

## THE INTER-AGENCY DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH INFORMATION SYSTEM

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### ABSTRACT

The Inter-Agency Development Research Information System (IDRIS) is a database containing information on research projects supported by a number of development aid (donor) organizations. Some 7,000 research projects are described--all for the benefit of developing countries. The scope of research is: agriculture, fisheries, forestry, health, education, information, environment, social issues, women in development, economic issues, and industry. The system is hosted by IDRC, Canada, which together with the other participating agencies, is committed to expanding participation/and or making the contents of the database available to agencies, institutions, and researchers interested in Third World research activities. The database may be accessed on-line and is available on tape or diskettes in a number of computerized formats.

### RESUME

*Le Système d'Information Inter-Agences de Développement (IDRIS) est une base de données qui contient des informations sur les projets de recherche financés par un certain nombre d'institutions d'aide au développement. Quelques 7.000 projets sont décrits. Les domaines de recherches couverts sont l'agriculture, la pêche, les ressources forestières, la santé, l'éducation, l'information, l'environnement, les sciences sociales, les femmes dans le développement, les questions économiques et l'industrie. Le système est situé dans les locaux du CRDI au Canada, qui est chargé, conjointement avec les autres agences participantes, à la diffusion du contenu de la base auprès d'organismes, institutions et chercheurs intéressés par la recherche sur les pays en développement. La base de données est accessible en ligne et est disponible sur bandes et disquettes sous différents formats.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Inter-Agency Development Research Information System (IDRIS) is a database containing information on research projects in or for, developing

countries. The information is entered by the donor organizations<sup>1</sup> (bilateral or non-governmental in structure) that fund the research projects.

The decision to create IDRIS was taken in 1983 by five donor organizations.<sup>2</sup> The initiator and sponsor of the database, IDRC, had the necessary technical expertise in the area of computerization and offered its mini-computer as the site for the data storage. The advent of telecommunications allowed the other agencies to access the database via a modem and a terminal.

The decision to contribute information to a common database had ideological aspects as well. The agencies recognized that project funding in, or for, developing countries often occurred in isolation. Donors, like the researchers they were funding, were in danger of recreating the wheel.

As of today's date, IDRIS contains information on 7,000 research projects of recipients in 106 developing countries. The database is growing at an annual rate of 850. Much of this information is available nowhere else.

The sectors of research are: agriculture, forestry, fisheries, environment, health, industry, information, education, social issues, and women in development.

The information is organized in such a way as to give an overview of the research activity. Each research project funded by an agency represents for IDRIS a unique record. So when we speak of 7,000 research projects, it is the same thing as saying that the database has 7,000 records.

A schematization of the database structure shows that each record is broken into three major areas: funding, the recipient, and the research. Besides indicating the total funding of the project, the information included is funding by fiscal year, the year funding started and the year it ended.

The block of information on the recipient includes the name of the researcher, the name and location of his or her institution, and a free-form address.

Research project information includes the title of the project, an abstract, keywords describing the research and the geographic area, and documents produced. The software used is in the ISIS family and includes MINISIS and CDS-ISIS, both of which are in widespread use in developing countries, in documentation centres and libraries. The software is menu-driven and can be characterized as a generalized information storage and retrieval system for the computerized management of structured non-numerical databases.

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<sup>1</sup> At present, the organizations participating are: International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada; International Foundation for Science (IFS), Sweden; Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC), Sweden; Board on Science and Technology for International Development (BOSTID); the Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation (NUFFIC); the German Appropriate Technology Exchange (GATE), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the United Nations University (UNU).

<sup>2</sup> The organizations mentioned in footnote 1 except JICA and UNU.

<p><b>IDRIS RECORD</b></p> <p><b>Donor Funding</b> Fiscal Year , Year Started, Total Funding Year Ended</p> <p><b>The Recipient</b> Researcher Institution, Full Address</p> <p><b>Research Project</b> Title Abstract, Keywords, Geographic Region, Documents Produced</p>
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The IDRIS group has responded to the current information boom in a number of ways that has made the database of greater scope and importance than would be the case for a strictly donor information retrieval system.

The participating agencies recently made the decision to open the system to research institutions who are pursuing research issues of relevance to developing countries, or who are conducting research in developing countries. This broadening of the database will make it a more valuable source of information on research that is taking place in developing countries.

The IDRC has made the database available to the public in two ways. One has been to arrange for many institutions in the development community such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to access the database on-line.

The IDRC also arranges for the delivery of tapes or diskettes, with an up-date every six months, to a number of organizations, including UNESCO. Because of the development of a software that allows the database to be installed on micro-computers, requests for diskettes of the database are substantial. This is true for users in the Third World as well as in industrialized countries.

Customized sub-sets of the database are also offered, and include the sectors mentioned earlier in this paper: agriculture, forestry, fisheries, environment, health, industry, information, education, social issues, and women in development.

Sub-sets by geographic area are available as well and are as follows: Africa, Arab-speaking countries, Asia and the Pacific, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, and the Caribbean.