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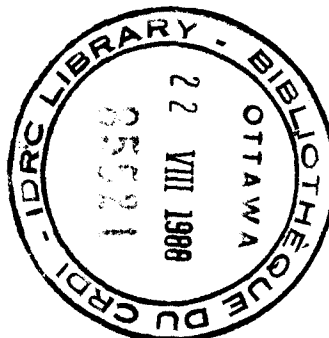
CANADIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

THIRD WORLD LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION :

The activities of IDRC

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IDRC AND ITS INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

About 25 years ago, there was a United Nations Conference on the Application of Science and Technology for the Benefit of the Less Developed Areas. At that time, papers indicated that not more than 3% of all scientific and technological activities world-wide were undertaken within the developing countries. The World Bank Commission, chaired by Lester Pearson, found there had been no change six years later. It was also found that much of the research then underway in the Third World was irrelevant to the needs of those countries, of no particular value, or in some instances contrary to their interests.

It should be realized that three-quarters of the population of the developing countries live in rural areas. These people are usually the last to benefit from the advances of science and technology but some support, however, must be given to research on the problems of urbanization, particularly rural-urban migration, housing, and sanitation technology for squatter settlements.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

From that background, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) was created by the Parliament of Canada in 1970 to stimulate and support scientific and technical research by developing countries for their own benefit.

Over the last three years, in particular, IDRC has been involved intensively in strategic planning. From this, certain principles have evolved.

IDRC's mission is **"to contribute to development through research and research-supporting activities"**. The Centre aims to assist in promoting the indigenously determined social and economic advancement of the developing regions of the world, with particular focus on the problems of poverty.

Development has been defined as **"a process for the benefit of people and should be consistent with human dignity, which is best fostered in conditions of adequate nutrition, sound health, independence of spirit, pride in indigenous culture and respect for human rights. Development decisions are investment decisions and have to be made by the people of the developing countries themselves and not by IDRC"**.

Out of this definition of development, IDRC identified three essential elements as viewed from the perspective of the beneficiaries - sustainable growth, equity and participation. Sustainable growth, which was later propounded by the World Commission on Environment and Development (The Brundtland Commission) refers to increased productive capacity based on accessible human and material resources. Equity refers to fairness in the distribution of resources and the benefits of growth. This involves the elimination of poverty and illiteracy and the provision of basic human needs. Participation refers to the potential beneficiaries participating in the decision-making which determines development.

IDRC is a donor agency and funds projects to fulfill its mission. The major criterion used by IDRC in selecting projects is that the proposed work fit within a priority expressed by a developing country government or research institution. It tends to fund comparatively small projects which have the potential for being sustained in the Third World and for application in parts of the Third World other than where the research was carried out. Most of the 3000 research and research-related projects funded by IDRC since 1970 have been identified, designed, and managed by Third World researchers. Institutions in more than 100 countries have received IDRC grants.

Within that general context, I would like to move on to the work of the Information Sciences Division and give you an example or two of the projects and their results in order to give you a flavour of our activities in the information field.

INFORMATION SCIENCES (IS) DIVISION

The Information Sciences (IS) Division is one of seven program divisions within IDRC. The other six are Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Sciences which supports projects on farming systems, forestry in arid and semi-arid lands, and aquaculture; Health Sciences, which divides its support for health systems, health and the community and health and the environment; Social Sciences, which supports research into international social and economic development issues; the Earth and Engineering Sciences Division, which focuses on hydrology, hydrogeology, geotechnics and small-scale mining technologies; the Fellowships and Awards Division which supports training in the Third World; and Communications Division, which among other activities manages our publishing program.

IDRC is unique among development-aid agencies in that it has, from the start, maintained a major program in the information sciences. This program's mission is to provide access to information to researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners in developing countries.

INFORMATION SCIENCES (IS) DIVISION [continued]

Through the projects that it supports, the Information Sciences Division seeks

- * To build indigenous capacity within developing countries for the effective management and application of information;
- * To improve systems, services, and tools for managing and using information relevant to development research and change; and
- * To foster cooperation and coordination in development research by sharing information.

The general strategy of the Division is to support improvements in the flow of information from source to use. In earlier years, the Information Sciences Division emphasized international and regional information systems. Much has been accomplished at this level and the emphasis has shifted toward strengthening systems at the national, subregional, and regional levels using traditional and nontraditional channels and improving the capacity of the developing countries to take advantage of appropriate new information technologies.

