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OTHER FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES
TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (TCDC)

Progress report on the TCDC Information
Referral System (INRES)

Report of the Administrator

Summary

    The Administrator presents this report in response to decision 83/15 of
the thirtieth session of the Governing Council. A brief account on the
progress of INRES up to 31 January 1984 is given.

    In addition, the operational implications of operative paragraphs 3 and 5
of decision 3/9 of the High-level Committee on the Review of TCDC, as
requested in decision 83/15, are provided.

    The attention of the Council is drawn to paragraphs 17 - 21 which deal
with the relationship between the Multi-sectoral Information Network (MSIN),
INRES and other information systems and present some conclusions.

CONTENTS

Annex

Background

1.   In response to operative paragraphs 4 and 5 of Governing Council decision 83/15, the Administrator submits this report on the progress of the TCDC Information Referral System (INRES), and also on the implications of operative paragraphs 3, 5 and 6 of decision 3/9 of the High-level Committee on the Review of Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries. Paragraph 6 of High-level Committee decision 3/9 concerns current and future financing of INRES, a matter in respect of which the Governing Council, in operative paragraph 3 of decision 83/15, has already decided to provide $600,000 from the administrative budget for the 1984-1985 biennium.   The Administrator will ensure that all INRES activities during 1984-1985 will be financed within that provision. Chapter II of the present report is accordingly limited to issues arising from paragraphs 3 and 5 of HLC decision 3/9.

I. PROGRESS OF INRES

2.   The INRES data bank, created in the biennium 1982-1983, provides information on institutional skills and capacities of developing countries in the fields of (a) education and training, (b) research and technological development, (c) consultancy and expert services, (d) scientific and technical information services and (e) bilateral and multilateral project experiences of these institutions in all sectors and disciplines. A detailed account on the status of INRES as at January 1983 was given in document TCDC/3/9 which was submitted to the High-level Committee at its third session and was also made available to the Governing Council at its thirtieth session.

3.   As stated in TCDC/3/9, over 8,000 INRES questionnaires were dispatched in May 1982 to the Governments of developing countries. By 31 January 1984, over 1,300 questionnaires had been completed and returned. Data from 941 of these have been processed and entered into the INRES data bank.

4.   In view of difficulties faced by some Governments in having the questionnaires completed, the Administrator authorized the resident representatives concerned in January 1984 to enlist temporarily the assistance of qualified nationals to support these Governments' efforts in the completion and return of questionnaires.

5.   A promotional brochure detailing the contents, and ways of contacting INRES, is being issued. Promotional activities involving country visits and holding of orientation seminars to familiarize potential users with the enquiry service of INRES have been initiated.

6.   An updated progress report on the use of INRES will be made orally to the Governing Council at its thirty-first session. A record of the use of INRES has been initiated and will be made available, together with a general progress report on INRES, to the High-level Committee at its fourth session (1985) and to the Governing Council at its thirty-second session (1985).

7.   The development of INRES has now reached the operational stage and arrangements have been made for such technical support as it needs in future to be provided by the Division of Management Information Services of UNDP. The Special Unit for TCDC, however, continues to manage and operate the information service including dispatch and receipt of questionnaires, data validation, coding and entry, management and operation of the enquiry service, monitoring of the use and general promotion of INRES among potential users.

II. IMPLICATIONS OF RE-ORIENTING INRES TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE MULTI-SECTORAL INFORMATION NETWORK (MSIN)

8.   In response to operative paragraph 5 of Governing Council decision 83/15 and operative paragraphs 3 and 5 of decision 3/9 of the High-level Committee, the Administrator has reviewed the activities of INRES in relation to the other multisectoral information systems in UNDP and the regional commissions of the United Nations in the light of the recommendations of the First Meeting of Heads of National Agencies of Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries held at Tunis from 25-29 October 1982. In this review, the Administrator has also taken into account subsequent studies carried out with the assistance of a consultant, and the technical consultation held with the Group of 77 in New York during 24-27 May 1983.

