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Description of a Proposed Information System to Facilitate Contact between Organizations

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ANNEX II to the report entitled: *Need for a World Management Information System -- to assist initiation and coordination of global development programmes*

NB: The system is described in the style of a brochure which would be sent to associations in order to solicit their support and collaboration. The brochure contains some duplication to facilitate discussion and editing. The proposed system could form the basis for the world management information network described in the main report.

A. Do you have a problem making contact with other organizations and finding sources of information in your various fields of interest?

The World Information Problem

There are:

- about 3000 international organizations
- about 100,000 national organizations throughout the world
- an **unknown** number of associated and independent working groups, committees, movements, programmes, etc.
- a large and **unknown** number of seminal groups which may be local in membership but national or international in significance

Examples of information problems:

- have you ever undertaken a **programme** in some field only to dis- cover - months later - that another organization had already produced many **publications** that would have been useful to you?
- have you ever organized a **meeting** and been unable to invite **representatives** from certain countries because either you did not know whether your field of interest was represented there, or you did not know how to locate the address in time?
- have you ever wanted to **distribute** your newsletter, **journal** or **project** conclusions to a wider circle but not been able to locate easily bodies with interests related to yours?
- how often have your important **contacts** been made purely **by chance** - and how many are you unaware of even now?
- have you ever undertaken a badly needed **programme** only to find much later that it could in fact have formed part of an interna-**tional programme** from which you could have obtained financial or material aid and advice?
- how easy do you think it is for other organizations to locate you?

- a United States National Commission for Unesco report concluded in 1964 that 'Communication is generally sporadic and uncertain bet- ween the international non-governmental organization and its natio- nal affiliates and individual members... Individual American members, for example, appear to know very little about what their interna- tional non-governmental organization is doing. In some cases, this includes even the executive secretary of the American affiliate. Much the same situation is believed to apply in other countries.'
- report on the 1968 Freedom from Hunger Conference for National Committees in Asia and the Far East indicated a 'seeming lack of understanding how the governmental and non-governmental organizations represented could help one another. Non-governmental organi zations were reported as often not knowing what other national orgazizations in the name country were doing.
- an 1968 FAO brochure states that 'In some cases even the member governments of the Organization are not fully aware of the variety and scope of information readily obtainable through the FAO,' It is probable that communication between many inter- governmental agencies and organizations, national government departments and national organizations is equally ineffective in many sectors.

Organizational Resources

The organizations, and the information network which they form, are the re- sources with which we are facing world problems, crises, tensions and the search for knowledge. This organizational network cannot be fully utilized by the groups which form part of it because there is no information available on organizations in general. It is very difficult to locate:

- new organizations and new programmes soon after they are initiated
- important contacts in a field of interest in which new sub-commissions or specialized programmes have been proposed, or in a geographical area with which there has been little previous contact.

The lack of information is such that many organizations do not know of the existence of other groups, programmes, regular meetings, information sources, etc. in the area in which they are operating Under present circumstances it is almost impossible to determine how important this problem is.

This situation can only lead to duplication of programmes and wastage of per- sonnel and financial resources. In some environmental problem areas the inter- action between uncoordinated programmes can itself create new problems.

Information and Cooperation

Little can be done directly to foster the link between two groups, for this depends on their individual wish to develop their field of activity and their judgement on how it should be developed. International cooperation is there- fore a difficult concept to promote. Cooperation is better understood at the national, regional or urban level where collaboration for mutual benefit is less suspect and has a recognized value.

What can be done, however, is to remove the current barriers to communication across:

- geographical boundaries (e.g. between regional or national organizations)
- subject area boundaries (e.g. between organizations with overlapping interests)
- administrative boundaries (e.g. between organizations of different types).

Such barriers oppose the initiation, development and maintenance of any inter- organization contact.

Importance of Contact Information

making it easier for organizations and groups to know of others in their eld in neighbouring geographical areas, or in related subject areas:

- an organization can determine with which bodies it could bene- ficially be in contact (or on a mailing list, as a member, etc.)
- rapid contact and response between organizations is possible whenever a new programme is formulated or a new problem arises
- an underorganized problem area can be automatically detected which is a direct incentive to create new organizations and programmes
- the relationship between specialized programmes becomes clearer, thus facilitating coordination under general programmes
- implementation of general programmes is speeded up e.g. Interna- tional Geophysical Year, International Cooperation Year, World Food Program
- the exchange of programme results and meeting conclusions is facili- tated
- a clear and up-to-date picture is provided for fund allocating organizations to enable them to pick out the areas in need of stimulus
- duplication and wasted effort can be avoided.

