E/CEPAL/CLADES/R.1 /c.1

REPORT

MEETING FOR THE DESIGN OF AN INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR PLANNING IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Santiago, 11-13 June 1979

Santiago, Chile, August 1979

MEETING FOR THE DESIGN OF AN INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR PLANNING IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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I BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE MEETING

1. Objectives, place and date of the Meeting

At the request of the Latin American Centre for Economic and Social Documentation (CLADES) and the Latin American Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES), the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) convened a Meeting of planning experts of the region in Santiago to study a proposal containing the design of the Information System for Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The project "Information System for Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean" was conceived by CEPAL as an attempt to establish adequate machinery for the exchange of experience among planning bodies, and at the same time to promote co-operation among these institutions.

In view of the magnitude of this undertaking, the project was divided into two components, each with its respective co-ordinating nucleus: the system for Latin America, for which responsibility will be assumed by the Latin American Centre for Economic and Social Documentation (CLADES) of CEPAL, and the system for the Caribbean which will be the responsibility of the Documentation Centre of the CEPAL Office in Port of Spain.

The two components of the system, financed in their first phase by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada, are closely interrelated since they will be using the same methodology in order to standardize the procedures and techniques necessary to attain their objectives, i.e.: the establishment of a data base containing information on planning documentation on Latin America and the Caribbean produced inside or outside the region, and the provision of an expeditious service to users through the data base. To achieve this basic objective, it is necessary to carry out successive activities to strengthen or establish national information infrastructure in the field of planning, such as advisory and training activities.

/Accordingly, ...

Accordingly, the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee (CDCC) requested CLADES to hold a course at the CEPAL Office in Port of Spain between 28 May and 8 June, entitled "Training Workshop for Library and Information Personnel in the Ministries of Planning and Development", which was financed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada.

As part of the activities connected with standardizing procedures, CLADES was also requested to hold a training course for staff of the Caribbean Documentation Centre in Port of Spain for the organization and analysis of the documentation produced by the CEPAL Office for the Caribbean and by the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee (CDCC) on development planning in the region.

2. Attendance.[1/]

The following Member States of the Commission participated in the Meeting: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela. Representatives of IDRC of Canada and the CEPAL Office for the Caribbean attended as observers.

3. Opening meeting

The group began its work on the morning of 11 June with an informal meeting of representatives at which the officers to be proposed at the first plenary session were selected. The suggestions emanating from this meeting were approved at the plenary session where the group officially initiated its work. Mr. Jorge Méndez Mundévar, Director of ILPES, then made an opening statement in which he stressed the importance of establishing an Information System for Planning as a mechanism for the exchange of ideas and experience, thus promoting new forms of collaboration within the context of horizontal co-operation. He emphasized that the need for an organized

/information system

1/ See Annex I

information system for planning was more urgent than in other fields in view of the diverse, rich and complex criteria from among which policies and strategies suited to national needs had to be chosen. Moreover, the emergence of new topics and the adaptation of science and technology to the particular development needs of Latin America and the Caribbean required a rapid and pertinent information mechanism.

The Secretary of the Commission, Mr. Jorge Viteri de la Huerta, then spoke on behalf of the Executive Secretary, Mr. Enrique V. Iglesias. He referred to the context in which the Information System should operate, taking the eighteenth session in La Paz as a parameter. He analysed the 33 resolutions adopted there and divided them into three groups: those related to the critical exercise of appraisal effected periodically by the governments, which would serve as a basis for the formulation of a New Strategy for the Third United Nations Economic and Social Development Decade; those dealing with regional or horizontal co-operation and co-operation among countries; and those concerning a wide range of heterogeneous topics with important common elements for planners, which seek to rationalize the resources existing at the national, regional and international level. He then stressed the role of planning in seeking a new economic and social order, underlining the importance of information for the decision-making process in order to avoid duplication and achieve an effective exchange of experience. He said that in conjunction with the establishment of an Information System there should be a political desire for co-ordination and co-operation among countries.

4. Election of officers

At the first meeting the following officers were elected:

Chairman:	Antonio González	(Peru)
Vice-Chairman:	Myrtle Hazel	(Jamaica)
Rapporteur:	Luis Porras	(Guatemala)

5. Agenda

At the same meeting the following agenda was adopted:

1. Election of officers
2. Working methodology

6. Documentation

In order to fulfil the objectives of the meeting, i.e., the preparation of a final version of the document "Design of an Information System for Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean", a preliminary version of this document prepared by CLADES and ILPES was presented. It comprises two volumes with the following content:

Vol. 1: General description of the "Information System for Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean";

Vol. 2: Technical parameters to be considered in the Information System; operation of the system and its possible short-, medium- and long-term products.