9.   The Tunis recommendations may be summarized as follows: a multi-sectoral information network (MSIN) is to be established at the global, regional and national levels to be organized and operated by the developing countries themselves on the understanding that it would not duplicate existing systems; the network would deal mainly with current, development-oriented information needed to promote co-operation in trade, development projects, science and technology, training, etc.; it is envisaged that initially communication will be through conventional means (diplomatic communications, exhibitions, seminars, cables and telex, etc.) and more sophisticated means could be gradually introduced; the Tunis meeting also requested the Administrator to reorient INRES to meet the objectives of MSIN. At present the Group of 77 in New York is engaged in planning and pre-feasibility arrangements of MSIN. UNDP is not yet involved.

10.   A preliminary review of the Tunis recommendations has been made by the Administrator with the assistance of a consultant who conducted a study of a number of existing systems relevant to multisectoral information exchange which are managed by UNDP and the regional commissions. Besides INRES, UNDP also maintains certain types of information in the Inter-Agency Procurement Services Unit (IAPSU) at Geneva which was established in 1977 following discussions at the twenty-fourth session of the Governing Council. IAPSU maintains information on suppliers of goods and services (to the United Nations

system) from all over the world. Some efforts have been made by IAPSU, jointly with the International Trade Centre (ITC) in Geneva, to identify equipment suppliers in developing countries, but on a limited scale due to staffing and resource constraints. A small project costing $32,000 was approved for execution during January - March 1984 to explore the feasibility of the establishment of a computerized data bank on potential suppliers of common-user items in developing countries for procurement needs of the United Nations system and the developing countries themselves.

A. Technological Information Pilot System (TIPS)

11.   The United Nations Financing System for Science and Technology for Development (UNFSSTD) manages a project aimed at demonstrating, on a pilot scale, the viability of establishing current information flow in the field of science and technology (energy and industrial technologies) among 10 developing countries for strengthening their endogenous capacities and promoting technical and economic co-operation. This project, which is called Technological Information Pilot System (TIPS), will focus attention on current information dissemination, acting in some respects as a wire-service agency. It will include a limited memory for data storage and will rely to the maximum extent possible on the use of the existing data bases and will arrange to access INRES off-line. It is envisaged that once the viability of this project is demonstrated, it could be extended in future to cover other development information sectors and additional countries, as was proposed in the earlier plans for a Development Information Network (DEVNET) which have now been shelved in favour of the pilot project TIPS. The project will involve establishment of national bureaux linked to a co-ordinating logistic global centre in Rome. The project has been entrusted to the Office of Project Execution (OPE) of UNDP for implementation in three years starting in April 1984, initially with a budget of $1.5 million for 15 months. A trust fund in the order of $6 million provided by the Italian Government forms the overall budget of TIPS.

12.   While, in pursuance of the Tunis recommendations, the Chairman of the Group of 77 in New York and his assistants have been considering seriously the establishment of MSIN (see paragraph 9 above), extensive consultations have also been conducted with experts from the developing countries and the UNFSSTD officials concerned with TIPS. A project document delineating objectives, scope, activitites and funding is to be produced by mid-1984.

B. Pan-African Documentation and Information System (PADIS)

13.   The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) operates the Pan-African Documentation and Information System (PADIS). PADIS is run as a project apart from the normal data processing activities of ECA. PADIS-DEV, the

development information reference file, contains a few thousand
bibliographic references to documents published by ECA. A Directory of
African Experts (volume I), including more than 3,600 entries from 46
African countries, was published in January 1984. The entries are fully
computerized for on-line searches and four additional supplements of the
Directory are to be produced by mid-1984. A register of more than 2,000
ongoing research and development projects in Africa, compiled in
collaboration with international and national institutions, is scheduled
to be computerized during 1984. Identification and maintenance of a
continuously updated list of institutions in and outside of Africa which
offer formal training in library, documentation and information sciences
for the purpose of training African personnel is being pursued.
Operational co-ordination with INRES on the registration of African
institutions for research, training and consultancy services was
discussed and co-operation has been maintained. PADIS is funded by UNDP,
ECA, UNESCO, International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the
African Development Bank. UNDP funding amounts to about $2.91 million,
$0.55 million of which is in Phase I (1979 – 1981) and the rest in Phase
II over the period 1982-1986. The regional activity at ECA will use only
a part of the budget while the remaining part will be used for creating a
national facility for each country in the region.