The more individuals and groups can be encouraged to develop their interests through organizations at a local or national level, the greater will be the corresponding requirement (and pressure) for contact at the international level. The more such links that are created, the greater will be the stabi- lizing influence on world society. This type of stability is the necessary context for change.

The current information situation with regard to the world organizational network can best be described as resembling a city without acentral telephone exchange, in which subscribers might or might not be listed in any of 500 telephone directories of varying dates produced by a variety of publishers some of which are themselves unlocatable. The cost and limited distribution of such directories is such that only a limited number of libraries can possess a usefully high percentage of them.

B. What is Inter-Contact?

Objectives of Inter-Contact

The main objective of Inter-Contact is to facilitate any form of contact bet- ween organizations and to encourage contacts and organizations in areas where they are needed but do not exist.

Membership and Sponsorship

Inter-Contact is a completely independent organization and is advised by a committee of international and national organizations to which control will eventually be transferred. Inter-Contact is a cooperative in the sense that funds arising from its activities are used either by its non-profit members to contact one another or by Inter-Contact to facilitate further contacts.

Activities of Inter-Contact

Inter-Contact is based on a very simple idea. It is not feasible to solve the information problem by storing large numbers of bibliographical entries or document texts on a computer. There is too much. It is, however, possible to solve the much simpler problem of keeping track of the organizations, committees and programmes which are each responsible for the production of a stream of documents.

Addresses and fields of interest of international, national and significant local organizations, working groups, programmes, etc. are collected on a com- puter This information is then made available as address lists to different categories of users. In some cases without charge, at cost in others, or at commercial rates to users who wish to employ the addresses for that purpose. By carefully balancing the rates, the users which have adequate finance in effect pay for the use of the system by others. Low cost use of the system by bodies active in any aspect of the general development process (viewed in its widest sense), leads to more rapid circulation of information and more rapid and effective response to new problem areas.

C. Who controls Inter-Contact?

Day-to-day Operations: These are controlled by the secretariat which processes information received through the post and prepares it for the computer. Re- quests from users and the resulting data from the computer are handled in a similar manner.

Executive Committee: During an initial period, this will be made up of re- presentatives of bodies interested in establishing the centre. It is however specifically stated in the Constituion that once Inter-Contact has proved itself, the Executive Committee will then be elected by the Cooperative Committee. The Executive Committee is advised by a Users Committee.

Cooperative Committee: For a maximum period of five years, the Cooperative Committee will be composed of representatives of organizations sympathetic to the general objectives of Inter-Contact. At this stage the Committee will have an advisory function only. Once Inter-Contact has shown itself to be a viable organization, the Constitution specifies that invitations should be extended to international organizations to be represented on the Coopera- tive Committee and that overall responsibility should be transferred to the Committee,

Associations throughout the World: Inter-Contact can only be viable if it is useful to and supported by the many **independent** associations and institutes whose addresses and fields of interest are collected together. In effect, therefore, it is these associations which control Inter-Contact. If the centre is a success, their interests will be directly represented via the national and international associations on the Cooperative Committee.

D. What can Inter-Contact do for you?

Lists of useful contacts: Whatever your field of interest we hope to be able to provide the contacts that you need in other countries or related fields of interest. This should assist you in designing your programme of activities by taking advantage of what other organizations have done, avoid duplication where collaboration would be beneficial, and indicate potential new members or readers of your periodical. Some of this information will be supplied to you at no charge.

Assist others to contact you: Other bodies, committees and inter-govern- mental organizations which may want to get in touch with organizations such as yours - without knowing of your existence -- can do so through Inter- Contact. This should ensure greater recognition for your efforts.

Improve you information collecting and disseminating ability: Newly created committees producing reports and documents in your field will know - through Inter-Contact - to which key bodies, such as your organization, a copy of the material should be sent for review, storage and bibliographical processing.

Improve your ability to obtain funds: Fund allocating bodies and foundations experience much difficulty in locating suitable channels for their funds. Through Inter-Contact foundations interested in your field can locate your organization rapidly.

Rapid response to new problems: Under present conditions it is difficult to locate and notify the relevant bodies each time a new problem or crisis area is detected. Through Inter-Contact a mailing can be quickly made to any combination of organizations with regard to any field of interest to pre- pare organized response and support.

Free use of a computer: The profits made by Inter-Contact will be partially allocated to paying for the cost of data processing by non-profit associations whose addresses have been included. A scale will ensure that those which can least afford to pay and have contributed most derive the greatest benefit - the scale will be further biased to favour international associations. Any allocation of free computer use will be deducted from the cost of any more extensive use of the computer. You could therefore use the computer to help you to send questionnaires in areas where you would like to initiate *a* programme, or you could use it to help you prepare a printed directory of contacts for your members.

