Lat 1046 [INFOBILA]

1.    TITLE

Developing a National Information Network System For Belize

2.    ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT (250 WORDS)

The concept of a national information system for Belize, being born in the latter eighties, was given strong support and encouragement by Dr. Mohammed Aman, UNESCO consultant to Belize in 1992. It visualizes a computerized network system incorporating LAN/WAN, to be established for the collection and dissemination of library and other public information, with international online access via the Internet.

The project utilizes the National Library Service as the coordinating body, and the hub around which the network is built. Supporting organizations are local and regional libraries, resource centres, archives, museums, and educational institutions. Envisioned clients are persons and organizations requiring existing information for educational, research, private or other reasons.

3.    COUNTRY

Belize

4.    OTHER BENEFICIARY COUNTRIES, IF THERE IS ANY

Regional and international persons/organizations requiring existing public information for educational, research, private or other reasons.

5.    PROJECT RECEIVING AND CO-EXECUTING INSTITUTION WITH UNESCO

The National Library Service through The Ministry of Education and the Belize UNESCO desk.

6.    EXECUTING AGENCY: UNESCO/PCI

7.    CONTRIBUTION IN USD REQUIRED FROM AN EXTERNAL FINANCING SOURCE

US $30,000.00

8.    CONTRIBUTION IN USD OFFERED BY THE HOST COUNTRY

US $125,000.00

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9.    ANTECEDENTS AND JUSTIFICATION

Belize has a well developed National Library Service incorporating 11 branch libraries and 24 sublibraries. There are some seventy-seven libraries, archives, resource and documentation centres, both governmental and private, distributed throughout the country. A considerable portion of the information reposited in these institutions result from researches being done in Belize encompassing agriculture, archaeology, tourism, education, socioeconomics, fisheries and the environment. These are all areas of study having significant implications with respect to the development of the country.

Acute financial limitations and lack of trained human resources create bottlenecks, and impairs the ability to disseminate this information to full effect. Further, lack of coordination and resource sharing among the existing repositories create redundancies in maintenance and acquisition costs, and serve to minimize the benefits derived from these already limited financial and human resources. The net results are: waste of scarce resources, a poorly informed population and misguided developments.

The importance and urgency of current and accurate information to support the decision making processes of commercial, industrial, government, social, scientific, educational, medical, research and other knowledge based activities is a globally accepted fact. It is even more crucial within the context of a developing country. The financial implications of dated information in the investment market can never be overstated, nor the disastrous effects on the lives of communities, families and individuals of poor decisions by governments and other social organizations caused by lack of current and accurate information.

In order to remedy these problems methods have to be adopted which will curtail costs, increase access and improve sharing, thereby creating a more efficient collection and distribution system.

The idea of a national network was introduced officially in 1988, when the Caribbean Network for Integrated Rural Development (CNIRD) conducted a regional survey to identify information centers and promote CDS/ISIS. In 1990 a follow up meeting was held in Belmopan to establish a national network preliminary to joining the regional information network system. At the Library Computerization Course sponsored by UNESCO and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), March, 1991 the issue was again discussed.

Several attempts to implement a network system failed. This was predominantly due to financial aspects. Subsequently a steering committee comprising the National Librarian, a computer networking expert, a documentalist and a consultant, was formed to coordinate what was proposed to be the Belize

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Library and Information Network. A list of possible participants was drawn up.

Subsequent meetings led to the decision to pursue the objectives as a joint project between the National Library Service and the Belize Information Service (now the Department of Information). The proposals resulting from this endeavor was submitted to UNESCO through the Belize UNESCO Desk, and was approved for funding but never financed. This proposal modified to reflect the current situation results from that same body with the addition of other interested parties. Our objectives remain the same.

## 10.    GENERAL OBJECTIVES

The establishment of a National Information System for Belize is based on the recognition of the vital role libraries play in a country's development. This objective, therefore, seeks the provision of easier and wider access to information for the increased development of the cultural, educational and social sectors; enabling Belize to achieve and maintain parity with the rest of the region in these regards.

The convergence of computerization and telecommunications is undoubtedly the single most effective tool by which this initiative can be accomplished. The desired effect is a better informed public, more positive and sustainable development resulting from better informed decisions. Further benefits will be derived from the increased speed at which the general transfer of information will occur, thus improving the quality of information with respect to its accuracy and relevance to the times, hence increasing its utility. Ultimately, to ensure that no individual is denied access to information for want of the necessary technology

## 11.    SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

This project seeks to achieve the following:

(A)    Institutional strengthening and access to the Newsroom and Data Library operated by the Department Information through the establishment of an on-line news editing system, and an electronic Bulletin Board System (BBS) which can also be accessed by the mass media, students, researchers and the general public.

(B)    Upgrading and development of technical resources of the National Library Service through the provision of a computerized data bank and retrieval systems.

(C)    Establish a National Library Network to link public and private sector libraries to each other and to those in

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the region to allow for the exchange of information and documentation, and provide an efficient mechanism for networking and cross fertilization of ideas and knowledge. This will, in effect utilize and maximize the rich sources of information and research now scattered through many special and general libraries which are currently severely underutilized.

(D)   To facilitate staff development and training in information management, processing and retrieval. The importance of having properly trained staff, technical support and a program for user education cannot be over emphasized and appropriate resources have to be expended to ensure this is in place before full operation can be established.

(E)   To design and conduct a nationwide user study of library and information services the results of which will aid the planning and evaluation of current and developing information services.

(F)   To be able to share information with the Caribbean Community through ECLAC, Jamaica's National Information system, Coordinadores Regional de Investigaciones Economicas y Sociales (CREIS), Associacion de Sistemas de Informacion Nacionales (ASIN) and others.

