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**USER NEEDS ASSESSMENT STUDY
OF THE
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DATA SERVICE (ESDS)**

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**Center for Development Information and Evaluation,
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The findings and recommendations of this user needs analysis can be categorized under the following conceptual headings:

- (1) The overall purpose of the ESDS;
- (2) Activities of the ESDS consistent with that purpose;
- (3) The staffing requirements for those activities; and
- (4) The management and oversight arrangements for those activities

2. The Overall Purpose of the ESDS

2.a The Analytic versus Technical Support Objective of the ESDS

Reformulate the overall goal of the ESDS in such a way that it clearly provides technical support in data access, management and presentation so that all its objectives flow from that overall role.

2.b The Prioritization of Activities

Prioritize ESDS activities explicitly, giving the highest importance to data access and maintenance, Congressionally mandated activities and the country data diskette service.

Develop ways for restricting special projects and special requests so that ESDS response to them is of the highest quality, e.g. requests only from within the Agency, requests which involve the processing of data from the ESDB or the ESDS Data Network, or requests which involve database development.

3. The Activities of the ESDS

3.a A Network for Tracking Country Development Trends and Agency Performance

Remove the objective for tracking country trends and A.I.D. performance from the Statement of Work.

Assign the very specific responsibility of providing access to and processing of external and/or internal development and performance data to ESDS in support of other CDIE components that carry the lead responsibility for overall system development.

3.b The Two-Way Country Data Diskette Service

Remove the requirement of expanding the Country Data Diskette Service into a "two-way" system, incorporating country-source data and replace it with support to PRISM, the mission-based performance monitoring effort currently being developed.

3.c High-technology Public Information Presentations

Remove the production of PVT "videoshows" and audio visual public information oriented presentations from the responsibilities of the ESDS.

Assign this responsibility to some other office such as External Affairs or contract the services from USIA.

3.d The Country Data Diskette Service

Expand the dissemination of the diskettes to offices in each mission rather than simply to individuals and to the bureaus in Washington.

Link the newly created LAN systems in each bureau up to the Country Diskette data set.

Spend more staff resources on the Service in order to expand each country data set where possible and/or to refine them, possibly working closely with bureau economists and/or entertaining requests from the missions for specific information.

Make the Diskettes easier to use by reducing the volume of historic, trend data by limiting them to five or, at most, ten years series rather than fifteen.

Provide proper documentation, referencing and explanation of data and variables to make them more useful.

3.e Outposting ESDS Staff in the Bureaus

Outposting should be expanded to other bureaus. There is enough variety between the bureaus in how they operate, their programming priorities, etc. that support to them requires ESDS staff who are familiar with them and how they work. Supporting the bureaus from a centralized staff would work only where the bureaus had enough in common that ESDS staff could move among them and serve each of them as their time was available. In selecting which bureaus to expand into, priority ought to be given to the remaining regional bureaus and Program and Policy Coordination. If the CDIE/DI budget cannot be expanded to accommodate additional outpostings then only one

staff position currently programmed for Rosslyn should be outposted, leaving some centralized ESDS staff.

The services outposted staff provide must be guided by the overall purpose taken on by the ESDS referred to above. The bureaus must be made aware of exactly what kind of support the ESDS is programmed to provide. Finally, outposted staff must be directed more assertively by the ESDS Project Director to provide only those services.

Outposted staff should have more interaction with each other and with the Rosslyn staff. Although the regional bureaus work differently there are probably areas where similar initiatives or services can be provided such as the ESDS Data Network.

Regional bureau outposted staff should provide a great utility in training mission staff in performance indicators, use of Country Data Diskettes, content of and access to other ESDS databases and maintenance of country specific databases.

3.f Training Agency Professionals in Data Processing

The ESDS should develop and carry out staff training activities in the accessing and applications of economic and social data in the bureaus where there are outposted ESDS staff if such activities do not duplicate training activities carried out by IRM. The training should be offered to mid-level and upper-level professionals, particularly bureau program and technical resource officers as well as economists.

4. The Staffing of the ESDS

4.a Sectoral versus Technical Skills of the ESDS Staff

Remove the prescribed staffing pattern specified in the current the Statement of Work.

5. The Management of the ESDS

5.a CDIE/DI Supervision of the ESDS

CDIE/DI must take more effective control and supervision over the ESDS. One way to do this would be to assign a Project Officer to oversee it. Even if this proves impossible then CDIE/DI should define more clearly and more narrowly the kinds of activities the ESDS is authorized to undertake. Guidance as to which activities those might be are provided in this report.

An effort needs to be made to prioritize the users and the services provided. It is probable that some of the ESDS services are compromised as a result of the large demands on the ESDS. Their quality and timeliness could improve if the varied demands made on the service were prioritized based on a clear vision of the ESDS's purpose.

To help meet and prioritize the users' needs, ESDS workplans would be helpful, laying out priorities of the ESDS for the year ahead.

Work to avoid duplicating functions mandated to other offices in A.I.D. There now exists some overlapping of tasks between the ESDS and IRM, R&RS, and probably PPE. The ESDS will more effectively fulfill its mandate and meet legitimate user needs if it avoids assisting other offices in hardware and software instruction, if it leaves research assistance support such as literature reviews to the R&RS, the evaluation of A.I.D. programs to PPE, and public relations videos to XA. Agency-level economies of scale can be realized if duplication is avoided.

