

**THE LIBRARY IN THE LIFE OF IDRC
A UNIQUE RESOURCE**

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The Library in the Life of IDRC: a Unique Resource

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The Library in the Life of IDRC: a Unique Resource

Introduction

The purpose of this presentation is to tell you about the services that the Library offers and the main results of the evaluation which was completed last year in which many of you participated. After the presentation, I am hoping that there will be a useful discussion both from the point of view of you, the users of the Library's services, and the Library.

1. Objectives of the Library

The Centre Library has as its goal to stimulate and facilitate 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 be more precise the Library provides specialized information and library services, advice and training as well as acting as a test bed for technological and bibliographical developments and standards. Its primary clientele is all IDRC staff and staff of projects funded by IDRC but it also offers services to users external to IDRC, mainly Canadian institutions and researchers concerned with development. Services are also provided to researchers in developing countries and international organizations.

2. Functions of the Library

In order to provide a high quality of service, the Library has a very specialized and well experienced staff. They use three main tools to provide information and document support.

First, they select, acquire, organize, control and provide access to a collection of about 50,000 books and 4,500 serial titles all of which have been selected to respond to the information needs of IDRC staff. Much of what is added to the collection is the result of suggestions made by the Library's users. This collection is, therefore, a working collection as its strengths reflect the current program of IDRC.

The Library's archival collection contains copies of all IDRC publications, copies of final reports and other documents produced by IDRC projects. When these items arrive in IDRC, a copy is sent to the Library so that it can be indexed to be made accessible through the Library's data base, and microfilmed so that microfiche copies are available upon request. This is an effective way of disseminating the research results of projects which otherwise would not be included in the literature of the North.

Secondly, the Library's Development Data Bases Service provides unique access in Canada not only to the Library's holdings and other IDRC data bases but also to four UN data bases and the USAID data base. In addition, the Library has access to over 400 commercial data bases providing references in many subjects.

Thirdly, the Library is also connected to the world-wide interlibrary loan network.

All of this gives the Library staff an immense information resource from which to select information to meet the very specific needs of the staff in IDRC and the staff of projects supported by IDRC.

The Centre Library works closely with the libraries located in each Regional Office to ensure the best possible service to IDRC staff wherever they are located and with the minimum duplication of resources.

The Library is responsible for editing the pre-project abstracts and writing the post-project abstracts, both of which are translated, indexed, entered into NEWPINS and, subsequently, into the Inter-Agency Development Research Information System (IDRIS) data base, access to which is worldwide. This information is also contained in the country booklets which are distributed to Canadian missions and CIDA offices and are used extensively by the Regional Directors when they visit government officials and Third World institutions. These abstracts have also been published in two IDRC Manuscript Reports entitled "*Project Profiles : the quality of teaching and the training of teachers in the developing world*"¹ and "*Project Profiles 2 : Education, work, and employment*"² which were published recently.

The Library provides advice and informal training to individuals from institutions involved in Third World development, including IDRC projects, in areas in which the IDRC Library has developed expertise, such as planning for library automation, library applications of MINISIS, indexing and the application of international standards.

¹ Project profiles : the quality of teaching and training of teachers in the developing world. Ottawa, IDRC, 1989. (IDRC - MR 239e)

² Project profiles 2: Education, work and employment. Ottawa, IDRC, 1990. (IDRC-MR 253e).

The Communications Division automatically refers IDRC program and project staff to the Library for advice on planning the format and content of a proposed bibliography. Library staff train the managers of the libraries in the Regional Offices and also those project staff who require training in indexing and in using MINISIS.

Outside of IDRC, Library staff have provided advice on the setting up of documentation centres, both at the international level and within Canada, and have assisted new or existing MINISIS users' sites in developing their applications.

In addition, the Library participates in providing field work opportunities for students in the Canadian library school and library technician programs.

The Library acts as a test-bed for technological and bibliographical developments and standards that may be appropriate for adoption by IDRC and its projects, developing countries and the international community. Before a new version of MINISIS is released to all licensees, it is first tested in the Library when Library staff work with the Computer Systems Group to find solutions to any identified problems. The Library was also one of the test sites, for comparative purposes, for testing the feasibility of using CD-ROM technology in developing countries.

