

International Information Systems

—M. A. Aziz Khan

INFORMATION is truly the life blood of society. It fealy brings about changes in our ways of thinking and living. Many different types of information seekers use it in their problem solving and gainful decision making. It also plays an important role in the general education of everyone. All of these contribute to human development and improvement of the quality of life as a whole. The human society is entering an era characterized by sociologists as the information age, the outcome of which is the information society. Therefore, the question of control which involves the dissemination of information are the essential parts of standard systems and services that provide timely, reliable problem-oriented information in a form convenient to users, contributing vitally to development. All countries should mobilize adequate support for the establishment, development, management and proper functioning of such systems and services on cooperative basis.

In an international information system many institutions are involved in discovering information and reporting it to add to a data base and it delivers information for the use of the user of the system. The system gives to the user that has previously been given to it as input and it works well when given a subset from the total mass of information that is within the system. It depends effectively to the selection criteria put to it by the user. The system delivers relevant information applying different parameters, such as subject geographic source and type as required by the user. A user can ask the system to give information on a particular subject, somebody can expect from the system the information that deals with a particular country or a particular region of the world. One can ask an information system to give information that originally comes from particular sources or from particular

institutions one can also go to the information system and demand information that has statistics within it. The answer of all these questions from different angles can easily be provided as per needs of the user if a nation organizes its own national information centres and seek cooperation of decentralized global information systems.

Developed countries are fully aware how useful information is; they allocate resources so that it can be processed efficiently, and exported and imported. This brings financial cultural and even political, advantages. But in the developing countries, this consciousness is still very weak and consequently, the collection is insufficient and the management of information is also weak. If this deficiency is to be corrected, the developing countries who are those most in need of information must organize their sectoral services into integral systems that will act as point of contact with the international systems. Such consciousness and effective step towards sharing benefit global information systems will contribute more to achieving the goals of developing societies, to bridging the gap between east and west and to making this world a better place to live in.

Most nations have limited capabilities and resources, both human and financial to devote to the production and acquisition of total gamut of scientific, technical, and social information. Many countries produce large volumes of literature on different subjects, but the fact remains that a country's development depends on its application of knowledge, rather than in the generation of new knowledge. The knowledge and information are readily available somewhere in the world, and they must be made accessible to all kinds of users and means for communication and transfer must be established. In fact, in many countries it is the gap in information accessibility and trans-

fer, and therefore of use which must be bridged only when cooperation exists among a number of countries and institutions.

A worldwide role is played by the international information systems in the field of information that is needed for policymaking and for decision making as applied to science technology economic and social development. These systems have been organized on different subjects by the specialised agencies within the United Nations family with a noble objective to reduce the information gap between developed and developing countries.

International information systems are undoubtedly the best result of inter-governmental cooperation which can be illustrated as International Nuclear Information System (INIS), a worldwide information system for nuclear science operated by the International Atomic Energy Agency in collaboration with its member states. INIS produces ATO MINDEX with abstracts and index to title, author subject and country of origin. International Information System for the Agricultural Science and Technology (AGRIS) is coordinated by the Food and Agricultural Organization. The member states of FAO participate in this AGRIS and it provides references to documents dealing with agricultural development. The AGRINDEX is its published bibliography with index to title, author subject and country of origin. Development Science Information System (DEVSIS) for social sciences is operated by the International Development Research Centre in collaboration with participating countries, and this system produces DEVINDEX with abstracts and index to author, subject title and country of origin. The International Referral System on Information for Technical Cooperation Among Developing Countries (ECDC INRES) collects and disseminates information on the technical resources that the institu-

tions in these countries can exchange with each other. United Nations Development Programme operates this system and it provides an institutional directory. Recently the United Nations Economic and Social Council called for the establishment of an International Population Information Network (POPIN) as a decentralised network of libraries documentation centres, information system and clearing houses for the purpose of improving the flow of population information among the network members. United Nations Fund for Population Activities coordinates this system and POPINDEX will be its produced bibliography containing information of documents on population of participating countries. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is a UN special organization which protects intellectual property throughout the world through cooperation among States, and emphasizes transfer of technology including knowhow related to industrial property, and on improving access to the technological information contained in the world's patent documents. International Patent Documentation Centre (INPADOC) has entered into various agreements of cooperation with national patent offices and other organizations. The Republic of Austria agreed to found and finance and the WIPO undertook to support fully the centre. All these INIS, AGRIS, DEVSIS, POPIN etc. have shown that cooperative and decentralized information systems can be successful; that each type of organization allows the participating countries in each system to have an equal share in the formulation of policy and in system management. Each member country is responsible for the input of document references for the materials published within its borders. One input, the information is then available to all others, and each country may draw from the system what it needed by its own users.