Other working and information documents were provided.2/

7. Adoption of the Rapporteur's Report

At the final meeting held on the afternoon of Wednesday 13th, the group of experts adopted this report of the Meeting together with the decisions and recommendations for the final document and the Rapporteur's report.

/II. REPORT BY

2/ See annex 2

II REPORT BY THE RAPPORTEUR

1. Account of proceedings and conclusions

Mr. Jorge Viteri de la Huerta, speaking on behalf of the Executive Secretary of CEPAL, welcomed the participants and handed over the chairmanship to Mr. José Antonio González.

Mr. González thanked the participants for the confidence they had shown in him by appointing him Chairman of the Meeting. He then conveyed to them the greetings of the Minister Head of the National Planning Institute of Peru, who hoped that the seminar would yield successful results.

The technical secretariat of CLADES briefly introduced the document which it was proposed to use as a basis for the discussions during the three working days of the Meeting.

This proposal was accepted unanimously and the participants then suggested that - as a working methodology - they should study chapter by chapter each of the proposals contained in the document entitled "Information System for Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean. Frame of reference for the design of the system (second version)". Those present then devoted themselves to the study of each part of this document.

DEFINITION OF THE SYSTEM ACCORDING TO THE NEEDS OF USERS.[3/]

Standard user

This chapter of the working document previously prepared by CLADES and ILPES was widely discussed by the participants and the following decision was reached as regards to the standard user:

3/ For the sake of clarity, the sub-titles in this document are the same as those in the basic document, since at the working meetings each of them was studied with reference always to the original sub-title.

/- Since the

- Since the Information System for Planning came into being as an instrument of the System of Co-ordination and Co-operation among Planning Bodies, the former should be guided by the needs of the latter, as for example:
  - Identifying joint action which may be incorporated in development plans as a means of co-ordinating activities that will permit co-operation among planning bodies.

Therefore, the system should be designed primarily to serve planning bodies, without excluding the fact that it may subsequently serve other users.

Limits of the system: type of information to be entered and volume of literature on planning

The participants adopted the following decisions as to the material to be entered in the system:

(1) Development plans, programmes and projects, whether global, regional or sectoral, and budgets;

(2) Technical and methodological studies on planning;

(3) Planning documents of a historical type; and

(4) Documents analysing or providing value judgements of the national planning situation in the various countries, especially those signed by noted authors.

Within these categories it was suggested that an essential nucleus of basic information (covered by categories 1 and 2) should be identified with the aim of promoting the exchange of experience among planning bodies and achieving their integration.

The item covering priority information areas which was not dealt with in the working document was discussed at the Meeting and the following conclusion was reached:

/-that it is

- that it is the responsibility of each country to decide which priority areas should be considered in the selection of documents to be entered in the information system which may not have been considered within the aforementioned basic information nucleus;
- that the countries should suggest to CLADES the areas they may each consider to have priority as an input to the system for the purpose of its future orientation.

Limits of the system: geographical coverage

On this point the participants approved the proposal set forth in the working document in the sense of demarcating the geographical coverage of the project in its various stages. It was therefore decided to include in the pilot phase of the project the countries represented at the Meeting by planning experts.

Particular stress was laid, however, on the fact that Colombia - whose representative had been prevented from attending the Meeting owing to last-minute difficulties - should be included in that stage of the project.

With regard to a future strategy, it was emphasized that the system is expected to operate with all the countries of the area in the near future, and also to establish close links with countries of Africa and Asia in connexion with planning.

Limits of the system: languages included

It was unanimously agreed to accept CLADES' proposal contained in the working document in relation to: (a) languages in which the documents to be entered in the data base are written, and (b) the working language in which the information system for planning would operate (language of summaries, etc.).

/With respect

With respect to the first point, it should be noted that ideally the system would cover all the documentation produced on Latin America and the Caribbean in the world; this literature might be found in any language and, in order to process it, resources additional to those envisaged would have to be considered.

CLADES suggested entering in the data base in the early phases of the project the documentation obtained in Spanish, Portuguese, English and French, leaving it to a later stage to enter bibliographic material in other languages.