5.b The Sharing of Management Practices within CDIE/DI

The ESDS should adopt many of the mechanisms that the R&RS uses to focus its activities and to maintain relationship between outposted and centralized staff. Although it is important that outposted staff relate closely to their bureaus, it is also important that they maintain a strong relationship with ESDS/Rosslyn as well as with each other. Only in this way will they learn of services, databases, training opportunities, or other activities undertaken in other bureaus which might be useful in their bureaus.

The ESDS should study other operations undertaken by the R&RS which might be beneficial in the provision of its services. One such area is described below.

5.c The "Marketing" of ESDS Services

There must be a systematic effort to market ESDS services. CDIE/DI has already developed and shown a "videoshow" presentation about the Development Information Division. Reference has been made above about those efforts which R&RS are undertaking which can be utilized by the ESDS. The ESDS, moreover, could use its country diskette subscriber list as a beginning mailing list for news regarding new databases and other services which might be provided.

SECTION ONE

Purpose of the Report

The objective of this report is

"To assess the user needs of the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS)"

The Terms of Reference require that the report address the activities the ESDS undertakes and to analyze their "appropriateness", "cost effectiveness", "demand" as well as their "organization". (See Attachment A for the complete Terms of Reference.) The report is a mid-term assessment of the usefulness of the ESDS's activities with an eye to either modifying them in mid-stream or to refining them in the Statement of Work for the next ESDS contract in 1993.

With certain important exceptions, the report will take as given the ESDS's organizational location, staffing, Agency management and direction, and Statement of Work.

"User needs" will be generally defined as those services for which there is some manifest demand among A.I.D. staff, i.e. those activities which Agency staff find useful. However, this is only one measure of utility, based on individual staff members' needs. Another measure of utility is based upon the Agency's "need" for ESDS's services. The first definition of utility is more completely addressed in this report, through interviews with staff members and review of ESDS outputs, than is the second, the only measure of which is the projects's Statement of Work. It should be noted, however, that as the usefulness of the ESDS is expressed by ever higher levels of the Agency's management then those "individual" measures of utility take on ever greater salience and begin to reflect the Agency's level of utility.

The level of usefulness ascribed to ESDS activities is a difficult phenomenon to measure. In this report it will primarily be measured by demonstrated staff demand for services as well as demand expressed during staff to interviews. This methodology largely limits the universe of "user needs" to those services which A.I.D. staff are familiar with and that they are aware the ESDS offers. It proves more difficult to measure demand for services either which ESDS has never offered or which they offer but of which the staff are unaware. Finally, some services which are offered may not be demanded only because the ESDS is not staffed appropriately to fulfill them or because CDIE/DI is not organized to adequately provide them.

SECTION TWO

ESDS Activities and Services

1. Background

The objectives of the ESDS, as stated in Section C - Statement of Work - of the contract defining the terms and conditions of the program's performance dated April 18, 1988, are as follows:

1. The continued maintenance of the ESDS, including the incorporation of additional databases relevant to A.I.D. operations;
2. The establishment of a computerized Agency network for tracking country development trends and the progress of A.I.D. assistance programs;
3. The conversion of the country Diskette Service into a two-way system for the exchange of data between A.I.D./W and the field missions; and
4. The development and application of computer-based statistical formatting techniques and graphics that will enhance the presentation, analysis and evaluation of Agency programs.

The framing and defining concept of the ESDS at that time was to provide A.I.D. with a centralized capacity to access external and internal economic and social data on countries where A.I.D. operates, to disseminate those data to A.I.D. operational officers and high level managers, assisting them both analytically (to better understand and interpret them) and technically (to facilitate their electronic access and manipulation), in order to improve the quality of economic and social analytic underpinnings of A.I.D. programs as well as to more easily monitor and evaluate their performance. The principal users were seen to be field and operational support officers, i.e. economists and program and technical resource officers. The services to be provided were to be those which directly assist operations officers better design and evaluate their programs and projects. The principal products of the ESDS were to be in the nature of performance monitoring systems. (1) The contract staff to provide these services and produce these systems were, for the most part, to have sectoral expertise reflecting those areas of A.I.D. operations, such as economics and macro-economics, development finance, and agriculture. (2)

2. Current ESDS Activities

There is a tremendous variety of activities undertaken by the ESDS. The only foundation which all activities have in common is the ESDS's access to and maintenance of large-scale databases of externally and internally generated economic and social information. What the ESDS does with those data is what varies so greatly. The basic

categories of ESDS activities are outlined in Exhibit One on the following page.

The first three categories of activity shown in Exhibit One are of an on-going nature. The first activity relates primarily to the maintenance of the ESDB and the ESDS Data Network. The other two activities - Congressionally mandated reports and the Country Data Diskette Service - fall into the category of activities which are here described as data processing technical support. These are the more "traditional" ESDS activities and yet they involve ever smaller amounts of ESDS resources.

- Congressionally Mandated Reports

The Congressionally mandated reports include, primarily, the Congressional Presentation for A.I.D. and the Section 620(s) Report on Military Expenditures. These are annual activities which take up one full-time ESDS person. The ESDS does not produce these reports but does provide some of the more important data tables for the reports.

- Country Data Diskette Service

The Country Data Diskette Service is an activity, undertaken mainly by a college student/intern, in which the ESDS periodically obtains raw economic and social data from such external sources as:

- the International Monetary Fund (IMF);
- the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);
- the World Bank;
- the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and
- the United Nations.

