

# Formation of the Southern African Development Information System (SADIS)

## Introduction

The importance of establishing information infrastructures in developing nations like those of Southern Africa has been stressed in the United Nations World Plan of Action for the Application of Science and Technology to Development, prepared for the Second United Nations Development Decade. The plan states that efforts should be made to provide adequate facilities for the transfer of knowledge among nations, which cannot be accomplished without the existence of proper information channels responsible for the collection, treatment and dissemination of relevant data. The overall Information and Documentation Services in this region is clear to many information services personnel and need not be over-emphasised. All science and other research workers in Southern Africa are involved in development in one way or another. They alone know exactly what the bottlenecks are that militate against their work. High among these bottlenecks is lack of scientific and technical documents necessary for their work.

## The need for Information Resource Sharing among the SADCC Countries

There has been a need to have resource sharing undertaken on a regional level in Southern Africa for various reasons; among them being:

- (a) Research duplication and overlap by different research organisations working in the same field.
- (b) Poor dissemination of research findings to users e.g. policy makers, businessmen, farmers etc.
- (c) Lack of public awareness of research findings among the Southern African Coordination Conference (SADCC) countries. It has been therefore observed that a well organised information resource sharing system among the SADCC countries, will be able to identify the problems of knowledge or information generation among the SADCC countries. The concern is not merely one of eliminating duplication, overlap and low utilisation levels, but one of increasing the utility and relevance of a nationally expensive activity.

## Proposed Establishment of a Southern African Development Information System (SADIS)

A proposal to establish a Southern African Development Information System, was considered after three consecutive consultative meetings held in Harare, in 1981 and 1982. Countries represented at these meetings included: Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and SWAPO also sent representatives. It was agreed unanimously by the participants that Zimbabwe was to host the secretariat. At the time of going to press, a feasibility study team composed of representatives from UNESCO, African Bibliographic Centre (ABC) in Washington, and a representative of

SADCC secretariat is in the region to make concrete proposals for the establishment of SADIS. It has been agreed by the SADCC member states that SADIS should be established as a sectoral project OF SADCC, and that a project memorandum to this effect is being prepared for the SADCC council of ministers to be held in Dar es Salaam Tanzania in May 1983.

#### Functions of SADIS

SADIS is being established to perform the following functions:

- (1) To satisfy the information needs of users in Southern Africa, at individual, institutional, national and international levels, by providing accurate and updated information which is relevant for policy formulation, planning, monitoring and evaluation through the following series of activities:
  - (a) Cataloguing, indexing and abstracting.
  - (b) Current awareness and retrospective bibliographic searches on demand.
  - (c) Selective dissemination of information.
  - (d) Consolidation and repackaging of information.
  - (e) Document delivery.
  - (f) Facilitation of the user's access to primary document collection, both with direct supply of microcopies and with information concerning hard copy availability in and outside the UN family.
  - (g) Provision of information-bearing magnetic tapes from PADIS and other information systems to interested countries of Southern Africa.
  - (h) Advisory services to Southern African countries on information and documentation problems.
  - (i) Providing advice to member states and preparing guidelines regarding suitable hardware and software configurations selected on the basis of compatibility cost and other factors.
  - (j) SADIS will establish a register of ongoing socio-economic research and development projects.
  - (k) SADIS will act as a clearing house for information on all forms of technical assistance to SADCC countries for the development of socio-economic, scientific and technological information systems and services.
  - (l) SADIS will identify appropriate institutions in and outside Southern Africa whose formal training programmes in Library, Documentation and Information sciences would provide the necessary professional and sub-professional personnel training for staffing information services in Southern Africa.

A continuously updated list of such institutions will be prepared for the guidance of Southern African governments and donor agencies in the award of scholarships to technical personnel participating in SADIS at the national, sub-regional and regional levels.

It is generally hoped that a system like SADIS once established, will be able to facilitate free information flow in Southern Africa, and to accomplish regional cooperation in the area of information as follows:

- (1) Establishment of repertories of documentary institutions and research institutions in the region.
- (2) Publication and circulation of information (thesauri, indexes, bibliographies, and other documents) among researchers, documentalists in the different Southern African countries.
- (3) Exchange of research information between all the countries of Southern Africa.
- (4) Continued training of documentalists in these countries.
- (5) Periodic international conferences on research and documentation.
- (6) Standardisation of documentary techniques in the whole region.
- (7) Integration and coordination of documentary activities at national and international levels.

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