As regards the working language, the following conclusions were reached:

- that the working language of CLADES for processing documents on planning should be Spanish;
- that the working language of the Documentation Centre of the CEPAL Office in Port of Spain should be mainly English and, at a later stage, Spanish and French for the processing of documents produced in the Caribbean;
- that the titles of the documents should be translated into English or Spanish, as the case may be, on an experimental basis as additional information to be made accessible to a broader universe of users;
- that as the input to the "Information System for Planning" is decentralized, summaries of documents should be entered in the language of the country which drafts them, for example, Portuguese.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Physical data storage

This chapter of the original document refers to decisions of a technical nature to ensure that the information system is tailored to a realistic cost and will at the same time consider the expectations it is intended to fulfil; the positions adopted in the working document were approved. These relate to:

1. Physical data storage, a point in which consideration is given to alternative possibilities for the storage of documents as such and bibliographic information in a data base, and the following decisions were adopted:

- that during the early phases of the project (1979-1980) and until such time as the dispatch of documents to and from national focal points is regulated, a centralized basic collection of planning documents should be established in CLADES, containing the information compiled by ILPES during its years of work in the region and complemented by the valuable collection in the CEPAL/ILPES Library; as regards the Caribbean documentation, The CDCC Documentation Centre would be responsible for the organization of planning information generated and compiled by the CDCC secretariat and that existing in the Library of the CEPAL Office in Port of Spain;
- consideration was given to the possibility of microfilming the documentation entered in the system if the volume of documents and the users' demand for them made this advisable.

Criteria for the treatment and transfer of information

This section covers the data processing, control and retrieval systems, whether manual or computerized. In view of the fact that the CEPAL system had adopted the ISIS computerized

/system

system (Integrated Set of Information Systems) which is used by many institutions,[4/] and which would permit an easy exchange of information, the participants in the Meeting unanimously approved the following recommendation:

- that the ISIS system be used for control and retrieval of planning information in the bibliographic data base.

Activities of participating centres

The participants emphasized that it would be preferable to postpone the discussion of this point and first analyse the proposals contained in chapter IV on ORGANIZATION, since the activities of the participating centres would be strongly influenced by the greater or lesser centralization envisaged within the organization of the system. It was thought best, however, to keep to the original order so as to facilitate consultation of the basic document. Referring to the participating centres, the representatives reiterated the fact expressed in the working document that their activities would vary according to the organizational structure provided for the system. As regards the formulation of specific recommendations on this point, some references to the subject appear in the chapters entitled ORGANIZATION and REGULAR PROGRESS OF THE INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR PLANNING.

Products of the co-ordinating centre

The participants agreed with the proposals and suggestions embodied in the working document:

4/ By way of example, the following are some of the institutions using the ISIS system: UNESCO in Paris, UNCTAD and FAO, the Brazilian Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Enterprise (EMBRATER), the Centre for Scientific and Technical Information of Bulgaria, the Ontario Ministry of Education of Canada, PETROPERU of Peru, etc.

- that ILPES, because of its cumulative experience and as a user of planning documentation, should suggest the products which the co-ordinating centre should offer to planning bodies of the region.

Services and products of the system

In the working document prepared by CLADES and ILPES it is noted that, for the present, this point is confused with the previous one owing to the centralized organization of the system during the first phase of the project (1979). It should be emphasized, however, that the future products of the system will depend on the decision to centralize or decentralize the system in the medium term. While the system is centralized, requests for services will be directed to the co-ordinating centres, i.e., CLADES and the Caribbean Documentation Centre, according to whether they come from countries of Latin America or the Caribbean.

The participants in the Meeting fully agreed with those concepts and accepted without change the suggestion put forward by CLADES in the working document in the sense of postponing until a future working meeting any decisions regarding the products that may be expected from the information system, depending on the type of organization it might have.

The services which may be provided in the long term, however, are listed below:

- selective dissemination of information according to the interest profiles of users, being either institutions or individuals;
- preparation of lists of periodical publications (titles) on planning;
- monthly print-outs of the bibliographic material entered in the computer, as an advance on PLANINDEX;

/-retrospective

- retrospective searches for planning documentation entered in the computer;

- supply of reproductions of parts of or whole documents according to the users' requests.

As regards publications, mention may be made of:

- PLANINDEX, a periodical publication which is expected to be issued twice a year and which contains the bibliographic information and summaries of studies on planning entered in the data base.