C. Systems in the ECWA region

14.   The Economic Commission for Western Asia (ECWA) has recently made
a feasibility study for a Documentation Information Centre in the
region. ECWA is interested in information directly relevant to the
fields of economic and social development and science and technology. A
400-page list of institutions including consultancy services, research
institutes and universities in the region has been compiled with the
intention that it be reproduced. The Documentation Centre for the League
of Arab States, Tunis, which receives assistance from UNDP, manages
information relevant to the Arab League, covering political,
socio-economic, and international affairs. Other fields (such as
industry and agriculture) are covered by specialized agencies of the Arab
League. The Centre is working on bibliographic data bases as well as
directories, rosters of experts, a list of information-oriented projects
being carried out by specialized agencies, banks, etc., and a data base
of meetings organized by the Arab League. UNDP funding for the Centre is
$2 million, over 1982-1986, while Arab League funding is about $8 million.

D. Systems in Latin America

15.   The Latin American Centre for Economic and Social Documentation
(CLADES) was set up in 1971 as part of ECLA with the assistance of the
International Development Research Centre (IDRC). A number of data bases

relevant to development in Latin America and the Caribbean have been created and a range of publications, indexes in particular, have made the information collected widely available. The data bases include bibliographic information on libraries and documentation centres, planning and development programmes, organizations with environment-oriented activities, a register which contains names, addresses and services provided by 850 institutions in the field of socio-economic development, and ECLA's own publications. UNDP supports some national projects which have data dollection components but there are no UNDP-financed regional projects specifically in this area.

E. Systems in Asia and the Pacific

16.   There is a wide range of information activities relevant to TCDC at ESCAP, Bangkok. A variety of bulletins and newsletters exist. A bibliographic information system focused on ESCAP-produced documentation has been operative since 1981. Some of the co-ordination activities include networks or systems covering several development sectors and TCDC referral services including directories. A range of TCDC/ECDC directories and rosters are published at the regional level by ESCAP. These include training courses (1976, 1977 and 1979), consultancy services (1976 and 1977), experts (1977, 1978 and 1979), national standards institutions (1979), intercountry institutional arrangements (1979), technological research and development institutions (1982), and renewable sources of energy (experts and institutions 1979). UNDP's involvement in the Asia and the Pacific region is limited to the financing of a pre-feasibility study on the establishment of a data bank for the non-aligned countries for about $150,000 and supporting a small ongoing UNESCO-executed project, "Asian News Network", for $200,000.

III. COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS:
THE NEED FOR CO-ORDINATION

17.   The table in the annex to this report summarizes the characteristics, functions and activity areas of the multi-sectoral information systems reviewed. They can be grouped into two main categories. One category includes those which maintain computerized data bases and/or produce reference directories: i.e., INRES, IAPSU and the information systems of ECA, ECLA, ESCAP and ECWA/Arab League. These systems store data of continuing validity and interest for fairly long periods of time and facilitate retrieval of such data on demand. The second category includes the project TIPS and the proposed MSIN which are conceived as communication channels for exchange between developing

countries of active current development information. They are planned to
have very limited capacity for short-term storage of data and will depend
greatly on information obtained from the global and regional data bases.
They thus complement rather than duplicate such data bases as maintained
by INRES. The UNFSSTD officials concerned with TIPS meet and discuss
issues of co-operation with the Group of 77 officials concerned with the
planning of MSIN on a regular and continuing basis. Issues discussed
embrace co-operation in training activities of national personnel and
possibilities of future merger of TIPS in MSIN after the three-year trial
phase of TIPS.