From an SAS program it transfers these databases to the A.I.D. mainframe computer. On a semi-annual basis the ESDS downloads these data on a country-by-country basis, re-formats them onto Lotus 1-2-3 and sends country-level data diskettes to specified Diskette Service subscribers overseas.

Three professional staff are outposted to regional bureaus. The kinds of services they provide vary according to the education and interests of the staff member. The staff member outposted to LAC is an economist by training with a moderate level of expertise in computers and data processing. He provides the highest level of analytic support of any of the regional ESDS staff, independently identifying data needs as well as assisting in accessing, processing and presenting those data. The staff outposted to the Africa and Eastern Europe Regions are development generalists by training with relatively high levels of expertise in computers and data processing. They spend most of their time assisting regional staff in accessing, managing and presenting data as well as in the use

EXHIBIT ONE
A Breakdown of Current ESDS Activities

- (1) **Data Access:**
 - (a) **Database management and maintenance:**
 - **ESDB (mainframe)**
 - **ESDS Data Network (diskette)**
 - **AID generated databases**
 - (b) **Hardware and software maintenance**
 - (c) **Staff training on hardware, access, software, LAN, etc.**
- (2) **Congressionally Mandated Reports:**
 - **Congressional Presentation**
 - **Military Expenditures - Section 620(s) Report**
- (3) **Country Data Diskette Service**
- (4) **Staff Outpostings to Regional Bureaus (LAC, Africa and Eastern Europe)**
 - (a) **Regional database development**
 - (b) **Special projects and requests**
 - (c) **Bureau-level data management and presentation**
 - (d) **Short-term field assignments**
- (5) **Special Requests**
 - (a) **Bureau-level data management and presentation**
 - (b) **Major long-term efforts involving technical support**
 - **Woods Report**
 - **PPE/PRISM**
 - (c) **Special data requests**
 - (d) **Agency requests for data and/or graphics (LEG, Administrator/AA, etc.)**
 - (e) **Other:**
 - **Collaboration with R&RS request responses**
 - **Providing data to outside agencies**
 - **Economic model-building and programming**
- (6) **Graphics Support and Public Information Presentations**
 - (a) **Conventional-technology visual graphics**
 - (b) **Desk-top publishing**
 - (c) **Multi-media audio-visual video productions ("videoshows")**

of their computer software.

One staff person is engaged almost full-time in the production of "videoshows". Although a development generalist, the staff member has expertise in data processing and has been trained in Pragma Vision Technology.

There are approximately one and a half to two professional staff available to support the other bureaus, to respond to special requests, to identify new databases, to provide the long-term technical support efforts for such activities as, for example, to PRISM in PPE and production of the Wood's Report, not to mention the other requests for support which come in to the ESDS. One of these remaining professionals, it should be noted, is the Project Director who must supervise the entire operation as well.

The picture, therefore, is one of a project which is very busy doing a wide variety of only roughly related activities which are largely unprogrammed and undertaken upon request in an *ad hoc* manner.

SECTION THREE

Utility of the Activities Undertaken by the ESDS

1. Summary Statement of ESDS Utility

The ESDS has become viewed primarily as a provider of data processing, including access and presentation, technical support. The 1988 vision of the ESDS as a provider of systems development and analytic support to A.I.D. economists and program and technical resources officers has not become manifest. Instead, ESDS staff are seen as specialists in accessing and processing data, including the graphic presentation of data. This technical expertise which the ESDS offers the Agency extends to video presentations.

A principal finding of this user needs analysis is that the ESDS has struck a rich source of demand within the Agency. The ESDS is in great demand and is a valued service in general. The demand is high because the ESDS is able to provide many types of services: data dissemination; sophisticated presentation of data; some data analysis and research; and hardware and software training and troubleshooting. Moreover, the ESDS tries to meet these many and disparate demands. It is a service that is largely demand-driven and there does not seem to be much of an effort to discourage requests.

It is clear from the volume and nature of special requests, from the ways in which outposted staff are utilized, and from the long-term projects which ESDS is called upon to undertake that mid- and upper-level A.I.D. professionals are expressing a need for the following illustrative kinds of data processing technical expertise:

- o Bureau staff requiring basic computer technical assistance such as word processing and graphics software applications and bureau LAN systems support;
- o Economists wanting ways to display the data in order to more dramatically express their conclusions; needing help to sift through the mass of external development-related data in order to identify and use those data of most importance to them;
- o Program officers looking for the most succinct ways to show country or regional background or "baseline" data in Country Development Strategy Statements, project papers and other program documents;
- o Program and technical resource officers as well as economists needing to sift through national and regional databases in their attempts to identify performance indicators and to identify and have available to them new external databases;

- o Legislative affairs officers requiring tabular presentations of A.I.D. program and national economic and social data;
- o Top level Agency managers needing not only specific data on the A.I.D. program or other development data but also requesting their high quality graphical presentation for written reports and speeches; and
- o Top Agency officials requiring high technology support in internal briefings or external presentations, increasingly in a video or multi-media format.

A related finding to be noted is that most of these ESDS activities are delivered to A.I.D./Washington staff while, aside from the Country Data Diskette Service and occasional mission TDY visits, the field receives very little support.

It is important to note, moreover, that there are many more potential users that are unaware or vaguely aware of ESDS services. While user needs would be better served with a greater marketing effort, such an undertaking would also create an even greater demand for these already limited services.