ORGANIZATION

With regard to the future centralized or decentralized structure which will be established for the Information System for Planning, the participants in the Meeting analysed the various aspects necessary for the progress of the system.

Structure: centralization or decentralization

As regards the structure of the system and the activities and responsibilities of the participating centres, it was stated that the activities which might be decentralized and the strategy for achieving this would be detailed in the next final project document.

The participants approved the decentralization philosophy maintained by CLADES, which seeks through the distribution of responsibilities to strengthen the respective national capacity to serve local needs as promptly as possible.

They agreed to the CLADES proposal, however, that the system would be centralized in that Centre in the short term (1979 to mid-1980) and then tend towards a progressive decentralization in the near future, as the countries organized their planning information infrastructure and created the capacity to assume specific substantive activities in the processing of documentation on the subject.

/Resources

Resources

This aspect covers human, financial and material resources. It was clarified here that both the human and the financial resources for the first phase of the project to be completed in 1979 were already defined. For subsequent stages, however, careful consideration would have to be given to this point in the light of the type of organization it may be desired to establish for the system. If the system chosen were decentralized, the countries should consider making available resources for the relevant part of their task, while CLADES should consider within its work programme the training of the necessary human resources of the region for the proper execution of the project.

The participants adopted the recommendation made by CLADES in the working document to obtain resources for continuing the Information System for Planning activities after 1980, but suggested that the secretariat introduce some changes in the drafting so as to avoid any marketing concepts, the final tex remaining as follows:

- that, in order to obtain resources for continuing the Information System for Planning activities after 1980, it is suggested that a strategy be devised immediately to ensure financing for the regular execution of the project.

Appraisal machinery

In this respect, it is sought to establish some mechanism for evaluating the system's adaptation to the needs of planners in the region. A first appraisal would consist of the activities of the pilot project which could show the necessary changes to be introduced in the design of the project. It will probably be necessary, however, to introduce a mechanism that will permit further periodical adjustments of the system.

/This point

This point was widely and actively discussed by the representatives, and as a result of the exchange of ideas the following decisions were adopted:

In the short term:

- that the global appraisal of the pilot project should be undertaken by ILPES, CLADES and CDC with the aim of adapting the future progress of the system to the real needs of planners in the region.

In the medium and long term:

- that ILPES, CLADES and CDC should co-operate with planning bodies of the region in evaluating the products of the system;
- that the progress and activities of the system should be evaluated at the Conferences of Ministers and Heads of Planning Offices, the preparation of the relevant basic documents for this appraisal being the responsibility of CLADES, ILPES and CDC.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR THE SYSTEM

Training activities

As regards the provision of training for the personnel who will be supporting the information system for planning in each country and planning office, the participants recommended:

In the short term:

- that CLADES and ILPES hold a basic course on information and documentation in Santiago with participants from all the countries included in the pilot project which, in addition to courses and in-service training in the information area, would also include some concepts of planning and economic development.

/In the medium

In the medium and long term:

- that various training courses and seminars on the exchange of planning information, especially designed for national centres co-operating in the system, be held with the purpose of obtaining a multiplier effect.

Technical advisory assistance

In connexion with this point, consideration was given to the support which might be given to planning bodies of each country in strengthening or creating national information infrastructure for planning. That was considered a fundamental aspect by the technical secretariat of CLADES, since it would provide the basis for the future input to the system, whether centralized or decentralized. The existence of focal points or national counterparts was the only valid gurantee for the continuation of the system.

The group of experts unanimously endorsed the following proposals embodied in the working document:

In the short and medium term:

- that CLADES and ILPES establish a programme of technical advisory assistance prepared in accordance with the characteristics and level of information infrastructure of the co-operating centres, and that they be provided with advisory assistance suited to the stage of the project in which they are engaged;
- that this advisory assistance be oriented to promoting horizontal technical co-operation among the countries of the region and aim at decentralizing the Information System for Planning.

Technical tools: rules, manuals, controlled vocabularies, computer programmes, etc.

All these points were dealt with briefly but individually.

/Controlled

Controlled vocabularies

The representatives endorsed the recommendation proposed by CLADES to use the OECD Macrothesaurus as a basic vocabulary for the indexing of documents, but added that according to the specific needs of the system the actual planning terminology would be used to help towards the adequate retrieval of the relevant documents from the data base.

It was therefore recommended that in the long term:

- the controlled vocabulary be enriched with a view to constituting a working tool which would meet the specific and particular planning information needs of Latin America and the Caribbean;
- such a planning vocabulary be prepared in consultation with the participating countries so that it would be a useful instrument common to all;
- the vocabulary be made consistent with others existing in the region.