Beneficiaries

The Division's grant recipients tend to be documentation centres, research communities, and policy-making groups in developing countries, but the rural and urban poor can be identified as the ultimate beneficiaries. Occasionally, the point of intervention is closer to the intended beneficiaries; for example, through agricultural extension officers and community health workers. In most cases to date, however, the Information Sciences Division has used its resources to reach key target groups at other points along the information chain in the expectation that progress at such points would have a significant multiplier effect and broader impact on the final beneficiaries.

Although an oversimplification, information users can be split into three target groups: those needing information for research; those needing information for policy and planning decisions; and those needing information to implement developmental change. However, these groups are by no means homogeneous. Emphasis in the past has been placed primarily on the needs of the research community, followed by the needs of the policymakers. However, those information activities, that are designed to affect the rural and urban poor more directly, are receiving increased support.

The various activities of the Information Sciences Division are grouped into three main programs: science and technology information, socio-economic information, and information tools and methods. In addition, responsibility for a Computer Sciences Group and the Centre Library is included in the Division.

1. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION PROGRAM.

The main thrusts in this program have been in the areas of Agricultural Information, e.g., supporting the development of the Agricultural Information System (AGRIS). AGRIS is managed by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and is perhaps the best example of an international cooperative information system. Specialized Information and Analysis Centres (SIAC) for the most important food crops and commodities are also supported. SIAC are located in institutions which are centres of research excellence in the subjects to be treated. Based upon close co-operation between scientists and information specialists, the SIAC can be responsive to individual needs by offering evaluated, selected, synthesized and repackaged information. In the past 15 years, grants have been made to SIAC in areas such as cassava (Colombia), tropical grain legumes (Nigeria), sorghum and millets (India), coconuts (Sri Lanka), and buffaloes (Thailand) for which an award was received by IDRC acknowledging the importance and value of information in this area of research in South Eastern and Southern Asia and the Middle East.

Information on industry and technology for small- and medium-scale enterprises includes technical data on marketing, quality control, personnel planning, patents and standards information. Small-scale industries also need technical consulting services where experts can be made available through extension services.

Technology dissemination as well as capacity and resource building at the national level are priorities and networking is emphasized.

An important aspect of information for developing countries is the management of data for oceans, land and climate, the so called environmental factor on which agriculture and fishery depends. Accordingly, a significant portion of the STI program is devoted to helping developing countries built the necessary infrastructure in marine affairs, land inventories and agro-climatic models.

2. SOCIOECONOMIC INFORMATION PROGRAM

Activities supported by the Socioeconomic Information Program include initiating and strengthening information systems, coordinating existing services, promoting networking and sharing of information, repackaging and consolidating information, and training for activities in library and information sciences. Of particular interest to you would be the support given by IDRC for information infrastructure development. Support to national information systems focuses on those countries that give a high priority to information needs, entrust the activity to an organization centrally located in the government structure, and ensure that the national information plan has been developed within the framework of the World Information System for Science and Technology (UNISIST) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco).

Support for libraries and archives, which emphasizes human resource development to implement and maintain systems for handling library, archival and administrative records is given. It is aimed at training records managers and making government officials aware of the role of records management. The curriculum development sector is designed to strengthen the capability of developing countries to provide formal degree and postgraduate education in library and information sciences. Regional initiatives are also included in this sector. A survey of the projects that IDRC has funded over the years shows that there have been 7 for libraries, 37 for information networks and 220 for information services. These facts underline that the Third World is approaching information transfer not only in the sense of supporting traditional libraries but also in identifying needs and developing mechanisms to fill the country's information needs. This fresh, for us, approach appears to have come about because the infrastructure, which we take so much for granted, is, in many instances, not present in the Third World. For example, there are projects in order to obtain bibliographic control of the country's own literature - it is only thirty-five years ago that our National Library was created with one of its objectives to provide bibliographic control for Canadian publications - and another project to allow publishers to list their products. Information is linked to education and there are projects to support the training of professionals and paraprofessionals in the library field as well as providing tools to teachers to encourage the use of written information by students to learn. If we consider that the *raison d'être* of libraries is to provide information either directly or through citations and document delivery then, regardless of the name, these functions are being carried out in the Third World in various ways.