2. Analytic and Systems Development Support

Perhaps the greatest divergence from the 1988 Statement of Work vision of the ESDS occurs in the realm of analysis and systems development. More precisely, the ESDS was seen in 1988 as the direct provider of analysis and systems development to A.I.D./W and mission staff: to establish "a computerized Agency network for tracking country development trends and the progress of A.I.D. assistance programs". As such the ESDS was originally staffed commensurately with professionals in sector-specific areas holding Ph.D.s and Master's degrees.

Instead, the ESDS has, since the outset in 1988, rather provided technical support services in data processing to Agency specialists. (4) It is staffed primarily by M.A. and B.A. development generalists.

3. Data Access and Management Technical Support

Activities number 2 thru 5 inclusive outlined in Exhibit One can all generally be described as data access and management technical support. In almost all of these activities the ESDS is developing new data sets, either assisting Agency professionals obtain or itself directly providing data from existing data sets or it is either presenting or assisting in the presentation of data.

It seems clear and many respondents acknowledged that ESDS management, processing and presentation of A.I.D. data to Congress in the Congressional Presentation or in other Congressionally mandated reports is probably the most highly valued and effectively

carried out activity it undertakes. It makes management sense to centralize this activity in a project like the ESDS. The ESDS has become familiar with the process and carries it out with high quality. The graphics capability of the ESDS increases still more its utility in undertaking this activity. The activity is carried out by, basically, one person and it is easily programmable. Finally, we understand that Congress has required the ESDS carry it out. All these reasons argue strongly for the utility of the ESDS carrying out its Congressionally mandated activities.

While it seems that few if any economists in the bureaus in Washington use the Country Data Diskette Service, A.I.D. personnel in the missions generally do. Considering the relatively small percentage of ESDS resources that go in to providing the service (it is largely the job of one part-time student), the activity is quite worthwhile.

Nevertheless, it has its limitations. Many of these are not criticisms of the way in which the ESDS provides the service, but more a reflection that all data needs cannot be fulfilled through such a standardized and systematic process.

In addition, it should be stressed that user needs vary widely, between those in Washington versus those in the missions. Needs between different missions probably vary widely as well.

Typical observations from users include:

- o Data from the last two to three years (more in the case of some data sets) are not included on the spreadsheets. This obviously excludes the use of these data for the important purpose of keeping abreast of current economic events. However, the data are useful for such purposes as historical or trend analyses; "big picture" issues.

There is little that can be done to overcome this limitation. Data are downloaded from official tapes and these tapes go through such a long process of review and revision before they are disseminated to A.I.D. that by the time the ESDS gets them, data for the most recent years are missing. A further lag ensues from the ESDS's process of cleaning up the data in lotus format and then once more through the mail in the case of mission users.

- o The data diskettes are perceived to be not particularly user-friendly. Users have observed the following: (i) the files are typically very large and cumbersome; (ii) the variable abbreviations are not always clear; (iii) some of the variables conceptually have little relevance to a particular country's situation; (iv) first column of variables is very wide, leaving little else on the screen; (v) sometimes latest years will be blank across the board (not available).
- o The data provided by the ESDS service are often available through other sources. This is certainly the case for persons in the Washington, and often

the case for mission personnel as well.

Many users have the hard copy versions of these data sets. In fact, it is perceived by some that it is often just as easy to enter the data directly from the hard copies than to wade through the electronic files.

Most users of the data also have access to preliminary data from the IMF teams which collect the data in the field. These data are perceived in general to be quite important. Given its timely nature, it is the data that is often used for current analyses.

In the missions, current data are also obtained from the governments (central bank typically). The reliability and hence usefulness of these data vary widely however.

- o The data are not always compatible with data compiled by other means. In defense of the ESDS, this is a function of the nature of the data and not the ESDS's choice of data sets. One can easily find conflicting numbers in fact for the same indicator from different editions of the same source.

Other Technical Data Access and Management Support

There is such a great variety of ways in which the ESDS provides technical support in data access, management and even presentation. Support is provided to the regional bureaus through the outposting of ESDS staff. Three ESDS members are assigned to the LAC, Africa and Eastern Europe Bureaus. Approximately two other staff members work out of the ESDS offices in CDIE/DI and provide indirect support to the other bureaus. A listing of illustrative projects and requests is presented in Exhibit Two on the following page.

4. ESDS Support to A.I.D. Missions

Support to A.I.D. missions has been very limited. To date there has only been one TDY to A.I.D. missions. The LAC Bureau sent its outposted ESDS staff member to Ecuador with two objectives: to assist in performance monitoring system design and to undertake the installation of and training in databases. The Africa Bureau is planning a regional trip soon for its ESDS outposted staff to provide mission-level data management assistance and to assist in performance monitoring systems design. There have been two other trips undertaken by outposted staff which have been oriented to training in data processing and statistical methods. It is, therefore, difficult to ascertain the utility of the TDY travel for the ESDS staff.