Regular use of the computer: Special rates will be available to associations which wish to make regular use of the system. You can

subscribe in order to be sent information monthly or quarterly on new organizations or programmes in your field of interest. Alternatively, Inter-Contact can prepare the labels for the regular mailing of your newsletter, journal, meeting invita- tions, reports, or other material,

Opportunity to support: We believe that Inter-Contact offers you an opportu- nity to support a realistic programme which should contribute significantly to concrete progress in national and international development in you field of interest.

Prepare for the 1970s: The 1970s will be the start of an 'Information Era'. The stimulus of a more rapid flow of information will be of value to many associations. Inter-Contact offers a means of making early use of the sophis- ticated equipment and techniques which are required to handle the large amounts of information involved.

E. What do we need from you? And how can we compensate you?

Prom the above, you will understand that Inter-Contact can only succeed by collecting together information scattered through a multitude of directories and lists. This means a great deal of work. But in many cases, such is the current information problem, it would be impossible for us to locate all the relevant sources. It would be quite impossible for us to purchase all the directories in every speciality.

The **first request** that we make is, therefore, that you send us:

- an up-to-date list giving the address of the Secretary or President of the groups or organizations which are members of your organization (in any sense of the word) Unfortunately, we cannot list more than one **individual** member per country, in the case of international asso- ciations .
- any other organization contacts or sources of further information which are relevant to your field of interest or to which you think we should be able to refer inquirers.

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION: We well appreciate that in many countries, cul- tures or subject areas, some information is considered confidential. Some organizations do not wish to receive unsolicited material. Information is only gradually given freely. You will see (in section P) that we have made provision for this.

Once large numbers of addresses are on file, a great deal of work is required to keep them up-to-date, particularly in the case of the many associations with secretariats rotated between members. This is one of the factors which discouraged all previous attempts and produced the maze of unrelated specialist directories.

The second request that we make is therefore that you send us:

- any change of address of your organization
- changes of address of your member organizations or contacts
- any new addresses which you think might be of interest to other groups interested in your field.

In exchange, we agree to perform a certain amount of **free data processing:** for you. Please contact us if you are interested in this or in any other use of our computer system

- each year we will automatically send you a list of bodies opera- ting in your field of interest. The number of bodies in associa- ted fields which we include in the list will vary from year to year depending on the extent of support from fund allocating bodies currently interested in your area.
- depending upon the amount of information that you send us, and the use made by others of that information, we make available to you at the end of each year a certain amount of free data processing time. This you can use to make contacts, send questionnaires or special issuesof your journal, etc. The amount of computer time allocated to you may be increased by a general subsidy to organizations in your area by a foundation. Any excess will be charged to you at cost.

F. How is Inter-Contact financed? Where is the catch?

Initial Finance

During the initial stages a number of methods have been used to reduce the cost of the system. Extensive use has been made of skilled volunteers. The design of the computer programme has been undertaken with the aid of a university research institure. Loans have been obtained from commercial organizations which form a category of founder/subscriber. These loans will either be paid off during the early years of operation or alternatively will give the right to a reduced rate use of the computer system. These loans do not give any control of the use of the system.

Day-today Operations

We are very aware of the fact that many non-profit organisations would feel happier if it were possible to avoid financing the system from commercial sources. Inter-Contact uses a computer however, and computers are expensive. Non-profit organizations alone could never make the system economically viable. It is difficult to obtain general subsidies for this sort of enterprise be- cause no specialized organization can justify the support of a general in- formation system on a continuing basis.

The system**works** as follows. We mail material for commercial enterprises (e.g. professional congress organizers, travel agents, journal publishers, airlines, book publishers, hotels, etc.) to categories of addressees selected by them. This is done for a fee equivalent to the direct mail advertising rate under commercial conditions. The profit we make on this operation is then used to finance either the collection of new addresses or free data processing for non-profit organizations. All profits are used to improve the information system directly or indirectly.

THE CATCH: For the system to survive it is clear that the amount of adver- tising material sent to associations will increase. It is the willingness of associations to be exposed to this advertising matter which is the source of finance for the system. It is however in the interest of both adver- tisers and associations to ensure that there is a good chance that what is sent is in fact of interest to associations. We have therefore devised a system of codes to ensure that your association only receives material which is likely to be of direct interest to you (see section P).