18.   The regional data bases which are maintained by the regional
commissions and the League of Arab States are all engaged in
bibliographic and indexing activities as well as in the publication of
directories and rosters of experts. The ESCAP and ECLA facilities are
the oldest, having been established in the early 1970s and they include
data on institutions as well as on experts. PADIS has collected
information on institutions in Africa, but stopped the inclusion of this
information in its data base pending results of mutual co-operation with
INRES. ECWA and the Documentation Centre for the League of Arab States
have also collected information on institutions and consultancy services
with the intention of reproduction. INRES operates at the global level
and maintains information only on institutions. The collected
information is cleared and endorsed by the concerned Governments and UNDP
resident representatives on the basis of the institutions concerned being
able and willing to participate in TCDC activities. Moreover the
collected and stored information is characterized by being fairly
comprehensive and detailed.

19.   There is overlap between INRES and the regional organizations in
the collection, storage and dissemination of information on
institutions. The Administrator will consult further with the regional
organizations concerned about the most appropriate and effective
modalities for ensuring better policy and operational co-ordination.
Besides INRES and IAPSU, UNDP financial support to information activities
in all geographical regions amounts to about $5 million in the third
programming cycle, 1982-1986. The bulk of the support is for the African
and Arab States regions. The Administrator has instructed the Central
Evaluation Office of UNDP to include in its current work plan an
evaluation of the global and regional information systems supported by
UNDP.

20.   The quest for better co-ordination and harmonization of activities
of the United Nations information systems will be further facilitated by
the newly created Advisory Committee for the Co-ordination of Information
Systems (ACCIS). It was established in 1983 by the Administrative

Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), in response to Economic and Social
Council resolutions 1981/63 and 1982/7 as a central mechanism for the
co-ordination of information mechanisms in the United Nations system. It
maintains a small secretariat in Geneva. ACCIS has replaced the former
Inter-Organization Board for Information Systems (IOB) and aims at
ensuring the more efficient operation of existing or planned United
Nations information systems from the perspective of users at the national
level by enhancing the capacity of the United Nations system to collect,
store, retrieve and disseminate information. The work programme of ACCIS
is largely being carried out by technical panels. UNDP has been given
the lead agency role to chair one of the three technical panels charged
with the responsibility of establishing a Register of Development
Activities. The other two panels deal with computer-based communication
services, and access to United Nations data-bases. INRES and the
information systems of the regional commissions, being of interest to
Governments as prospective users, will appropriately figure in and
benefit from the co-ordination mechanism of ACCIS.

21.   The Administrator proposes to keep under review further
implications resulting from the consultants' study and the technical
meeting and to report to the High-level Committee, at its fourth session
and the Governing Council, at its thirty-second session, on these matters
as well as on the results of the evaluation mentioned in paragraph 19
above.

Annex

Multi-sectoral information systems in the United Nations
development system

System or organization maintaining system(s)	DATA BASES AND/OR DIRECTORIES								Current development information dissemination
	Education & training a)	Research and technological development a)	Consultancy services	Scientific & technical information a)	Equipment suppliers	Development projects	Expert rosters	Bibliographic information	
UNDP (INRES)	X	X	X	X					
UNDP (IAPSU)					X				
ECA (PADIS)	Xb)	Xb)				Xb)	X	X	
ECLA	X	X				X		X	
ESCAP	X	X	X				X	X	
ECWA/ARAB LEAGUE	Xc)	Xc)	Xc)			X	X	X	
UNFSSTD (TIPS)									Xd)
G77 (MSIN)									Xe)

a) Data base or directory related to information on services available from institutions only.
b) Information collected but not yet computerized.
c) Information collected but not yet published.
d) Project document produced; starting date in April 1984.
e) Project document to be ready by mid-1984.

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