The Library is in the midst of implementing two new applications of MINISIS this year, i.e. CIRC for the circulation system and CHECKIN for the serials receipt function. The Library is testing them not only to make them more usable for other MINISIS users, but also to give the Library the ability to give better service in the future.

Last year, the Library was also given the responsibility for the information packages which the IS Division has been sending out to IS projects. These packages contain information at various levels on subjects which are of interest to project staff and which is difficult for them to obtain locally. The next three packages will be on automating a system, and updates to the previous packages on storage technologies and the marketing of information.

Library staff are also active participants in the work of the PROMIS Users' Group and the Records Management Committee not to mention such external organizations such as the Canadian Association for Information Science, the Council of Federal Libraries and the Canadian Association of Special Libraries and Information Services.

It is the expertise of its staff, the high quality customized in-depth service, its special collection organized using international standards, its close involvement with the IS programme and its wide range of functions which makes the IDRC Library a unique resource.

3. *Library Services*

A basic tenet of all research and decision-making is that it is only as strong as the information upon which it is based. To this end, the Library staff encourages all staff in IDRC to consult them so that they can provide the IDRC staff with the right information at the right time.

a) Services to IDRC Staff

The services which the Library offers are well-known to most of you. They are:

- Reference and research
- Automated current awareness
- Scanning the literature
- Photocopying tables of contents
- Document delivery
- Providing access to the collection
- Ordering books and journals

As an example of how the Library responds to an information need, during the development of a project, the Library staff provide a program officer, upon request, with an automated search of the literature to review the previous research carried out in the specific subject area. This search of the literature allows program officers to better evaluate a project proposal in the light of the research that has been done and may provide a potential project recipient with background information to improve the proposal.

Another important service is the automated current awareness service which provides the user with the latest citations relating to his/her field of interest on a regular basis - usually monthly. The user can then select the articles he/she wishes to read, request them from the Library which will then provide a photocopy of each article either from its own collection or through interlibrary loan. As a special personalized service, the reference specialist also scans the literature on a regular basis. As she knows which journals the user receives on the tables of contents service and his/her subject profile for the automated current awareness service, she is able to pick up items which may be of interest to the user which he/she would not normally see.

b) Services to Projects

Once a project has been approved, the Library offers its services to meet the information needs of the staff of the project. It is possible that the project leader may not have access locally to all the information needed to carry out the research at the level required. So it may be useful for the project leader to identify his/her subject interests and, request an on-line literature search from the Library. Project staff can then identify the journal articles they require, and request them preferably from local sources, but if they are not available locally, from the Library. The Library, in turn, will provide them from its collection or supply photocopies through interlibrary loan. The Library does not lend books to project staff. However, books and journals subscriptions are ordered for projects through the Library. Project staff should obtain information about the publication and then financial approval from the program officer before making a request to the Library.

The Library provides two types of service to assist the project staff to remain current in their fields of interest. The first is an automated selective dissemination of information (SDI) service using commercial data bases. This service provides a print-out on a regular basis and keeps project staff informed about the latest research in their area of interest.

The second current awareness service is designed to keep project staff informed about articles published in specific journals. To do this the Library distributes copies of tables of contents of the journals as they are received.

For both these services, document delivery is provided for those documents not available locally.

Services have been provided actively to project staff for the last five years so that it was determined that it was time that it was evaluated.

4. *Evaluation of IDRC Library Services to Projects*

During the summer of 1989, a consultant, Dr. Colin Harris, carried out an evaluation of library services to projects. The methodology consisted of

- 1) an analysis of Library service to projects in the past;
- 2) a worldwide survey of IDRC program staff and project leaders using a questionnaire; and

- 3) visits to, and 50 interviews with, program staff in Ottawa, ASRO and EARO and project staff in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Nairobi.