We believe that the nuisance value to associations can be justified by the advantages of the system to them, namely:

- the existence of an effective information system covering all over-lapping fields of interes. (If commercial interests are prevented from making use of such a system, they will be forced to create a parallel profit-biased system, thus jeopardizing the existence and concrete advantages to associations of the non-profit system.*)*
- accurate knowledge of the services available to associations through commercial organizations. Much important information is only avail- able through such bodies.
- low cost data processing to facilitate the following contacts and interactions: association-foundation, association-government, association-business, national-international, national-national.

The other types of paying users are mentioned in the next section.

Subsidies

As the utility of the system becomes more widely understood, subsidies will prove an increasingly important source of finance. Subsidies are solicited from interested bodies or foundations to finance: the collection of infor- mation in areas in which Inter-Contact is weak; reduction in the cost of use of the system by associations in general or with reference to one particular speciality It is this possibility which will be most important for asso- ciations and fund-allocating bodies. It will represent a unique opportunity to build up contacts in areas which they have not been able to develop be- cause of the effort involved due to the present lack of organized information.

G. Who uses Inter-Contact?

Inter-Contact was established as a world information directory analogous to the ordinary telephone directory and the 'Yellow Pages' directory. It may therefore be used by any organization or individual. Users are:

- **associations:** location of contacts or potential members in re- lated subject or geographical areas; meeting invitations; report or periodical distribution; contact directory prepara- tion; crisis response; surveys; etc.
- **commercial enterprises:** travel advertising; professional services advertising (meeting organizers, conference inter- preters or translators, audio-visual equipment manufacturers, etc.); journals sales campaigns; book publishers advertising; etc.
- **research groups:** particularly in the field of international re- lations, may use the system to study the pattern of contacts bet- ween groups and organizations. This may lead to new insights in- to methods of meeting problem areas as they arise and increasing the effectiveness of the world information system.
- **national and international governmental agencies:** aid in the ini- tiation of general programmes (e.g. International Cooperation Year), distribution of project and programme results, questionnaires, loca- tion of competent specialized associations when new problem areas necessitate advice. Governmental bodies may also copy sections of the address collection for their own computer distribution lists.
- **regular subscribers:** kept informed of new organizations, pro- grammes or changes of address in a particular field of interest.
- **individuals** wishing to make contact with sources of information in a particular area
- **any group** wishing to determine the other sources of information in a particular areaprior to initiating a new programme, meeting, organization, or journal
- **foundations and fund-allocating bodies**: concerned with a particu- lar problem area which wish to locate competent organizations in that area.

H. How can you avoid being sent unwanted literature? Or get more literature?

The purpose of Inter-Contact is to allow organizations in whatever field of interest to send as much printed matter to each other as each is willing to pay for. If material is sent to you, we think it is because the organization concerned believes it has something in which you are interested or something in which you might develop an interest.

It is to your advantage to be able to select personally what is of interest to you rather than suffer from the vagaries of the current system under which you receive information if you happen to get onto a mailing list but are otherwise out of contact - perhaps unknown to yourself.

It is to everyone's advantage that what you are interested in should be known so as to avoid bothering you and to avoid wastage of funds. We have devised a system of codes to allow you to specify exactly what does interest you and to allow the distributor to judge whether organizations of your type would be interested in his material. The codes also permit you to specify what purpose you are willing to allow your address to be used for.

For less printed matter: The way these codes work is that you specify that you do not wish to receive a certain type of literature. Then anyone who wishes to send such literature to your type of organization must pay a penalty fee. This will limit the amount of such literature to a minimum and reduce the nuisance value to you.

For more printed matter: Similarly, if you wish to receive a certain type of printed matter which would normally not be sent to your organization on the basis of the distributor's judgement, then we charge you a small fee - because we must then compensate the distributor for the extra cost to him. In effect this reduces the nuisance value to him.

I. What other information does Inter-Contact provide?

We do **not** maintain files of data on each organization. We have neither the space, nor the resources to store the information and retrieve it for specific inquiries. All the information we have is indicated in section P.

We are aware that the name, address and field of interest of a large orga- nization is not very useful. Such organizations may have many sub-commissions, regional bodies, and working groups, because of the many projects with their own secretariats and programmes and a certain degree of autonomy. Such bodies are therefore also included.

In the same way, organizations are not the only channels and storage points for information. In some cases a journal, a bibliographical service or a regular meeting in effect replaces an organization or is of greater signifi- cance.

By including working parties, programmes and meetings,we make the whole system dynamic. Instead of simply finding out what the situation was like 12 months ago - you can obtain a picture of what is being done now in an area of interest, to you.