EXHIBIT TWC

Illustrative Activities in ESDS Technical Support

Regional Bureaus

Regional database development

- Multi-country trade tables
- Non-traditional agriculture database
- *Selected Economic and Social Data for Latin America and the Caribbean* (publication)

MIS hardware and software needs analysis and installation

- Standard manual of MIS policies and procedures (Africa)

Bureau-level data management and presentation

- Andean Counter Drug Implementation Plan
- Country profile data sheets

Special projects and requests

- Haiti Exports to the U.S.
- Central American exports to the U.S.
- Central American Public Consumption data
- Latin American wood exports and imports
- Caribbean Trade Data
- ABS database maintenance strategy
- AFR trade tables
- Education and Literacy indicators for selected African countries
- Trade and Finance Data for selected Eastern European countries
- Direction of Trade for selected Eastern European countries
- International Financial Statistics for Eastern Europe

Special Requests

- South Korea Exports to the World
- Egyptian wheat
- AID Workforce charts
- Infant/Child Mortality Decline
- Collaboration with CDIE/DI/R & RS request responses
- Economic model-building and programming

Major long-term efforts involving analytic and technical support

- Woods Report
- PPE/PRISM
- Poverty indicators Task Force

Special data requests

- OECD/DAC data
- Special UN data
- DRS (Debt Reporting System)
- DHS (Demographic Health Survey)
- Penn World Tables
- OAS database

5. Graphics and Public Information Support

More than access to or analysis of data, the type of activity which the ESDS has found the greatest demand for is the presentation of information, whether numeric, graphic, textual or audio-visual. ESDS support in this area has produced everything from tables to desk-top published reports to video cassettes. Within this activity there is increasing interest in the latter form of multi-media "videoshows" referred to earlier. Indeed, there is growing interest being generated in the Administrator's Office for more Country Briefing Books, automated presentations of A.I.D. programs at the country level, one of which has been produced for Uganda on a pilot basis. Examples of these graphics and public information activities are given in Exhibit Three below.

EXHIBIT THREE

ESDS Graphics and Public Information Activities

Conventional technology visual graphics

- Administrator and AA presentations and speeches
- Congressional presentations
- Other
 - AID Managers Network Annual Meeting (flyers and logo)

Desk-top publishing

- The Woods Report

Multi-media audio-visual video productions ("videoshows")

- Pragma Vision Technology (PVT) system and equipment maintenance
- Applications
 - CDIE/DI
 - PRISM
 - Eastern Europe
 - Narcotics
 - Administrator's Country Briefing Books
 - Uganda

The ultimate purposes of the graphic presentations prepared by the ESDS range from clarification to information to persuasion.

It is important to note that the ESDS not only provides the data used in PVT videoshows but also produces the videoshows themselves. Consequently, ESDS resources

are consumed in the purchase and maintenance of PVT equipment as well as the costs of production. Moreover, it is understood that the Pragma Corporation charges the ESDS, either directly or indirectly through CDIE/DI, for certain indirect corporate costs in producing each "videoshow" requested of the ESDS.

SECTION FOUR

Findings and Recommendations

1. Introduction

The findings and recommendations of this user needs analysis can be categorized under the following conceptual headings:

- (1) The overall purpose of the ESDS;
- (2) Activities of the ESDS consistent with that purpose;
- (3) The staffing requirements for those activities; and
- (4) The management and oversight arrangements for those activities

Although the analysis has focused on the activities of the ESDS and their utility to A.I.D. we have concluded that what those activities are and should be is a function, partially, of the overall purpose that guides the project, the way it is staffed and the way it is administered.

Within each of the categories listed above, moreover, our findings and recommendations tend to cluster around issue-areas regarding the ESDS's operations. Within each category therefore, findings and recommendations will be reported under each of these issue-areas.

2. The Overall Purpose of the ESDS

2.a The Analytic versus Technical Support Objective of the ESDS

A problem which the ESDS presently experiences is a sort of schizophrenia: It is torn between the image of an analytic organizational "being" and a data analysis support organizational "being". The one says: "Let me help you think this through." while the other says: "Let me help you access and process the information you need to think this through." The former organizational "being" would be staffed differently than the latter. It would have different tools and it would probably cost more. Although the ESDS Statement of Work depicts an "analytic" organizational being the current ESDS acts more like a "data analysis technical support" organizational being. It should be noted that these two possible roles of the ESDS should be seen in juxtaposition with that of IRM which is that of a "data processing and computer maintenance" organizational being.

Findings:

It is clear from staff interviews that Agency economists and program and

technical resource officers, either in the bureaus or in the missions, believe they have the sectoral, substantive and program management expertise to design systems better than a centralized off-line office like CDIE.

ESDS is not staffed presently to undertake these responsibilities anyway.

If CDIE were to re-staff the ESDS by raising the level of sectoral expertise and educational achievement required for effective analytic support, then its staff would be largely duplicating bureau and mission staff expertise, incurring higher costs, without probably producing a better service.

On the other hand, providing younger professionals with less sectoral expertise but more MIS expertise would enhance the actions of bureau and missions professionals through support to them.

Of the users that we talked to in the bureaus and missions, the consensus is that there is a greater need for the ESDS to provide data than to analyze it. The economists have the means and the desire to conduct their own analysis.

Recommendation:

Reformulate the overall goal of the ESDS in such a way that it clearly provides technical support in data access, management and presentation so that all its objectives flow from that overall role, i.e. define the ESDS' role as focused on collecting, storing, and disseminating data. Let the analysis be done elsewhere and let the data processing and computer engineering be done by IRM.

2.b The Prioritization of Activities

As has been described in Section Two, ESDS activities can be divided between those that are on-going and planned for and those that are special projects and responses to special requests. Of the activities described in Exhibit One, the first three are on-going and planned while the remaining three are *ad hoc* by nature and unplanned.