An example of how IDRC support has had an effect over the years is the work which has been accomplished in the Caribbean.

The countries in the Caribbean realized that there was a need to coordinate their regional information activities which had been supported by several donor agencies over the last ten years. IDRC, as a major donor in the area, was approached to support the development of a regional information policy. In June, 1987, the Information Sciences Division supported a meeting of the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM) and the Office for the Caribbean of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) which produced proposals for a regional information system strategy for the area until the year 2000. It proposed the further development of human resources to manage the regional and national information systems; the linkage of these systems with national and regional mass media to encourage wider dissemination of information, and the establishment of a Regional Network of Information Systems.

A little background of the role of the IDRC over the years, which has assisted the Caribbean countries to achieve this high level of organization of a regional information network, based on national focal points, would be in order.

IDRC was the external agency which was very much involved in the development of regional information systems and in related material programs. Initially this support provided for bibliographical information and related information infrastructure but was later expanded to include other regional data in textual or quantitative format, as well as repackaged data, including the exploration of dissemination through telecommunication services. IDRC has supported the development of information systems at the regional and national levels as well as the development of national and regional computerized networks using the telecommunications network for dissemination of the information. In addition to economic assistance, IDRC has provided technical assistance and advisory services. Support for the regional systems has emphasized the sharing of regional resources and the intra-regional transfer of information.

One of the earliest systems supported by IDRC, in fact since 1979, is the Caribbean Information System for Economic and Social Planning (CARISPLAN), a subsystem linked to the Latin American Information System for Planning (INFOPLAN). In addition to funding for the development of the regional centre and for training and technical support in the twenty Member states, participation in the regional systems was facilitated by assistance in the development of national information linkages and focal points such as in Grenada and St. Vincent. This first phase provided the establishment of a regional focal point, some national focal points and long- and short-term training of information personnel and users.

The second phase allowed for the computerization of the regional centre and a national focal point in Trinidad and Tobago. At this time, a regional information system for patents was also established. Since then, several information systems for such subjects as agriculture, trade, industry, energy, banking and finance have been developed.

In addition to the previous systems, support has been given to many national information system activities in Jamaica, Barbados, Dominica and Cuba. It has been recognized that there is a need for a coordinated regional information policy, as a framework for the future development of regional information systems and related national developments, and there is greater cooperation needed among the donor agencies to ensure the most effective activities to meet the information needs of the Member countries. All these activities were linked in the meeting mentioned earlier.

This has been a very complex activity at many levels but I hope it gives you an idea of the type of activity that IDRC sponsors in the information field and its response to needs identified by the Third World countries involved.

3. INFORMATION TOOLS AND METHODS

The Information Tools and Methods Program was established to assist developing countries to acquire, manage, adapt, develop, and test appropriate information-handling tools using a variety of technologies and methods. Also services are provided to coordinate training activities for the Division and, on occasion, to give advice, assistance, and training to libraries and documentation centres in selected projects in developing countries. This program supports projects in the telematics, informatics, remote sensing and cartography, and micrographics and other storage technologies sectors; it is also interested in systems and methods for handling statistical and numerical information, and especially in the design of data archives, statistical and survey methodologies, and software.

The Information Sciences (IS) Division has been heavily involved in training in library and information sciences in the Third World. Emphasis has been given to give the greatest multiplier effect so that there has been concentration on diploma or certificate-level courses in poorer and more isolated countries and on post-graduate training programs serving regional needs. Such projects as curriculum development and review, to ensure that new developments in library and information science have been included, are taking or have taken place in China, Thailand, the West Indies and Ethiopia. As well, support has been given for people to attend various courses and seminars on information sciences in such places as Nepal, the Philippines, Chile, Mali and Kenya. From 1985-87, IDRC supported 55 individuals for training in institutions of higher learning around the world in the field of information sciences. The Centre Library also provides short-term training such as field work assignments for students from the Third World.

4. COMPUTER SERVICES GROUP

The principal role of the Computer Services Group is the enhancement, support and dissemination of MINISIS, the software developed by the Division in 1976 for a minicomputer, and related activities. MINISIS has proved to be very successful and is being widely adopted in many countries for bibliographic and other textual applications. The multilingual capabilities of MINISIS allow for the storage, retrieval, and manipulation of information in a variety of alphabets and character sets, including, Greek, Arabic, Thai, Korean, and Chinese. The MINISIS software, documentation, and training are made available free to nonprofit organizations in developing countries; however, commercial and industrialized country organizations are expected to pay licence fees.

