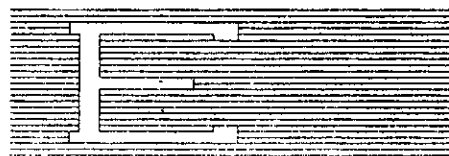




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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

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Fourth meeting of the
Standing Committee on Harmonization and Standardization
of Documentation and Information Systems at
Regional and Sub-regional Institutions in Africa

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
11-13 November 1991

REPORT

I. Organization and Attendance

1. Organized by the Pan African Development Information System, the Fourth Meeting of the Standing Committee on the Harmonization and Standardization of Documentation and Information Systems at Regional and Sub-regional Institutions in Africa was held at the Headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa from 11-13 November 1991.

2. The meeting was attended by the African Development Bank (ADB), the African Intellectual Property Organization (AIPO), the African Regional Organization for Standardization (ARSO), the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Africa (CIRDAFRICA), the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the International Energy Foundation (IEF), the United Nations Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the International Livestock Centre for Africa (ILCA), the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), the Organization for the Management and Development of the Kagera River Basin (KBO), the Population Information Network for Africa (POPIN-Africa), the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern African States (PTA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (The full list of participants appears as Annex to this report).

Opening of the Meeting (agenda item one)

3. The meeting was opened by Mr. A. B. Tall, Officer in Charge of ECA, on behalf of Mr. Issa B. Y. Diallo, ECA Acting Executive Secretary. He noted the results of the UNDP In-depth Evaluation of PADIS, which had taken place in 1990, commending PADIS for progress made in the implementation of its immediate objectives, in particular in assisting member States in establishing development information systems. As PADIS entered its twelfth year of existence, he requested the Standing Committee to examine its methods of promoting development information utilization in the region taking account of new user needs in the context of both the evolving African Economic Community as well as technological change. He recalled the Committee's principal objective of exchanging ideas and experiences and devising strategies to develop and promote information systems capable of contributing to the development of African countries and urged them to formulate practical recommendations to this end. He informed the Committee that since PADIS' objectives were in line with the basic terms of reference of the ECA from its establishment, - to collect, process, analyse and disseminate information necessary for the development of member States, - ECA planned to do all it could to obtain regular budget posts for PADIS to ensure its continuance.

II. Summary of proceedings

Election of officers (agenda item two)

4. The following officers were re-elected to serve until the next meeting:

Chairperson:	ECA
Vice Chairperson:	CODESRIA
Rapporteur:	ILCA

Adoption of agenda (agenda item three)

5. The agenda and programme of work as presented in documents ECA/PADIS/SCH/IV/1/Add.1 and ECA/PADIS/SCH/IV/2 were adopted as amended.

Matters arising from the Third Meeting of the Standing Committee and the Tenth Meeting of the Chief Executives of ECA-Sponsored Regional and Sub-regional Institutions (agenda item four)

6. The secretariat presented document ECA/PADIS/SCH/IV/3 reviewing progress made in implementing decisions taken at the third meeting of the Standing Committee as well as matters arising from the tenth meeting of the Chief Executives of ECA-Sponsored Regional and Sub-regional Institutions. Achievements, including the updating of the directory of databases at African institutions and the studies on utilization of PADIS information products and services in various African countries, were outlined, and activities under process were pinpointed along with suggestions for future activities. In this regard, PADIS proposals for associating institutional participating centres in the preparation and implementation of activities placed for the coming five years were presented.

7. In the discussion of this item, it was urged that to promote cost effectiveness, future meetings of the Committee should be combined with technical workshops or training, and that PADIS should attempt to find sponsorship to defray the costs of participants attending the meetings. The use of computer conferencing to enhance communication among members of the Committee between meetings was also suggested. The question of standardization of systems was raised, with the meeting urging PADIS to take the lead on this issue. It was suggested that standardization was necessary not only of software, but at the level of methodologies as well. Most institutions were using Mini-Micro CDS/ISIS, it was noted; however, the introduction of the microcomputer Version "H" of MINISIS could bring changes in this pattern. Information was offered on UNESCO's development of statistical database management software (IDAMS) which could interface with CDS/ISIS. The need to avoid duplication of efforts in the undertaking of activities was raised, underscoring the role the Committee could play in co-ordination. The involvement of the private sector in African information activities was also suggested.

