BLIS semester II
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Reference Sources & Services
Topic – UNISIST
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UNISIST
(United Nations Information System In Science & Technology)

In 1973 with the launching of UNISIST programme a new phase in UNESCO's work in library, documentation and information field was marked. UNISIST was a conceptual framework with emphasis on scientific and technological information. ''UNISIST was planned as a continuing, flexible programme to coordinate existing trends towards cooperation and to act as a catalyst for the necessary development in scientific information''. The main goal was the establishment of a flexible and loosely connected network of information systems and services based on voluntary cooperation.

The working document of the UNISIST Intergovernmental Conference known as the UNISIST Study Report (1971) stated the broad principles on which this World Science Information System was to be based. According to this Report, ''UNISIST stands for the unimpeded exchange of published scientific

information and data among scientists of the world, promotion of compatibility, cooperative agreements, cooperative development and maintenance of technical standards to facilitate the interchange development of trained manpower, reduction of administrative and legal barriers to the flow of scientific information and assistance to countries that seek access to present and future information services.''

Three major inter-governmental conferences, namely, UNISIST I, NATIS and UNISIST II (1971, 1974, 1979) recognised a number of programmes and made several recommendations for their implementation. The actual implementation of these programmes has been carried in 'UNESCO's Medium Term Plans'.

PGI—General Information Programme

The General Information Programme (PGI) was created in 1976 by merging UNISIST with a programme concerned with the development of documentation, libraries and archives. An Intergovernmental Council having 30 Member States replaced the former UNISIST Steering Committee and guided the planning and implementation of PGI. During UNISIST II Conference (1979), it was felt that the creation of PGI had brought a number of benefits, for example, it reduced the number of inconsistencies in UNESCO's dealings with Member States on matters relating to information transfer, infrastructure development, education and training and provided an integrated approach to information systems planning and development. The following are the types of activities undertaken under each of the five sub-programmes that made up PGI:

i) Tool for Processing and Transfer of Information

- ISO Standards Handbook I : Information Transfer, 2nd ed. 1982.
- Reference Manual for Machine-Readable Bibliographic Descriptions, 2nd ed. 1981.
- Reference Manual for Machine-Readable Descriptions of Research Projects and Institutions, 1982.
- Common Communication Format, CCF, 3rd ed. 1993.

ii) Development of Databases

Useful inventories and studies like the International Inventory of Software Packages in the Information Field and the Application of Microcomputers to Information Handling have been published.

A mini/micro version of Computerised Documentation System/Integrated Set of Information Systems (CDS/ISIS) Software has been developed by UNESCO and is provided free of charge to non-profit organisations of developing countries.

Within the PGI framework about 50 projects on creation of databases have also been taken up for which assistance regarding software, consultation, equipment and training has been provided.

iii) Regional and International Cooperative Schemes

In the area of cooperation and resource sharing PGI aims at strengthening the national capitals for information exchange and creating necessary mechanisms for sharing experience and resources and for viewing coordinating regional activities. Examples of such

regional schemes are ASTINFO – Regional Network for the Exchange of Information and Experience in S&T in Asia and the Pacific and APINESS – Asia-Pacific Information Network in Social Sciences.

iv) National Information Policies and Infrastructure

UNESCO has advocated that information infrastructure should be developed in each country within the framework of a National Information Policy. One attempt in this regard was in 1974, when the document "Information Policy Objectives: UNISIST Proposals" was brought out. This publication provided 113 possible policy objectives in the field of S&T. Revised guidelines were also provided in "Guidelines on National Information Policy: Scope, Formulation and Implementation".

v) Developing an Information Workforce

Under the PGI Programme priority has been given for training of both information specialist and information users. The objective is to improve national and regional training programmes, preparing teaching materials and providing training for teachers and refresher courses for specialist.