(G)   To produce a National Bibliography.


12.   AWAITED GENERAL RESULTS


By meeting the specific objectives of the project it is envisioned that several general results will materialize. These will include a more developed and integrated approach to information problems in Belize. This will have developed partly from the provision of a more effective and efficient information personnel structure as well as having a more unified and systematic information network. Access to these combined resources will undoubtedly result in an improved and stimulating intellectual climate.

The value of information will be recognized as a commodity that has both benefits and costs.

The National Library is, in addition, aiming to develop the proposed information network to encompass a national unified database and a union list of serials. This will in effect promote the use of standardized cataloguing procedures to an acceptable international level.

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13.   RESULTS BY EACH SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

Several libraries in Belize have been introduced to, and received basic training in, UNESCO's CDS/ISIS, the generalized Information Storage and Retrieval System designed specifically for the computerized management of library resources.

Both ECLAC and MEDCARIBE have demonstrated interest in having Belize become part of their network and thus have access to Belizean materials. Indeed the National Library Service currently exports data to the MEDCARIBE data bank. The Department of Information (DOI) recently joined the Caribbean News Agency and the Association de Sistemas de Informacion Nacionales (ASIN) as part of an effort to increase the flow of relevant Caribbean and Latin American news into the country. The DOI is desirous of making this information flow more widely available, and share it more efficiently with libraries, non-governmental organizations and the general public. Having a National Information Network will obviously facilitate participation in knowledge exchange at both the local and regional levels.

Some individual objectives.......

(A)   The provision of an on-line news editing system, and an electronic Bulletin Board System (BBS) will provide valuable access to government activities and developments for all citizens of Belize through an updated flow of communication.

(B)   Upgrading and development of technical resources of the National Library Service will provide a centre base around which the proposed information network can be built.

(C)   Establishment of a National Library Network to link public and private sector libraries will have far reaching benefits in all areas of society as well as the sharing of resources in an environment of scarcity

(D)   staff development and training in information management, processing and retrieval will provide the necessary skills to enable people to make full use of the enabling technology.

(E)   A nationwide user study of library and information services will provide a focus for the planning process.

(F)   Linking with other regional information networks enhances the flow of information from area to area benefiting primarily the political and socioeconomic development of

the whole region.

14.  DESCRIPTION OF THE FORECASTED EMPLOYMENT OF THE EXTERNAL
     FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION

     Funds derived from contributions will be used to finance
the purchase of equipment for the installation of the network
system, eg server, back-up units etc. It will also be used for
initial training of staff and technical support personnel.
A portion will be allocated for an information
specialist to design and conduct a user study and to
monitor developments through a program of evaluations.

15.  DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL CONTRIBUTION

     The national organization will perform the supervisory and
coordinating functions. Local organizations will provide
databases and information sources (most already existing as
operational entities). The national organization will provide
the management, staff, buildings, and the financing for same.
The national organization will establish its own connections
and arrangements with participating regional organizations and
bodies. Local agencies are held responsible for the provision
of their own needs with respect to hardware and software
equipment.

16.  FINAL BENEFICIARIES OF THE PROJECT

          The National Library Service
          The Department of Information
          The people of Belize
          Participating organizations
          The regional community
          The global community

17.  IDEAS FOR THE SELF SUSTAINING OF THE PROJECT WHEN CONCLUDED
     THE INITIAL PROJECT

     Continued public demands will ensure national interest and
Governmental support. A well trained and efficient staff will
ensure that the project continues and develops. Provisions
will be made to extract appropriate charges for additional
services provided.

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A. The issues of concern are:
Acquisition of Hardware/Software:
maintain flexibility -    multiple    platform    machine,
                          upgradable, expandable,

Compatibility            -    fast, powerful, large/fast hard
                              drive,  durable/reliable  network
                              equiptment/devices    (hard/soft).
                              Maintain   backup   system   which
                              emulates main system.

Support / Training       -    Need  professional(s)  to  assemble
                              system  and  train  support  staff,
                              needs both technical and documented
                              support  from manufacturers, (texts,
                              online, software...). Need personnel
                              trained to manage both hardware and
                              software    (requires    programming
                              skills).

Administration and Management:
establish support legislation

determine protocol       -    User  access  and  regulations,
                              generation    cost    (where
                              appropriate),    will    be
                              determined    by    NLS    in
                              consultation    with    user
                              community.

Security -    management software, user code access where
              required,  security  software  to  maintain
              integrity of database, transparent access to
              provide easier management.

Financing
implementation cost -    cost  of  hardware,  software,
                         training, installation

maintanance cost    -    funding to effect maintenance

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as necessary, perform upgrades
and expansions as system grows
and    conventions    and
communication platforms evolve
etc.

Futurity
be cognizant of emerging technologies, social trends and
requirements, especially with regards to information and
communication.

Although an integrated system will result the components are of
necessity developing at different rates.

The project is conceived as having several stages:-

The initial planning stage which involves the setting up
of workshops to determine policy, standards, guidelines
and strategies for effective information organization and
management.

Data collection - this requires supporting information
eg. survey of user needs, available equipment,  etc.

The establishment of different areas of specialization
for different resource centres with databases developed
in   accordance   with   the   accepted   standards   of
bibliographic control and organization. This will address
problems such as the duplication of costs in acquisition
and redundancy of stored data, conserving on scarce
financial resources and vital storage facilities.

To critically look at the National information Act with
a   view   to   adopting   relevant   guidelines   or   make
recommendations for changes in the absence of such
guidelines.

Training in information management.

Equipment Installation and training.

Evaluation and adjustments.

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