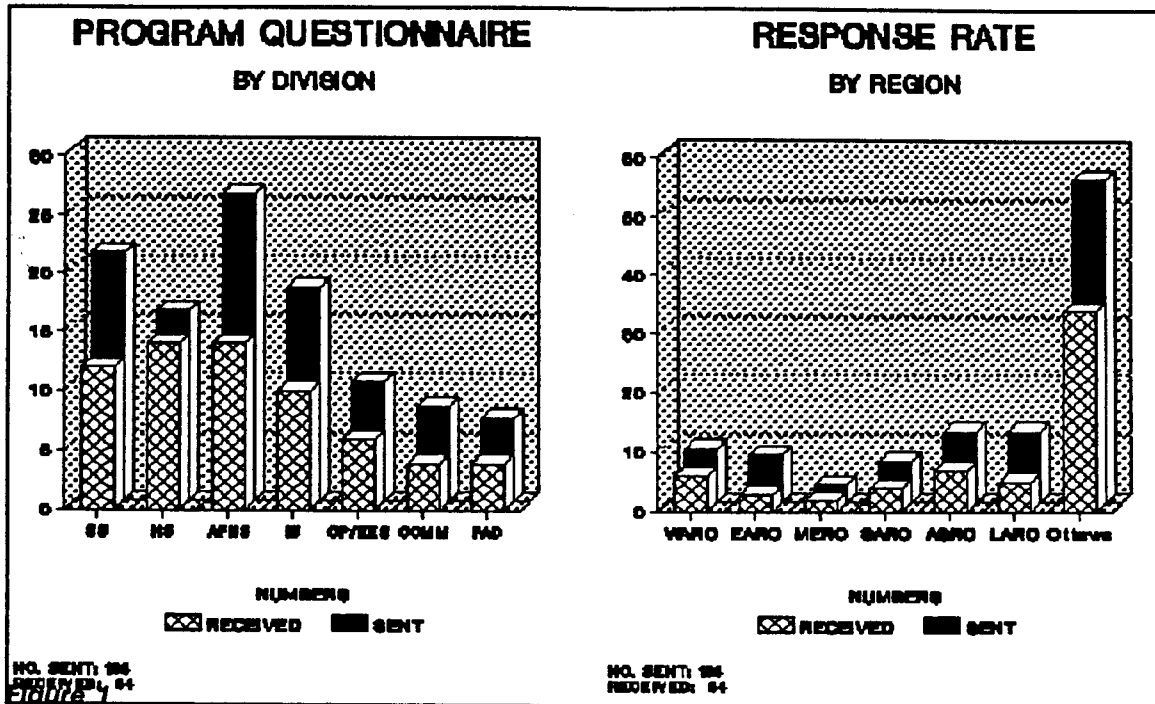
a) **Findings**

i) **Past Library service to projects**

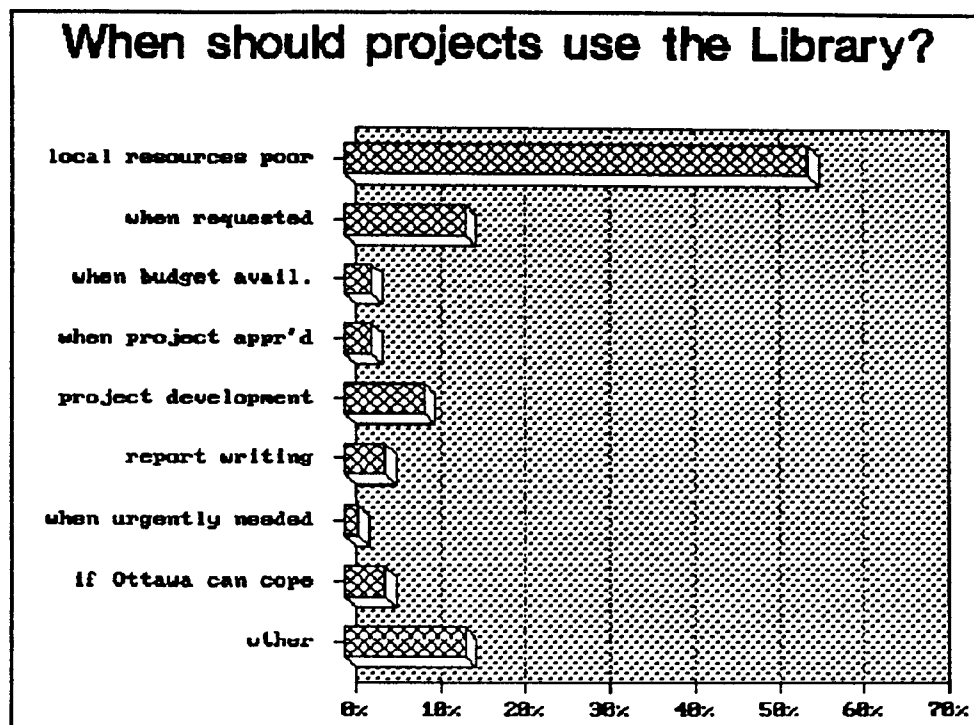
An analysis of the Library records revealed that library services had been delivered to 604 projects of which just over half are current projects. Of course, these records did not indicate services for project staff when the program officer had served as the intermediary and had not informed the Library that the service was for a project.

ii) **Survey of Program Staff**

31 program staff, including the Directors of 5 Program Divisions were interviewed. In addition, a questionnaire was sent out to all program officers in IDRC to ascertain their knowledge about Library Services to Projects and their views as to their appropriateness. 61% responded which was excellent considering the short time frame.