When the system is fully developed we hope to be able to show for any area of interest all the different types of organizations, groups, meetings, bib- liographical services, etc. which are concerned. This is the organizational network with which we are equipped to meet the future. In a period of rapid change, we believe that the world cannot afford a delay in organized response to crisis and unforeseen problems.

J. What other services does Inter-Contact provide?

The baric objective of Inter-Contact is to facilitate contact between orga- nizations and groups for whatever purpose they may conceive.

Since it is totally impracticable for everyone to consult a computer for a single address - and this does take time - the preparation of direc- tories in any speciality must be encouraged. We do this by either pro- viding the list of names and addresses to be used in preparing the directory, or else we assist in the despatch of questionnaires to organizations likely to be included, or finally we can process the details in the computer directly into a form which can be handled by a printer. This avoids the cost of com- position. The existence of the directory is noted in the computer and in- quiries are referred to it.

Another major problem in contact between organizations is the language prob- lem. Many contacts are simply not initiated - particularly from the English speaking world - because of the lack of a common language. We are constantly investigating techniques to avoid these problems. Please contact us for further details.

K. With whom are we competing?

In our opinion, no one,

We have been informed that this service is necessary but not the responsibi- lity of any particular group - and we have been to governments, internatio- nal organizations and the United Nations and Specialized Agencies. Each group is bound to its own programme and method of operation and cannot under- take a general project of this type.

Directory Publishers: We do not intend to compete with the publishers of directories - - in fact we hope to make them better known as sources of in- formation.

We claim that by having lists of addresses up-to-date in every field and making them freely available -- we make it much easier for any organization to prepare a specialied directory in any area it wishes.

Other Information Services: The existence of most information services is only known to a restricted circle. As with directories, we hope to make the location of existing specialized information centres, bibliographical ser- vices, etc. much simpler.

It is extremely important to note that we are not interested in attempting to solve the documentation problem. We have no intention of acting as a documentation or bibliographical service. We are only interested in the channels, generation and storage points for current information - we are focused on the present situation and the future possibilities, not on the examination of past activities. We must adopt this policy to avoid being overwhelmed by the information explosion.

L. What are Inter-Contact's plans for development?

The Inter-Contact programme is an ambitious one. It is however possible to start in a modest way by collecting basic details on the organizations which are most important nationally and internationally.

As funds become available, the amount of information can be extended in **coverage** - to the less well-known organizations, and **in detail** - to en- sure more precise distribution of printed matter.

The stored information should therefore be of optimum utility at each stage. This makes it possible to justify immediately any funds solicited. The sto- rage schedule can of course be modified whenever there is interest in the development of a particular type of organization or a field of activity.

At a later stage *a* conference centre booking service might be added as an aid to meeting organizers.

M. What types of information is included?

The computer files will be built up according to the following flexible priori- ties: intergovernmental organizations, international associations, national governmental agencies, national associations, multinational business enter- prises, local or regional associations.

Related internal technical committees, projects or programmes, meetings, directories, bibliographical services, etc, will be included simultaneously or whenever convenient.

It is **not** planned to include businesses as such since they are already well documented. Commercial research institutes, trade associations will however be included. Complex commercial organization structures, such as holding companies, which are of significance to an understanding of the organizational network as a whole may be included at a later stage.

As a long term project, it is hoped that sufficient funds can be accumulated to permit a programme under which Inter-Contact would stimulate contacts in areas which appeared critical but were insufficiently known to have lead to the formation of an organization.

N. Wnat you should do to ensure that other organizations can contact your through Inter-Contact?

(see under E)

O. What should you do if you wish to support Inter-Contact?

(supporting members founder/subscribers etc.)

P. Address details form for Inter-Contact

(each item numbered; text in English only; provision for a multilingual explanatory sheet covering each numbered item)

1. Name of organization/group/committee/programme/etc,

2. -idem- in English or French (if different)

3. Address

4. Main fields of interest

5. Contact codes

A The above address can be used for: a) Contact inquiries only b) Preparation of directories c) Distribution of non-advertising matter d) All uses e) ... B Material should preferably be sent in the following language groups: a) ... C Data below on organization is to be considered: a) Confidential - only for automatic examination by computer and not to be printed b) Available to single inquirers c) Available for conversion to directory form d) ...

6. Number of collective members (range)

7. Number of individual members (range)

8. Number of geograrhical units represented (range)

9. Type of information source -

A international, national, regional local B governmental, commercial, association C programme, meeting, periodical, bibliographical service, directory

10. Staff (range)

11. Library volumes (range)

12. Meeting attendance

A Own meetings (range) B Delegation to other meetings (range)

13. Budget

A Ordinary budget (range) B Meeting budget (range)

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