibilities and policy questions for the Library. We are investigating the most effective way of having our regional offices get access to our data bases and of organizing their material so that we have access to it. As well, alternatives to printouts for the transmission of information from our data bases are being considered, given the capabilities of the technology. As the Centre upgrades its MICOM's and begins to use minicomputers more, the possibilities are far-reaching.

MINISIS/UNIMARC INTERFACE

The International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA) and IDRC are jointly working on the design and implementation of an interface to UNIMARC (Universal MARC Format) to permit the compatible exchange of information with libraries using MINISIS systems. The interface which will be ready for distribution to MINISIS users in 1985 will also offer some facilities for handling variants of MARC and the Common Communication Format (CCF) (Godfrey, 1984).

ELECTRONIC MAIL

The Library is using ENVOY 100 as an electronic mail system primarily for inter-library loans and for communications with the external users of the Development Data Bases service. The Information Sciences Division has been operating since 1983, a computer conference using the Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES) and is actively investigating the use of computer conferencing systems in developing countries.

MICROCOMPUTERS

The Information Sciences Division of IDRC is currently undertaking a modest effort to develop some software for bibliographic applications to run on different microcomputers. The software is designed to assist small peripheral nodes in an information network to contribute references to a central network computer in machine-readable form. Essentially, it is a data entry package without facilities for searching or generating indexes. There are generalized modules to define very flexible data structures; to enter and modify data; to define print formats and print data; to output data in a single "line format"; and to perform general data base housekeeping functions. It is being written in PASCAL and developed on an IBM PC but will be largely "moveable" to different hardware using the CP/M or MS/DOS operating systems. Once the software is completed by the end of 1984, the source code and all the documentation including the internal documentation, will be available free of charge on request (Gavin, 1982).

CONCLUSION

The Centre Library is fortunate to be part of an institutional environment which has a commitment to using and experimenting with new technology. Use of these technological developments has enabled the Library to continue to improve and upgrade the services it offers to the Centre staff in Ottawa and abroad and to the Canadian research community interested in Third World development.

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