8. The central role of librarians and the importance of other information professionals who interface between information resources and African end users were raised. The need to marry, in appropriate fashion, traditional library systems with modern high technology information facilities was highlighted as a way to bring about a more balanced development in this field and to derive maximum benefits therefrom. The training of librarians in computer use was urged.

Report by the African Development Bank (ADB) on organizing the 1992 workshop on management of information systems and hosting the Fifth Standing Committee Meeting (agenda item five)

9. The representative of ADB reported on progress made towards hosting the fifth meeting of the Standing Committee and a workshop on the management of information systems. Discussions were at an advanced state both with the management of the Bank and with the Ministry of Co-operation (France) which had been approached to fund the training/meeting. As soon as these were completed, a date would be set and members of the Committee informed.

Progress report on PADIS activities since the Third meeting of the Standing Committee (agenda item six)

10. The Secretariat introduced document ECA/PADIS/SCH/IV/4. During the period under review, PADIS activities had concentrated on delivery of training, advisory services, and other forms of technical co-operation for ECA member States, data base development, network building, user services, servicing of legislative and other meetings including expert groups, undertaking of studies and issuance of publications.

11. In the discussion of this item, it was suggested that the training activities and studies undertaken by PADIS should involve universities and institutions of higher learning. The Secretariat stated that this had been done in the case of recent studies undertaken and that efforts were underway to involve African universities which provide training in information science to incorporate PADIS methodologies in their curricula. The question was also raised of usage both of the PADIS system as well as of other information systems in the region. It was suggested that indicators be devised which could measure the rates of utilization of various kinds of information systems.

Reports by representatives of institutions on development and activities since the Third Meeting of the Standing Committee (agenda item seven)

12. Representatives of participating institutions outlined the objectives of their institutions as well as what activities had been carried out since the last meeting of the Standing Committee.

African Development Bank (ADB)

13. ADB reported that both its documentation centre and library were fully automated, using TEXTO software which it had purchased from IBISCUS (France). They had recently become aware of the possibility of automatic data transfer between TEXTO and CDS/ISIS, which would facilitate information exchange between ADB and other institutions in the region. They had developed their own thesaurus, which they were willing to share with the Committee. The ADB collection included more than 10,000 books and 15,000 reports. ADB emphasized the importance of convincing decision makers of the importance of information for planning. Their success in obtaining outside funding for information activities was detailed.

African Intellectual Property Organization (AIPO)

14. Created in 1962, 14 Sub-Saharan countries were now members of AIPO whose headquarters are in Yaounde. The organization's mandate was to link research and

industrialization through scientific and technical knowledge contained in patent documents. AIPO's computerization began in 1986, through co-operation with IDRC and acquisition of MINISIS. AIPO had since become a MINISIS Resource Centre for the Africa region. Its patent, trademark and library databases were described. Plans were underway for the creation of two referential databases as well as for the establishment of a network to communicate with its participating institutions.

African Regional Organization for Standardization (ARSO)

15. Established in 1977, ARSO now had 24 member States. Its mandate was the promotion and elaboration of regional standards. Its information activities comprised an information system, ARSO-DIS, and network, ARSO-DISNET, which provided technical assistance to its member states. ARSO had created and maintained five databases and using desktop publishing techniques, was producing information products from these databases including bibliographies and catalogues. Guides were presently being produced for its network.

Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Africa (CIRDAFRICA)

16. Established in 1979, the Centre operates through a network of national integrated rural development centres in its 17 member countries. Among its objectives were to serve as a clearinghouse and data bank for information on integrated rural development in Africa. Its information services included a resource centre, referral service, database development, publication review, selective dissemination of information, reprographic services, translation and production of promotional materials. CIRDAFRICA had established a co-operative information system in member States which was being computerized.

Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA)

17. In existence since 1973, CODESRIA had an information and documentation centre specialized in social sciences (CODICE), equipped with modern information technology. It maintained a total of five databases, from which its policy was to distribute diskettes and extracts rather than publish updates. Bibliographies were being produced from these databases on major social science research themes. CODESRIA's library holdings were described, in particular its efforts to collect all African social science periodicals. In information technology, it was engaging in desktop publishing and training local institutions in the use of CDS/ISIS.

Eastern and Southern African Universities Research Programme (ESAURP)

18. Created in 1977, ESAURP was based on a network of national research co-ordinators in participating countries. While it had plans for the creation of a database of regional research institutions and their research capacities, this had not yet begun due to lack of funds. The organization was particularly active in the issuance of publications. The difficulties they had experienced in computerization were elaborated. Although staff had been trained in this area by PADIS and other organizations, information management activities had not gotten off the ground. ESAURP was also engaged in consultancy work.

International Energy Foundation (IEF)

19. Founded in 1988 to serve researchers and engineers in the energy field, the purpose of the Foundation is to advance knowledge on energy. Among the databases it was creating, using CDS/ISIS, were a bibliographic data base on energy and on IEF publications and documents. IEF encouraged data transmission via existing networks. Computerization of its library was also planned. PADIS is to serve as the Africa regional focal point for IEF's organization of the First Global Energy Information Conference, to be held in Tripoli from 17-19 October 1992. IEF emphasized its concern for bibliographic control of "grey" literature, information as a commodity as well as the legal aspects of data transfer. It had held some 10 conferences on energy information and was planning a number of workshops to promote information transfer.

United Nations Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP)

20. Established in 1963 as a subsidiary body of the ECA with emphasis on training and research, IDEP maintained a rich library collection which was not yet computerized due to financial problems. PADIS was involved in plans to effect this, and studies on technology use had been undertaken. Computer services were expanding at the institution as a whole, but these had been largely limited to office automation applications. The library, however, had begun to compile automated bibliographies with these facilities. Its cooperation with other regional institutions located in Dakar was noted.

International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

21. IDRC informed the meeting that it was being restructured with the appointment of a new president. The former Information Sciences Division had been replaced by the Information Sciences and Systems Division. Its approach in information would now be a holistic one, with emphasis on research. Among its topics of focus were information development and security in southern Africa as well as the sociology of information. It would also be interested in promotion of trade information systems in the Africa region. In the training area, it would be looking at information management and marketing.

International Livestock Centre for Africa (ILCA)

22. ILCA described its mandate for the collection of non-conventional documentation, through which 20,000 documents had been collected, microfiched and documented. ILCA publications were being produced in-house using desktop publishing techniques. Its information services encouraged the production of annotated bibliography databases in printed format as well as on diskette. Its library was fully computerized, with both acquisition and circulation software. It was in the process of forming an agricultural information network and was moving towards decentralization of information services, with emphasis on encouraging relations with national agricultural libraries. For its information services such as Selective Dissemination of Information, ILCA had developed a feedback analysis system.

Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC)

23. With Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria as member States, the LCBC was established in 1964 to coordinate the usage of natural resources in the river basin. Its documentation activities had suffered from the removal and subsequent return of its headquarters in N'djamena. The organization was currently trying to revive its documentation centre through the acquisition of documentation, as part of an overall project for the organization

financed by UNDP. To this end it had begun computerization, acquired a documentalist and a microfiche reader. The work of cataloguing and indexing LCBC documentation, utilizing CDS/ISIS, had started.

Organization for the Management and Development of the Kagera River Basin (KBO)

24. Established in 1977, KBO reported that computerization of their materials had begun with SUPERDOC, but was now proceeding with Mini-micro CDS/ISIS. SUPERDOC materials were being transferred manually to the new system. Since the last meeting, KBO had acquired a microfiche camera and progress was being made in microfiching of their collection. A CD-ROM reader had also been installed. Data base design, data collection and entry were proceeding on their statistical data bank. While computerization was proceeding well, information activities were limited by the insufficiency of the library collection. Participants offered suggestions to KBO for automating data transfer between SUPERDOC and CDS/ISIS.