Findings:

There are no priorities placed on these activities which would order the ESDS's response to them.

Because of the volume and variety of activities and projects, the ESDS staff is overworked and the quality of services provided many be suffering.

The bulk of activities and projects which expand the volume and variety of projects of the ESDS come from the unplanned category of activities.

Recommendations:

Prioritize ESDS activities explicitly, giving the highest importance to data access and maintenance, Congressionally mandated activities and the country data diskette service.

Develop ways for restricting special projects and special requests so that ESDS response to them is of the highest quality, e.g. requests only from within the Agency, requests which involve the processing of data from the ESDB or the ESDS Data Network, or requests which involve database development.

3. The Activities of the ESDS

Specific recommendations can be made concerning certain issue-areas related to the activities which ESDS undertakes. Not all ESDS activities are included in these issue-areas and, therefore, not all activities are referred to below.

3.a A Network for Tracking Country Development Trends and Agency Performance

Although a great deal of what CDIE does currently involves fulfilling this objective, it is probably inaccurate to assign this responsibility to the ESDS as does its Statement of Work.

Findings:

Other components of CDIE are currently taking this responsibility and are spending a considerable amount of money to do it.

The Agency has evolved into a highly decentralized organization and, as the current PRISM Project recognizes, it would be against these trends as well as established organizational structures and procedures to try and centralize a country-level development and performance tracking system.

Recommendations:

Remove the objective for tracking country trends and A.I.D. performance from the Statement of Work.

Assign the very specific responsibility of providing access to and processing of external and/or internal development and performance data to ESDS in support of other CDIE components that carry the lead responsibility for overall system development.

3.b The Two-Way Country Data Diskette Service

As it is currently provided the Country Data Diskette Service has a certain usefulness,

as expressed above. The shortcomings of the present system are not really correctable and are not the fault of the ESDS project. The principal shortcomings stem, instead, from the data sources. If it were expanded to a "two-way" system it would add costs without producing a significantly more valuable product.

Findings:

It would be difficult to ensure that these data would be collected consistently from one period to the next.

Pushing the missions to meet production deadlines would be difficult.

A two-way system would require much more resources from the ESDS than are now devoted to the Country Diskette Service while the improvement in the overall Diskette Service would be marginal.

The mission and bureau staff interviewed expressed no desire for such a "two-way" system and in many cases said they probably would not use it anyway.

Recommendation:

Remove the requirement of expanding the Country Data Diskette Service into a "two-way" system, incorporating country-source data and replace it with support to PRISM, the mission-based performance monitoring effort currently being developed.

3.c High-technology Public Information Presentations

The high technology, audio/visual, computer-driven presentations which the ESDS currently undertakes do not fit well into any conceptualization of an "economic and social data service".

Findings:

They are too far outside the parameters of the Statement of Work, not to mention the 1988 vision for the ESDS:

The access to external development data is not important for or even necessary to "videoshows" and

The public information purposes of these activities might be viewed as public relations, designed, that is, to persuade rather than inform.

"Videoshows" and other high-tech presentations are very costly.

As public information presentations go, it is probable that those put on by

the ESDS are not of as high quality as could be obtained from other, more appropriate sources.

Recommendations:

Remove the production of PVT "videoshows" specifically and audio visual public information oriented presentations from the responsibilities of the ESDS.

Assign this responsibility to some other office such as External Affairs or contract the services from USIA.

3.d The Country Data Diskette Service

The Country Data Diskette Service does provide useful support to the missions, particularly in CDSS and project paper preparations and where country background and longitudinal data series are required. Their shortcomings such as datedness and lack of detail cannot really be overcome by A.I.D.

Findings:

The Service provides the best, generally recognized data on country economic and social circumstances. Its use by the Agency allows it to "speak" from the same data as the development community.

The Service is provided at a relatively low cost, utilizing principally a student intern.

There is clear consensus among the users of the Service that it has value, if limited.

There is inadequate documentation, referencing and explanation of the data contained in the diskettes.

In some ways the data service provided by the ESDS is in the vanguard of development institutions. For example it uses purchasing power parity data rather than data derived from official exchange rates to determine country incomes, in this instance moving faster than the World Bank and the IMF.

Recommendations:

Expand the dissemination of the diskettes to offices in each mission rather than simply to individuals and to the bureaus in Washington as well.

Link the newly created LAN systems in each bureau up to the Country Diskette database.

Spend more staff resources on the Service in order to expand each country data set where possible and/or to refine them, possibly working closely with bureau economists and/or entertaining requests from the missions for specific information.

Make the Diskettes easier to use by reducing the volume of historic, trend data by limiting them to five or, at most, ten years series rather than fifteen.

Provide proper documentation, referencing and explanation of data and variables to make them more useful.

3.e Outposting ESDS Staff in the Bureaus

Whether to serve the bureaus directly through outposted staff or through a centralized team in Rosslyn is a valid management question. The ESDS has chosen to do both by outposting three staff and supporting the remaining bureaus through roughly two centralized staff as well as the Project Director.

Findings:

Outposting has proved to be an effective form of support, providing valued service to three bureaus. However, the type of service varies among the bureaus depending essentially on the skills of the ESDS staff member and, partially, on the desires of top bureau management.

Outposted staff tend to be fully oriented to and directed by the bureaus they serve, having only limited intercourse with the ESDS staff in Rosslyn, although they do have some relationship with each other as well as outposted R&RS staff.