Program Officers were asked in what circumstances they thought it would be appropriate or not appropriate for projects to use the Centre Library. No list of possible circumstances was presented.



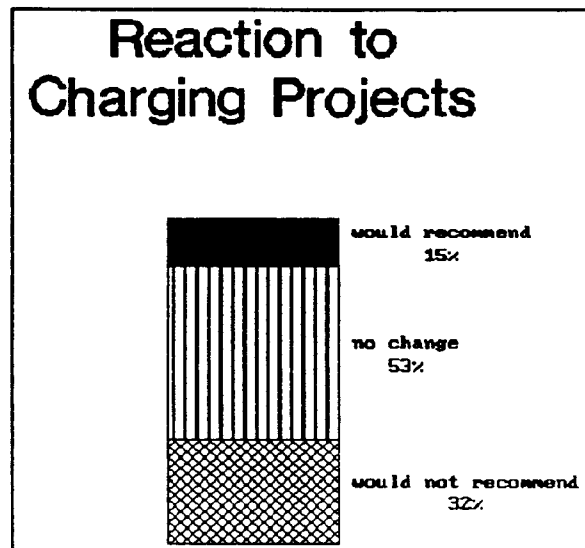
This demonstrates the percentage of respondents who identified when use of the Library is appropriate. Some indicated more than one category. When the question was asked as to when projects should not use the Library the converse was the result.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE LIBRARY

Purchase of Books
Journal subscriptions
Library research
Copies of journal articles
Latest references for research
Literature packages
Advice or Training

This is the list of services as stated by the consultant. 9% of program staff were unaware of each of the main services, and, on average, 42% would not refer projects to use a particular service. Interviews showed that there is a lack of awareness of which library services are available to projects although 90% of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated satisfaction with the Library services to projects.

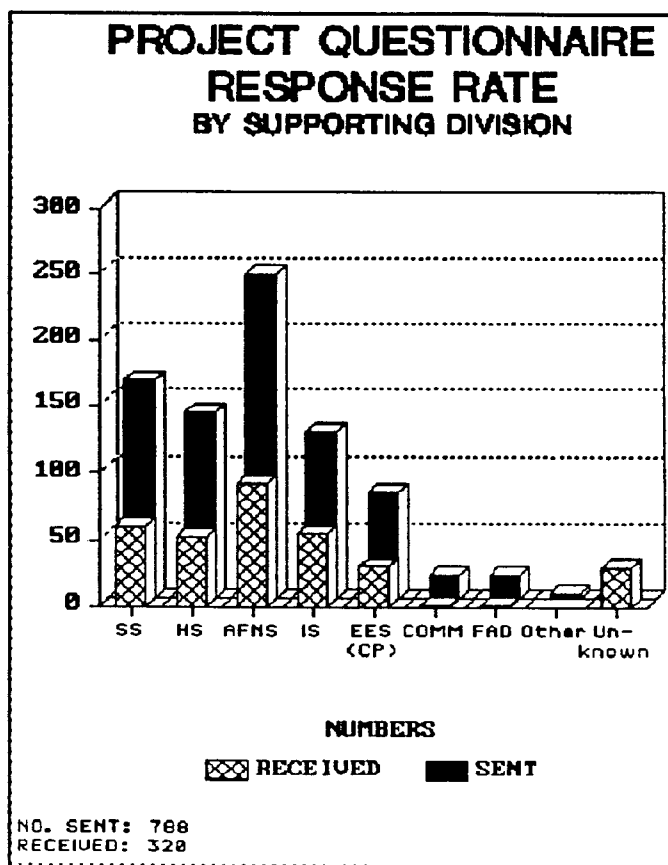
In order to plan for the future, a question on the effect of charging for services was included.