A practical application of MINISIS within IDRC is the development of the Interagency Development Research Information System (IDRIS). This is a common database of information describing research activities located in, or concerned with, developing countries and funded or coordinated by agencies that are members of the cooperating group.

The popularity of MINISIS software is evidence that this particular tool is serving the needs of several groups in developing countries. This has prompted the Computer Systems Group to set up a small, experimental program to support projects concerned with decentralizing MINISIS-related activities by building up local institutions as resource centres.

5. CENTRE LIBRARY

Organizationally, the IDRC Library is part of the Information Sciences Division although its mandate is to serve the Centre as a whole. Its goal is to promote access to information about Third World development, with particular emphasis on research in adapting scientific and technical knowledge to the economic and social advancement of developing countries.

To meet this goal, the Library provides information and library services, as well as training and advice, to IDRC staff, recipients of IDRC support, and Canadians involved in governmental, academic, and voluntary institutions concerned with Third World development. Training is also offered to the personnel of international organizations who are responsible for establishing information guidelines and standards. As resources permit, the Library also answers requests from institutions in developing countries, international organizations, and institutions in other developed countries.

In close collaboration with Information Sciences projects, the Library acts as a "test-bed" for technological and bibliographical developments and standards.

The Library develops and maintains a current collection of materials to support IDRC's programs and anticipates the information needs of IDRC staff and IDRC supported projects.

Over the last two years, the Library has been developing a Regional Information Service to the Regional Offices of IDRC in Colombia, Egypt, India, Kenya, Sénégal, and Singapore. This service is still in its infancy but rapid progress is being made in providing improved response time to IDRC staff and project officers in the regions.

It also offers a Development Data Base Service, comprising eleven data bases, to the development research community in Canada located in government and not-for-profit organizations. This service provides access to five (5) IDRC data bases, five international data bases and one inter-agency data base.

The five IDRC data bases comprise **ACRONYM** which provides information on acronyms which relate to international development and are used by IDRC; **BIBLIOL** which covers the holdings of the Library including all publications prepared by or for IDRC; **DEVSIS** which covers literature emanating from Canada on the economic and social aspects of Third World development from 1975 to 1984; **NRG** which contains information on energy problems facing developing countries; and **SALUS** covering the literature mainly on low-cost rural health care and health manpower training in developing countries from 1970-1985.

Permission to access the international data bases must be given by the organization concerned, before IDRC can make them available. The first data base **AID** is created by the Agency for International Development in the United States and contains bibliographic information on the technical research and development materials produced by AID programs. **FAO**, created by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, includes worldwide coverage of documents written by or for FAO. **ILO**, created by the International Labour Office provides worldwide coverage of journal and monographic literature in the field of economic and social development and industrial relations. **UNESCO**, created by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, includes worldwide coverage of monographs, serials, reports, proceedings and unpublished documents written by or for UNESCO. Lastly, **UNIDO**, created by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, covers documents prepared by or for UNIDO, concerned with the improvement of industry in developing countries.

IDRIS, which stands for Inter-Agency Development Research Information System, is made up of information describing the research activities located in, or concerned with, developing countries, and funded or coordinated by five donor agencies: Board on Science and Technology for Development (BOSTID), Washington; German Appropriate Technology Exchange (GATE); IDRC; International Foundation for Science (IFS), Stockholm; Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA); and the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC), Stockholm; United Nations University (UNU), Tokyo.

At present there are 120 external institutional users of this service.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, as Martha Stone wrote in her article in the Canadian Library Journal, August 1985, the Information Sciences (IS) Division "provides assistance for co-operative initiatives in information services relating to international development, and in so doing, improves the skills and resources of developing countries. This includes identifying specific initiatives of value; creating a program in relation to the needs and requirements that have been established; and providing funds, expertise and information to support such programs.

This objective should be seen in the context of the importance of information for Third World development, which is probably recognized most distinctly by the fact that the major emphasis of the literature concerns the adequacy of various means. The end for such means is taken as a given; namely, there can be no question about the importance of information as a fundamental building block for all developing countries."