The outposted staff get very little direction from the ESDS Director or from CDIE/DI although they do receive support in computer programming or software instruction when needed.

Almost invariably the outposted staff are used for data access, management and presentation support.

Recommendations:

Outposting should be expanded to other bureaus. There is enough variety between the bureaus in how they operate, their programming priorities, etc. that support to them requires ESDS staff who are familiar with them and how they work. Supporting the bureaus from a centralized staff would work only where the bureaus had enough in common that ESDS staff could move among them and serve each of them as their time was available. In

selecting which bureaus to expand into, priority ought to be given to the remaining regional bureaus and Program and Policy Coordination. If the CDIE/DI budget cannot be expanded to accommodate additional outposts then only one staff position currently programmed for Rosslyn should be outposted, leaving some centralized ESDS staff.

The services outposted staff provide must be guided by the overall purpose taken on by the ESDS referred to above. The bureaus must be made aware of exactly what kind of support the ESDS is programmed to provide. Finally, outposted staff must be directed more assertively by the ESDS Project Director to provide only those services.

Outposted staff should have more interaction with each other and with the Rosslyn staff. Although the regional bureaus work differently there are probably areas where similar initiatives or services can be provided such as the ESDS Data Network.

Regional bureau outposted staff should provide a great utility in training mission staff in performance indicators, use of Country Data Diskettes, content of and access to other ESDS databases and maintenance of country specific databases.

3.f Training Agency Professionals in Data Processing

In providing technical assistance in the development and use of economic and social databases, ESDS staff also finds itself instructing Agency officials in the access to, use and manipulation of and graphic presentation of data. This instruction, however, is very much *ad hoc* and is not formalized.

Findings:

A small although significant amount of ESDS staff time is spent in training Agency professionals in various aspects of information management and data processing. Most of this training is one-on-one in the bureaus.

Although staff training is mentioned among the tasks to be undertaken by the ESDS in its Statement of Work the project currently does not carry out any staff training activities.

Recommendation:

The ESDS should develop and carry out staff training activities in the accessing and applications of economic and social data in the bureaus where there are outposted ESDS staff if such activities do not duplicate training activities carried out by IRM. The training should be offered to mid-level and upper-level professionals, particularly bureau program and technical resource officers as well as economists.

4. The Staffing of the ESDS

4.a Sectoral versus Technical Skills of the ESDS Staff

The "analytic versus technical" issue-area noted above regarding the overall purpose of the ESDS is reflected in the staffing pattern of the ESDS. The job descriptions in the ESDS Statement of Work specify expertise - economics, social scientist/human resources development, macro-economics, finance, statistics and agriculture - which are different from those which currently obtain - economics, finance, anthropology, international relations, international development, and education. All positions are prescribed at the Master's or Ph.D. level while the current staff, apart from the Project Director, hold Master's and Bachelor's degrees. For the tasks currently undertaken, and within the overall purpose which is recommended for the ESDS, the current staffing pattern is probably appropriate.

Findings:

There is a need for the Project Director to have a solid background in economics or a development-related social science and with analytical capabilities grounded in quantitative methods. But certainly for the purposes of fulfilling the needs of the bureaus and missions, the rest of the ESDS staff need not have such expertise.

Furthermore, there is the issue of the cost-efficiency of different staffing options. Using lower-level staff with economics and social science as well as data analysis and modeling background to assist bureau analysts provides more output for the cost than hiring another senior-level economist, for example. This is in part because the former option increases the productivity of existing economists. In the Latin American bureau, it has been observed that the economists are spending more time writing, and are doing long-term research projects that they would not be doing without the aid of the ESDS outposted staff member.

Recommendation:

Remove the prescribed staffing pattern from the Statement of Work.

5. The Management of the ESDS

5.a CDIE/DI Supervision of the ESDS

Prior to the current ESDS contract there was a Project Officer responsible for overseeing the project. Retirement and staff turnover in the position of Project Officer, however, inhibited CDIE/DI's ability to effectively channel the ESDS into its proper programmatic orientation. More recently, budget restrictions have caused CDIE/DI to lose the

position altogether. All these circumstances have prevented CDIE/DI from controlling the otherwise varied and sometimes divergent directions of the ESDS's activities.

Findings:

The ESDS undertakes activities which are so different from each other that they can be described as incompatible.

They require staff with different kinds of expertise.

They serve very different audiences.

They require different kinds of support from CDIE.

At a time of severe budget limitations A.I.D. cannot afford a program which carries out such divergent and largely unprogrammed activities.

Recommendations:

CDIE/DI must take more effective control and supervision over the ESDS. One way to do this would be to assign a Project Officer to oversee it. Even if this proves impossible then CDIE/DI should define more clearly and more narrowly the kinds of activities the ESDS is authorized to undertake. Guidance as to which activities those might be are provided above in this report.

An effort needs to be made to prioritize the users and the services provided. It is probable that some of the ESDS services are compromised as a result of the large demands on the ESDS. Their quality and timeliness could improve if the varied demands made on the service were prioritized based on a clear vision of the ESDS's purpose.

To help meet and prioritize the users' needs, ESDS workplans would be helpful, laying out priorities of the ESDS for the year ahead.