Population Information Network for Africa (POPIN-Africa)

25. Set up in 1984, POPIN-Africa comprised part of a global network of population development information. POPIN-Africa had established sectoral and subregional centres in a regional network. No national participating centres had yet been established. Major project activities centred on computerized data base creation, including the POPREF bibliographic data base; POPINS, POPEXP and POPRES, referential data bases, from which publications were generated. POPIN-Africa also produced a country bibliographic series. It was active as well in clearinghouse activities on population information.

Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern African States (PTA)

26. Although established in 1982, PTA had not organized a central library until 1991. However, individual units of the organization had previously undertaken information activities, including those sponsored by FAO, UNIDO and ITC. PTA requested the Standing Committee to assist it in developing its library facilities.

Review of specific items of the System (agenda item eight)

Review of the PADIS Institution Code and official membership in the PADIS network (agenda item 8.1)

27. The Secretariat introduced document ECA/PADIS/SCH/IV/5 on this agenda item. It was stated that the need for codes applicable system-wide for the representation of names of intergovernmental institutions had been necessary since the First Meeting of the Standing Committee. Accordingly, an effort had been made to devise a simple alphanumeric code for representing the names of PADIS institutional participating centres. There were now 28 institutional participating centres in the PADIS network, an increase of 133% since the last meeting. Standing Committee members who were not yet institutional participating centres were urged to follow the signing of the agreement with their institutions.

28. With regard to bibliographic input sheets, it was suggested that fields for the date of input and indexing of document be added to worksheets for bibliographic description.

used by PADIS and institutional participating centres. It was felt that this would assist in research on how much time such operations could take.

Report on the survey of databases and information systems in regional and sub-regional institutions in Africa (agenda item 8.2)

29. The Secretariat introduced document ECA/PADIS/SCH/IV/6. The information as of 29 October contained in this document, which had been compiled at the request of the second meeting of the Committee and revised at the request of the third, was based on the results of questionnaires sent to institutions in Africa. The response rate had been about thirty percent. Some participants felt that the fields should include the possibility of describing availability of databases on CD-ROM. It was noted that the databases described were those that were maintained by the respective institutions. A suggestion made was to include a question on availability of data bases in order to show whether those data bases could be obtained free of charge or whether they were for sale. The question of copyright was also raised.

Computer-mediated communications (agenda item 8.3)

Experiences of CODESRIA and ARSO

30. CODESRIA reported that it had begun computer-mediated communications with a linkup to GEONET in 1987. In 1991 it had participated in the PADIS training workshop through which it had received a faxcard and additional communications software. Although problems had been experienced with the faxcard and in accessing Addis Ababa directly, Dakar participants had been successful in establishing a communications network among themselves. Regarding connection with Addis Ababa, CODESRIA was advised to try again since PADIS had recently installed a high speed error correcting modem.

31. ARSO was linked electronically to PADIS both through FIDONET and directly. Their information system had its own network as well, which was planning the linkage of four additional points as well as training National Standards Bodies in computer-mediated communications.

Report on PADIS Project on Computer based Networking in Africa

32. The Secretariat presented document ECA/PADIS/SCH/IV/7 which gave the objectives, expected results and progress made in the PADIS project on computer based networking in Africa. The project deals with computer mediated communications (electronic mail, electronic bulletin board, electronic teleconferencing), computer based resource sharing (access to PADIS data bases) and experimentation of new technologies for information storage and document delivery (CD-ROM and fax machines). In implementing the above project some of the problems which were encountered were: the high cost in use of telecommunication facilities, unskilled personnel to install and configure data communication equipment and software, unavailability of direct telephone lines, management and administrative problems, unavailability of basic data communications supplies and equipment.

33. In the discussions that followed, members were informed that PADISnet was using FIDONet which links 11,000 microcomputers around the world. Also at the request of Standing Committee members, details were given on specifications of hardware and software required to participate in the network. Differences between plain communication

software and automatic mailers were explained to enable information centres to make a good choice of software. Also, possibilities of teleconferencing by Standing Committee members were raised. The Standing Committee was informed that there would be no technical problem in setting up a Bulletin Board System for communication between members of the Standing Committee. In view of the costs of operating such a system, PADIS requested assurances that it would actually be used.

