PROPOSED ISPRS PARTICIPATION IN AN INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATION RECYCLING PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

One of the most pressing and persistent problems for scientists in the developing countries is the shortage of appropriate literature. This is also true of remote sensing literature, for which book purchases or subscription costs may exceed the per capita GNP. Restrictions on foreign exchange further limit the funds available to libraries for acquisition of books and periodicals. Several schemes have been devised to supplement library holdings by donations of books and periodicals through professional organizations such as the Association of Geoscientists for International Development (AGID) and the Third World Academy of Science. The author proposes that ISPRS's participation in one of these or a similar undertaking is urgently needed if Third World scientists are to participate fully in the scientific advances and applications of remote sensing.

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Most of you have, at one time or another, served as referees for one of the remote sensing journals. Some of the papers were probably submitted by authors from developing countries. Most of their papers were rejected, not because the work wasn't well done, but because it had already been done 10 years before, and a great many papers had been published in the meantime describing better ways to do it or explaining why it wasn't valid, etc. It may have been simple enough for you, as a referee, to reject the papers, but for the authors, and the journal editors who had to write the rejection letters, it was a very painful process.

When I first came to ITC nine and one-half years ago, I learned that many of our readers--specifically the alumni who receive the journal free of charge as part of what ITC considers its commitment to their continuing education--have access to very few other publications. Because of very stringent exchange controls and limited hard currency, they are simply unable to pay for subscriptions--even for their libraries--to expensive professional journals. The cost of a one-year subscription to the British "International Journal of Remote Sensing", for example, exceeds the per capital GNP of a number of countries. I very quickly instituted the "journal abstracts" section in the ITC Journal in which we reprint the abstracts of the leading journals in

the field, complete with the authors' addresses so that interested persons can contact them directly, but of course we could not even attempt to include all the applications disciplines, such as geology, soils, vegetation, etc. In a subsequent reader survey, I discovered that exactly one-third of our alumni were cut off from all other professional publications, and that while several hundred of them used the journal abstracts as I had hoped they would, most of them did not.

About two years ago--after writing a stack of rejection letters to Third World authors--I decided that this had to stop, and I hit on the idea of starting an "adoption agency" for journals and books. It seemed simple enough: find out who needed what, who had what and get the two together. Since the ITC Journal is also sent free to many remote sensing centers in the Third World, I even knew where most of the likely recipients were. I could simply canvas their librarians, put a small notice in PE&RS that we were looking for "orphans" and everything would fall into place.

Then I thought perhaps I should see if anyone in Holland had any experience in this sort of thing, and I discovered the "Netherlands Periodicals Project" in which the various Dutch universities donate surplus publications to selected universities in Third World countries. The problem is that the recipient universities are in what are called "target countries"--a list of eight to 10 countries that the Dutch government singles out each year for an especially heavy concentration of development aid (the Dutch really do donate a bit more than 1 percent of GNP to development assistance). The administration of the project requires one full-time person, and his annual budget is something on the order of US$ 70,000. I wasn't awfully keen about the target country part of it, there was no possibility of hiring anyone to work even part-time, and hopes for a budget of any consequence were nil.

I then learned of the work of AGID--The Association of Geoscientists for International Development--an international organization that operates a journal adoption agency from Canada. By this time, I was asking a better class of questions, and of course I got a better class of answers. I contacted Tony Berger (who was administering the project), who is also active in the ICSU Press--an arm of the International Council of Scientific Unions, of which I believe ISPRS is a member. ICSU Press operates its own publication service, and it also tries to obtain extra copies from journal publishers for distribution to the developing countries.

I learned from Dr Berger that many of my apprehensions about setting up this adoption agency were well-founded. With a finite supply of materials, how do you decide who gets what? How do you ensure that the materials sent actually remain in an open library and not on the director's shelves? Do the donors send the materials directly to the recipients or are they better sent to some intermediate point and shipped from there. If so, where is this intermediate point? Where do you get the money for postage? Are there problems with customs?

Some of my worries were real, others were not. His most useful information was that there are any number of professional organizations who are actively involved in publication recycling programmes. The list includes the American Association for the Advancement of Science (which concentrates on sub-Saharan Africa), The World Scientific Press in Singapore, the International Atomic Energy Agency, Unesco, the Physical Society of Japan, the International Union of Biochemistry, and many more. To avoid duplication of efforts and to optimize financial resources, most of these programmes are being coordinated through the Third World Academy of Science (TWAS) in Trieste. In the end, some materials are actually shipped to Trieste and transhipped from there to the recipients.