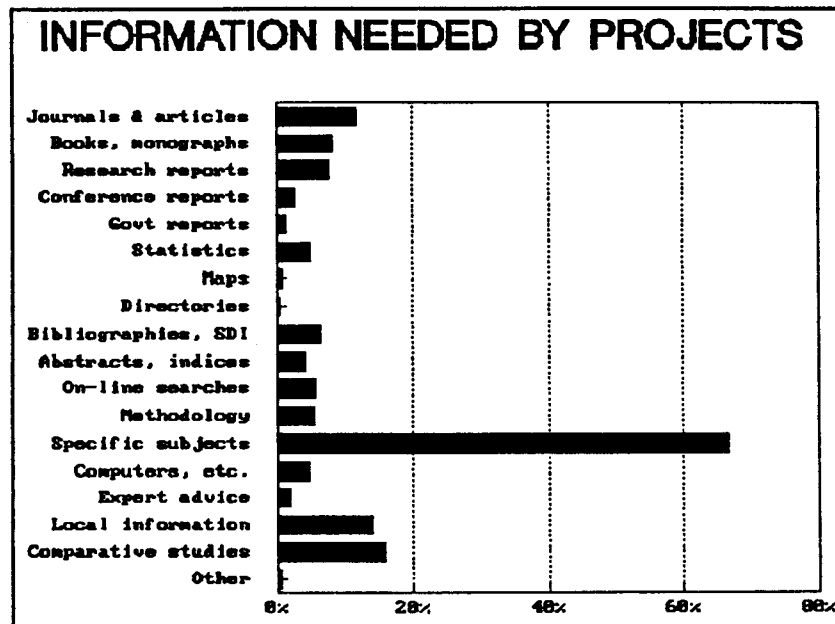
Most program staff believe that some form of access by projects to IDRC Library services is necessary but that these services should be provided on a selective or prioritized basis.

iii) Survey of Project Leaders

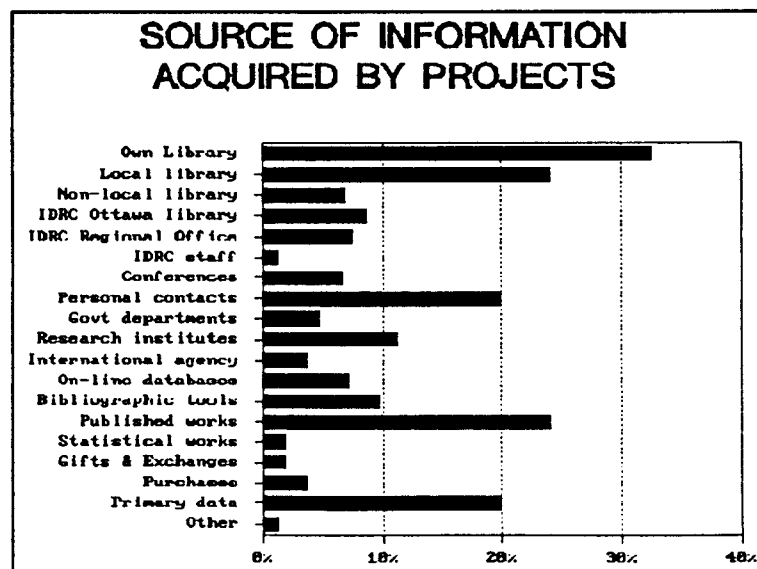
Questionnaires were sent out to 788 project leaders. The sample included all active projects that were on record as having used the Library and a random sample of active projects that were not recorded as having used the Library. 41% responded.