Type of abstracts

This point deals with the method used to summarize the information contained in the documents; the participants put forward several recommendations, in view of the importance of such abstracts as a vehicle for enabling planners to make the right choice of bibliographic material required:

/In the short

In the short term:

- that indicative and informative abstracts[5/] of the content of the document be prepared, using a free style and excluding descriptors from the text of the summary, for publication in PLANINDEX accompanied by bibliographic references for each document;
- that national development plans be analysed in depth by ILPES experts and that the resulting summary be entered in the information system as a document, with its own bibliographic identification, compendium and use of descriptors for subsequent retrieval.

REGULAR OPERATION OF THE INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR PLANNING

Institutional arrangements

This subject is closely linked with the decision regarding the organization of the system, since its "centralization" or "decentralization" will be a determining factor of the type of institutional commitment established.

5/ Indicative abstract: This briefly states the content of the document, its objectives and the main subjects dealt with. It consists of a short description of the document and covers its principal points. It does not include quantitative data. It simply indicates what subjects are discussed in the publication without interpreting the author.
Informative abstract: This presents the conceptual content of the document and summarizes its essential ideas, stating the thesis, hypothesis or theories presented; how the hypothesis is developed, what data were used; methodology, type of data (quantitative or qualitative); conclusions; what new ideas it offers or whether it reaffirms old theories, etc. Its objective is in some degree to replace the original document, and it should therefore contain enough information to ensure that the user will have no doubts about the content and its potential use. It provides a clear condensation of the essential arguments and conclusions of the original document. It should show a coherent and significant relation between the author's ideas and arguments.

/The representatives

The representatives then added another resolution for the short term:

- that activities with the co-operating centres be continued along the same lines as up to the present time, despite the fact that no agreement has been ratified on an institutional basis;
- that the participating countries be requested to appoint an official and permanent representative who would be responsible for supplying information on the documentation which should enter the system;
- that each of the participating governments designate a national co-operating centre (or focal point) of the system in each country.

In the long term:

- that consideration be given to the possibilities of securing financing through the provision of paid services to individual users or institutions other than the co-operating centres.

Resources

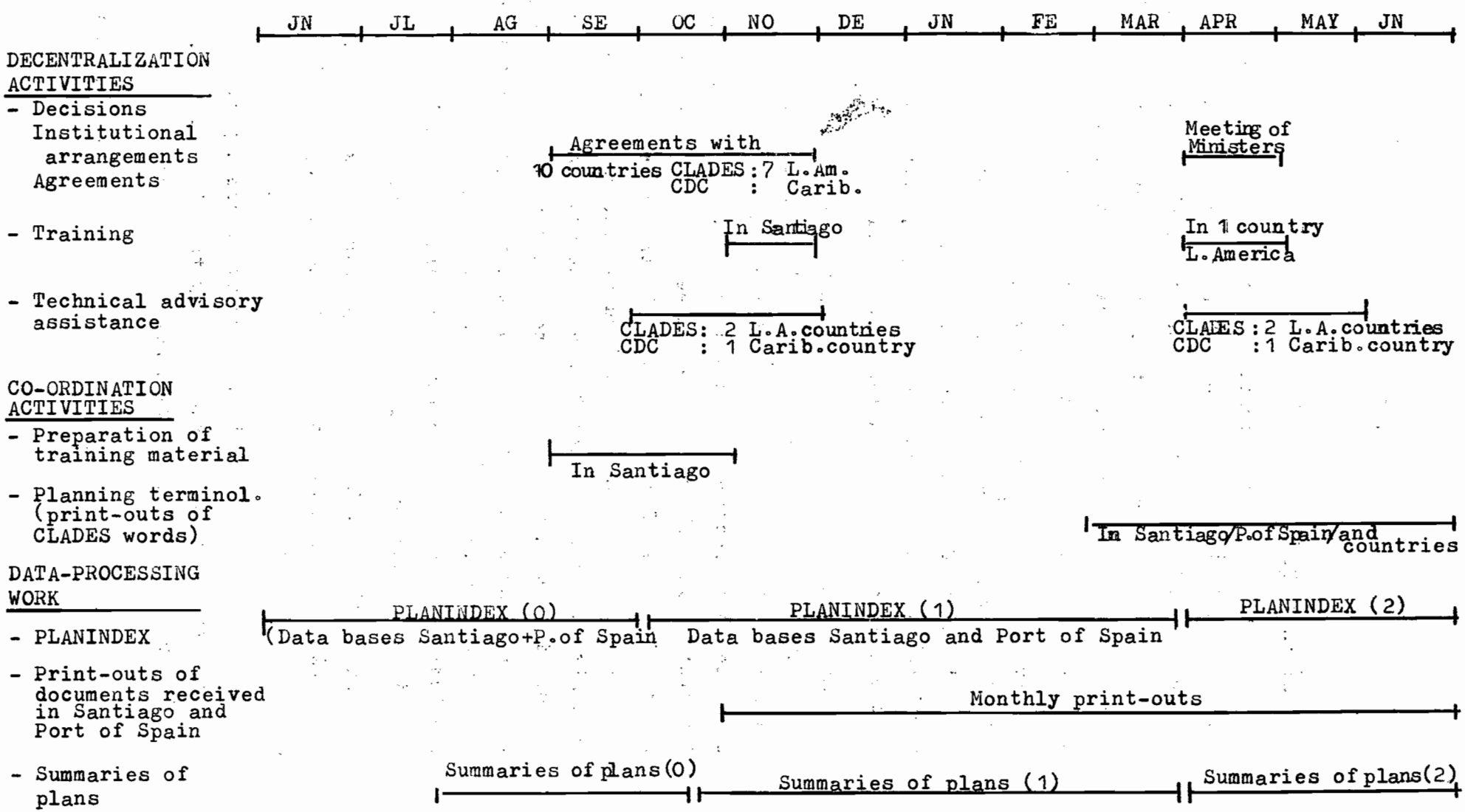
The participants expressed agreement with the following recommendations on financing contained in the working document:

In the short term:

- that CEPAL take steps to seek financing for the system from national or international agencies with the aim of obtaining the necessary support to maintain a permanent working nucleus in CLADES and CDC, thereby ensuring the continuance of the system bayond 1979.

Point 2, Stages of the project, provides a preliminary time-table of activities, which has undergone some changes as progress has been made in the execution of the project. The following time-table resulted from the discussions at the Meeting.

TENTATIVE PLAN FOR PHASE I (JN79 - JN80)



2. Closing meeting

Upon the successful conclusion of the Meeting, the participants wished to express their thanks to the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada for having made it possible, through its generous contribution, to carry out the first stages of the work on this information project for planning of such interest to the region.

At the closing ceremony, statements were made by Mr. Polo Casanova, Technical Secretary of the Ministry of Co-ordination and Planning of Venezuela, on behalf of the participants, and Mr. Enrique V. Iglesias, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America.

Mr. Casanova expressed appreciation of the honour conferred on him by the participants in the Meeting in electing him to speak on their behalf at the closing ceremony. He then expressed satisfaction with the conduct of the Meeting and the fruitful results obtained after three days of discussions. The results were of great interest to them as planning experts and future users of the information system, and in particular to Ministries and Planning Offices. He went on to refer to the commitment they had all assumed, as experts on the subject, firmly to uphold the usefulness of the information machinery for planning being organized by CEPAL, so that at the forthcoming meeting of top-level planning authorities the decisions adopted now in Santiago might be approved.

In conclusion, he thanked CEPAL for the extraordinarily warm welcome it had extended to all the participants in the Meeting.

Mr. Enrique V. Iglesias, Executive Secretary of CEPAL, stressed the important steps taken by the Ministers of Planning of Latin America and the Caribbean in initiating horizontal

/co-operation

co-operation in the field of planning. He drew attention, in particular, to the rich fund of planning experience accumulated in the region, which would be duly utilized in the establishment of the intercommunication mechanism concerned. Going more deeply into the question, he added that the best way of finally consolidating the "development planning" function would be to establish a system that would link national planning machinery and to seek common denominators which would give a planning new projection in the present situation of Latin America and the Caribbean. Lastly, he said that the information component as a mechanism within planning systems constituted a pioneer experience in the field of co-operation among planning bodies and represented a collective effort to comply with the mandate of the Ministers a d Heads of Planning of Latin America and the Caribbean to establish suitable machinery for the exchange of experience and co-operation among those institutions.

Annex I

MEETING "INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR PLANNING"

Santiago, 11 - 13 June 1979

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Jorge Viteri de la Huerta, Secretary of the Commission

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Annex II

List of Documents

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