This seemed like a splendid solution to what was beginning to appear as an oversized undertaking, so I got in touch with the people in Trieste, explaining that we have a slight problem with remote sensing literature. Whereas TWAS is trying to concentrate of establishing strong libraries in strong universities (their primary emphasis is of course on the physical sciences--it was established by Abdus Salam, the Nobel laureate in physics), the active remote sensing communities in many of these countries are probably in separate organizations, sometimes associated with major universities but often not. I wrote to Professor Hassan Dalafi in Trieste to see if their system could accommodate a list of recipients that might not coincide with other academic disciplines, and he replied that it would not be a problem--but he wasn't at all specific about how this could be worked out. TWAS can, however, provide an important service in coordinating the work of many scientific disciplines and professional organizations, some of which must have developed quite efficient systems for gathering and distributing their professional literature.

The literature situation in Third World countries is critical, and this is a most opportune time to act. The "graying factor" is important here. There are many people retiring now (and there will be many more in the next few years) who have vast bookshelves full of remote sensing literature--journals, books, publications of all sorts--for which there is no room at home! The price of scrap paper is so badly depressed that it is not even economical to throw them out! And all this while there are libraries in Third World organizations who would happily go to great extremes to get their hands on any of it.

We all have great expectations and hopes for Third World scientists, a large number of whom are forced to reinvent the wheel because they are cut off from professional publications. Many of these people have been trained in the North and hold advanced degrees from northern institutions. Many of them are first-class scientists, but they can't do first-class work unless they are in close contact with their scientific peers. And they can't establish or maintain that contact if they don't have the literature.

I'm sure we all agree that their fellow scientists in the affluent parts of the world should do what they can to help alleviate this problem. The easiest, least painful and probably most effective means

of doing so is getting scientific publications to them. The two most direct solutions are getting back issues from private holdings and redistributing them to the remote sensing organizations that need and want them, and getting current issues by both continuing support from individuals and gaining support from the publishers to print a few hundred extra copies for distribution to Third World organizations. As any journal or book publisher can tell you, the delta costs of additional copies on a large print-run are exceedingly small--only the cost of the paper. The ITC Journal is already committed to this; PE&RS should find it relatively easy, and may in fact already be doing it. The publishers of "Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing" (Elsevier) and the "International Journal of Remote Sensing" (Taylor and Francis) are both commercial publishers and may be more problematic. Free distribution would in no way conflict with their established markets, however, since we are dealing with countries too poor to buy their products.

Ideally, this should be viewed as a temporary measure--a stop-gap effort until Third World organizations are able to obtain their own funds. Given the general unwillingness of northern countries to provide the kinds of support these countries need, I suspect self-sustaining economic growth and financial stability are still a long way off in many places. Moreover, world population growth will always impose more pressing demands on national treasuries.

I have really just got warmed up in this undertaking, and about all I have learned is where to start asking questions. Before I get too far out on this limb, however, I want to get more people interested and involved in it, more suggestions on what to do and what not to do, and sufficient encouragement from the organization that, if a good plan can be developed and the proper groundwork laid, ISPRS will support it--both physically and financially.

Time is, of course, important. I hope to have a formal proposal to put before the next ISPRS congress in 1992. It should be possible in the intervening period to identify--with your help--the organizations and institutions that should receive this assistance (and can benefit from it) and to assist them in defining their most urgent needs. It should also be possible in that time to gain some sort of commitment from journal and book publishers and also to get reliable information on the actual operating costs. (I am assuming a volunteer staff will run it, but postage will be an unavoidable expense.) Efforts should be coordinated with the Third World Academy of Science, and we need to work with the professional organizations of related disciplines--some of which have successful programmes of their own. We need to be in close contact with them in any case, since they can give valuable advice on how or how not to proceed.

If ISPRS support is there, and there are sufficient people elsewhere who are willing to participate, I see no reason why we cannot have a collection and distribution system ready to start working in 1992.

ISPRS commissions and working groups have spent years establishing educational standards in photogrammetry and remote sensing. It now

needs to expand that effort to include "continuing education"--which can be achieved only through professional contacts and communication. Meetings and symposia such as this one are important, but they cannot possibly reach the thousands of researchers who cannot obtain the funds to attend them, nor can they bridge the ever-growing gap between northern and southern science. One solid, substantial contribution in which we can all participate, however, is the recycling of professional literature--a bit of aluvium (as it were) to help fill that gap.