Development of an Agricultural Project Management Support System (AGPROMASS) (agenda item nine)

34. The Secretariat presented document ECA/PADIS/SCH/IV/8 which gave objectives of the proposed project, the methodology to be used, its recipients and the co-ordinating organs. Standing Committee members were requested to comment on AGPROMASS as a whole and its information component (AGPRODIS).

35. In the discussions that followed, Standing Committee members welcomed the project. Some questions were raised whether it involved some duplication of activities. Standing Committee members were informed that the main aim of the project was in fact to enhance exchange of information on projects methodologies, techniques and results, thus avoiding repetition of errors and duplication of activities. Standing Committee members suggested that survey of directories and data bases of research projects should be carried out in the beginning of the project to enable implementing agencies to have a good view of what is already done in this field. Standing Committee members dealing with rural development discussed participation in the network and their respective institutions would be considered as centres of excellence in their own specialties, co-ordination of the information component would be done by PADIS. It was proposed that a consortium be set up so that other institutions could participate. The need for sustainability of the project was also raised by the Standing Committee.

Adaptation of PADIS to changing needs (agenda item ten)

36. The Secretariat presented document ECA/PADIS/SCH/IV/9 which outlined PADIS' approach to its 1992-1996 activities. It emphasized the need for an integrated approach for development information, the expansion of its data banks, the strengthening of standardization and harmonization activities, the increased focus on national and institutional participating centres, the adaptation to technological development for information storage and document delivery, promotion of improved levels of information use, improved communication with users, continued emphasis on training and increased efforts at income-generation. Networking and the diversification of information products would be stressed, while the improvement of PADIS' information marketing and training activities would receive due attention.

37. In the discussions that followed, Standing Committee members emphasized the importance of an integrated approach to development information and stressed the urgency in marketing information services and products and need for PADIS to be involved in training and servicing the private sector on matters related to development information. Standing Committee members requested PADIS to strengthen its relations with institutions of higher learning in Africa and also to prioritize and develop sectors dealing with development information. PADIS was requested to create a special information sector for the proposed African Economic Community. Furthermore Standing Committee members were eager to see the development of indicators for measuring the use of information services and products in Africa. Some members suggested the computerization and incorporation of the ECA Library in the PADIS structure and a more systematic

collection by PADIS of information generated by ECA substantive divisions. The Committee was also concerned with the problem of dealing with widely varying levels of technological development in the region.

Any other Business (agenda item eleven)

38. Under this item, problems related to sales and distribution of books developed by African scholars and institutions were raised. African institutions are not able to sell their information products while they are required to publish or perish.

39. Discussions that followed showed that the problem above was related to the belief that foreign goods were the best. The following suggestions were given as means and channels for the sale of African publications: creation of a good bookshop in ECA, use of exhibitions, conferences and shows to market products, use of advertising agents, training in marketing techniques and use of associations of librarians and documentalists.

III. Recommendations

40. The Committee adopted the following recommendations:

1. Standing Committee meetings should be coupled with pertinent training courses or seminars; PADIS should attempt to find funds to underwrite members' participation.
2. African documentation and information centres should participate in conferences, symposia, shows and meetings in the region to promote their products and services.
3. PADIS should make available a computer bulletin board facility so that Standing Committee members can communicate on issues of standardization, harmonization and information exchange.
4. PADIS should promote background studies on measuring use of information services and products in Africa.
5. PADIS should promote the creation of information infrastructure for the proposed African Economic Community.
6. PADIS should strengthen its relations with institutions of higher learning in Africa so as to participate in development of curricula in the concerned institutions for benefits of the information sector.
7. PADIS should explore ways of working with the private sector in the use and support of development information.
8. PADIS should add a field on restrictive use /copyright/ availability of data bases in the directory of information systems and data bases in Africa. The completed directory should be published for the next meeting.
9. ECA should adopt a more holistic and integrated approach to its library and documentation resources and facilities in order to create an integrated information system and services at ECA within the PADIS context.
10. A distribution agency should be created in Africa for the distribution of African publications.

Annex

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