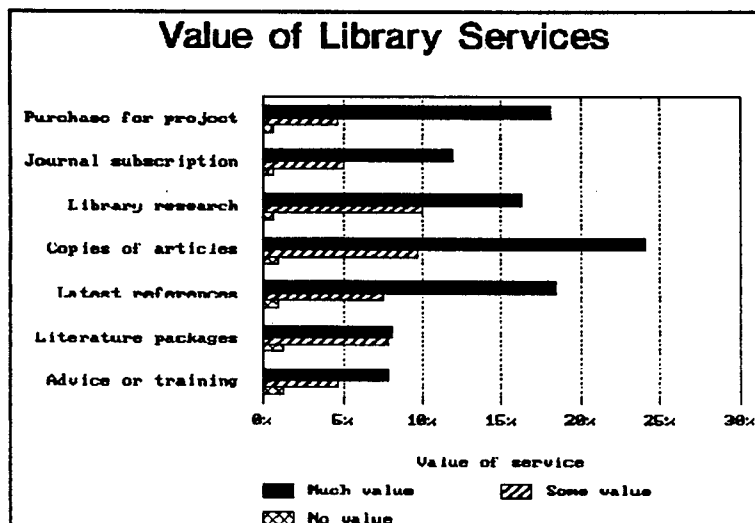
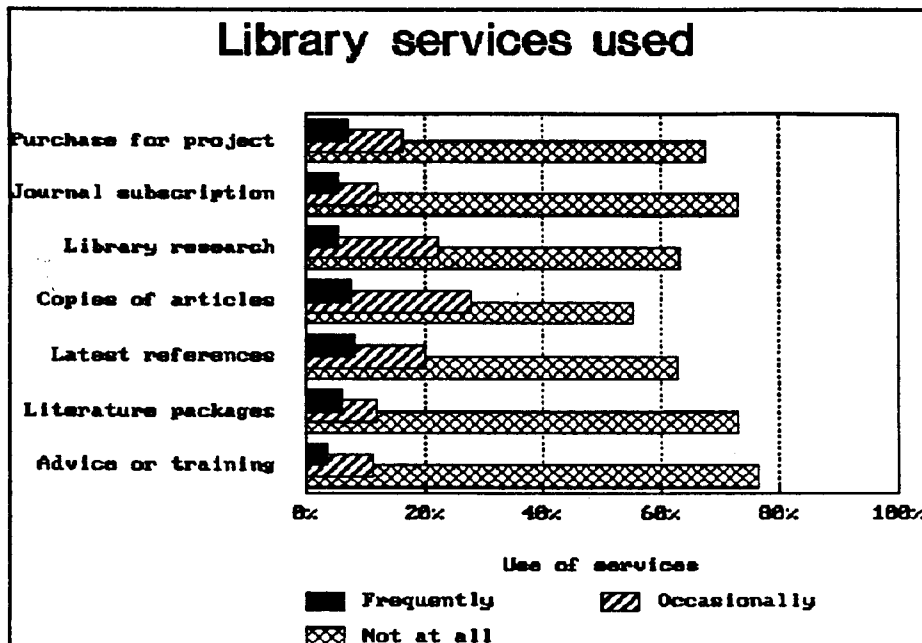


Project leaders were asked what kinds of information they need to carry out an IDRC project. No lists of "kinds of information" was presented so the responses were unprompted and volunteered.



The same approach was used when the question how project information is acquired was asked.





This table shows the high level of value which has been placed on the services received. Such comments as providing "information on relevant journals we did not know existed" and on "related projects unknown to us" were received.

Summary of Use of Library Services by Projects

There is very little variation among supportive Divisions or Regions in the use of Library services by projects. The most common uses of the Library are for document delivery (40%), library research and current awareness services (30% each) and book acquisition (26%). Almost all respondents found the IDRC Library services to be of value to the project. The consultant found that almost all projects would benefit from some degree of service from IDRC Library but there is also an unawareness by Program Officers and projects of what the IDRC Library can or will do for projects.

b) RECOMMENDATIONS

There are eight recommendations in the Report five of which are particularly relevant for discussion in this forum.

Recommendation 1

There is an urgent need for matters relating to information supply to projects to be examined in the context of Centre-wide or Division-wide policy, priorities and practice.

Based on his interviews and the results of the questionnaire to program officers, the consultant believed that, in general, not enough thought was given to the provision of information to permit the projects to deliver high quality research, that there was ignorance both about the Library services provided to projects and the availability of local resources. The question of the role of the program officers in the provision of information to project staff was raised and three approaches were identified:

- "those who would prefer - or at least not object to - projects dealing completely independently with the library.
- those who would accept that projects deal independently with the Library but would like to be kept informed of what was happening.
- those who would not happily tolerate any direct contact between project and library.

The reasons for Program Officers wanting to be partial or total 'go between' are:

- projects may be unaware of what is available, may not be good at formulating or expressing their information needs, search requirements, etc., so their needs must be interpreted or enhanced by the Program Officer.
- they believe that the library staff may not be competent to understand the project's needs, to evaluate its output, etc.
- The Program Officer must be familiar with what the project is receiving, reading, etc." ³

The consultant believed that these approaches were not reasonable as "Projects are, on the whole, staffed by people who are highly trained and should be capable of formulating and expressing needs, or of learning to do so. As several program staff said, project staff are senior staff and must learn to be independent. The library staff are quite capable of understanding projects' needs. Even program staff who have doubts about the librarians' abilities paradoxically have nothing but praise for the job the librarians do. A number of program staff actually thought librarians better equipped to help projects than they themselves were: librarians have access to a wider range of resources, are more up to date and are often ahead of us.

"The final reason, that Program Officers have to be up to date with what projects are seeing and reading, is understandable but is no reason for them to intervene in the relationship between project and library. Program Officers do not, after all, monitor what project workers read in their own libraries, journals, etc., or what they hear from their colleagues" ⁴.

As a result, the consultant recommended that the significance of information supply to research projects should be recognized by the Centre and Divisions in a formal way. In order for the projects to receive information they need,

³ Harris, Colin. *Evaluation of IDRC Library Services to Projects*, 1989, p. E. 4.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. E4-E5.

program staff could consider the information needs of the projects and plan for their resolution. How should IDRC formalize the information support for projects? Should the Library charge for its services to projects? At present there is a variety of ways in which the Library staff and Program Officers interact with project staff to provide them with information and documents. What basic principles need to be established in relation to the role of the Program Officer in respect of information supply? Should the Library communicate directly with projects?

Recommendation 2

There is an urgent need for both program staff and project staff to be made aware of the services available to projects from the IDRC Library.

Given that the consultant had enough evidence to state that "there is a great deal of uncertainty, ignorance and confusion (among both program and project staff) about what the IDRC Library can or will do for projects"⁵ the Library staff are preparing a brochure devoted entirely to explaining the services the Library offers to projects to be distributed to project staff and program officers as well as informing individual program officers about the services. Are there other ways which might be effective to increase the awareness of program officers and project staff?

Recommendation 3

Almost all projects would benefit from some degree of service from IDRC Library.

The consultant found that ignorance of the availability of IDRC Library services has resulted in the research conducted by some IDRC projects of being of a lower quality than it otherwise would have been. He acknowledged that some projects are reasonably or very well served by local library or information services. He suggested three criteria for using the services of IDRC Library:

- "i) where library/information provision in a locality is poor;
- ii) where a particular project can benefit from a more sophisticated information service; and

⁵ *ibid*, p. 3.

iii) as a library of last resort" ⁶.

Do you agree with this assessment? Are there other criteria which should be added?

Recommendation 4

The Library cannot serve all IDRC projects comprehensively, and should not aim to do so.

To follow-up from the previous recommendation, the consultant found that there is a substantial market among IDRC projects for IDRC Library Services. Obviously, the Library cannot fill this need directly. Should the Library develop a guide to local resources for the use of Program Officers? Should the Library serve closed projects?

Recommendation 5

The role of Regional Office libraries should be reviewed.

Recommendation 6

Consideration should be given to allowing both Ottawa and Regional library staff to travel. This could contribute to a much clearer understanding of projects' information needs and problems.

Recommendations 5 and 6 will be discussed with the Regional Directors later this week.

Recommendation 7

A standard format should be adopted for the title page of any IDRC project report (but particularly final reports), and the Library should be the formal repository for such reports.

It is generally accepted that a copy of the final reports of projects are deposited in the Library. However, it is sometimes difficult to identify a final

⁶ *ibid*, p. 3-4.

report and many of the final reports written during the earlier years of IDRC were not sent to the Library.

Efforts are being made by the Library to track down reports which have not been received and one division in particular has had a special activity to gather final reports.

Recommendation 8

Broader access within Canada to the IDRC Library should not be introduced without very careful consideration of the adverse effects that such a course would have on the Library's service to its primary constituencies; its staff and projects.

6. Conclusion

The Library staff are constantly looking for more effective ways to support the work of IDRC. The feedback from its clientele is essential in order for it to provide high quality service and this evaluation has been helpful in providing much useful information. However, to plan for the future, discussion on its recommendations is necessary.

The Library staff are particularly grateful for the opportunity not only to report back on the results of the evaluation to all those who participated but to also work with its primary clientele in improving its service.