Work to avoid duplicating functions mandated to other offices in A.I.D. There now exists some overlapping of tasks between the ESDS and IRM, R&RS, and probably PPE. The ESDS will more effectively fulfill its mandate and meet legitimate user needs if it avoids assisting other offices in hardware and software instruction, if it leaves research assistance support such as literature reviews to the R&RS, the evaluation of A.I.D. programs to PPE, and public relations videos to XA. Agency-level economies of scale can be realized if duplication is avoided.

5.b The Sharing of Management Practices within CDIE/DI

CDIE/DI has three other contracted projects at least one of which, the Research and

Reference Service (R&RS), has certain operations and goals in common with the ESDS. R&RS provides support to the Agency in Washington and overseas retrieve and analyze textual data related to economic and social development.

Findings:

Although both projects have centralized as well as outposted staff, the R&RS staff have two important differences from the ESDS staff:

The R&RS outposted staff relate to and are directed by the R&RS Project Director. ESDS outposted staff are largely directed by their bureaus.

The R&RS staff have more structured intercourse with the central staff as well as with each other for the purposes of sharing of and reporting on experiences.

The R&RS goals and activities appear to be much more focused than those of the ESDS.

There appears to be more direction from and accountability to the CDIE/DI Division Chief in the case of the R&RS than the ESDS.

Recommendations:

The ESDS should adopt many of the mechanisms that the R&RS uses to focus its activities and to maintain relationship between outposted and centralized staff. Although it is important that outposted staff relate closely to their bureaus, it is also important that they maintain a strong relationship with ESDS/Rosslyn as well as with each other. Only in this way will they learn of services, databases, training opportunities, or other activities undertaken in other bureaus which might be useful in their bureaus.

The ESDS should study other operations undertaken by the R&RS which might be beneficial in the provision of its services. One such area is described below.

5.c The "Marketing" of ESDS Services

The ESDS provides services, however defined, to the Agency much like an in-house consulting firm. Most of those services are demand-driven; they are not, as a rule, supplied on an on-going basis. Consequently, the Agency staff has to know what services are offered and how to avail themselves of them in order to use them. If there is not a conscious effort to make the Agency aware of the ESDS services then they will be utilized only in a sporadic fashion, if at all.

Findings:

As has been described, Agency staff request those services of the ESDS which it experiences that the project offers; and the image of the ESDS as a provider of support in data processing and graphical presentation has taken hold.

Based on A.I.D./W and mission interviews it is clear that most Agency staff do not know about the diskette service and that the only ones who subscribe to it do so because they somehow have learned about it and found it useful.

Recommendation:

There must be a systematic effort to market ESDS services. CDIE/DI has already developed and shown a "videoshow" presentation about the Development Information Division. Reference has been made above about those efforts which R&RS are undertaking which can be utilized by the ESDS. The ESDS, moreover, could use its country diskette subscriber list as a beginning mailing list for news regarding new databases and other services which might be provided.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Indeed, three of the nine "specific tasks" described in the ESDS contract refer to "country trends and performance tracking systems", "a computerized Agency data network for tracking country development trends and progress of A.I.D." and "performance tracking systems".
- (2) This encapsulization of the ESDS is derived from the terms of Contract No. PDC-0000-Z-00-8034-00 as well as from interviews with the program's original Project Officer and Division Chief.
- (3) The term "videoshow" refers to a particular computer-driven audio-visual presentation with manual direction and voice-over capability, the technology for which was developed and copyrighted by the Pragma Corporation under the subject ESDS contract and trademarked as "Pragma Vision Technology".
- (4) One the earliest assignments of the ESDS was to provide technical support to the Administrator's Office in the preparation of an Agency-wide report known as the Woods Report. This assignments lasted several months, required the entire ESDS staff and received a very high exposure in the Agency. The Woods Report was praised for the quality of its graphics and overall presentation.

5/1

ATTACHMENT A

TERMS OF REFERENCE

SCHEDULE

ARTICLE I - TITLE

User Needs Assessment Study of the Economic and Social Data Services (ESDS).

ARTICLE II - OBJECTIVE AND BACKGROUND

A. Objective

The objective of this order is to assess the user needs of the Economic and Social Data Services System.

B. Background

The Economic and Social Data System serves as the Agency focal point for economic and social data gathered from information sources throughout the development assistance community. ESDS responds to requests from A.I.D. offices; providing technical services such as the utilization of computer-generated graphics; preparing statistical reports and analyses mandates by Congress, such as the Congressional Presentation and the Section 620(s) Report on Military expenditures; and providing country diskettes to USAID economists.

ARTICLE III - STATEMENT OF WORK

The following is a list of illustrative issues which will be examined in-depth by the contractor team during this needs assessment. This set of issues will be further refined during the initial week of the delivery order.

Activities

Data Collection - What data is currently collected? Why, for whom and how is this process conducted? What are the data sources? What is the estimated cost to collect and maintain this data?

Data Organization - How is the data organized? Are ambiguities, redundancies and gaps properly annotated? Is the present organization useful to agency economists?

Requests - How is data disseminated? How much analysis is performed? Is this analysis adequate to meet user needs? Are missions aware of ESDS's response capabilities?

Appropriateness

Are the ESDS resources used appropriately to meet Agency needs?

Are the data resources appropriate for the development community-at-large?

Should more ESDS resources be used to support activities performed by non-A.I.D. staff?

Cost Effectiveness

Do ESDS products and services produce an impact at acceptable cost? Which data is least cost effective?

Are ESDS activities performed in an efficient manner? Are some functions completed more cost effective than others? What aspects influence cost?

Demand

What is the documented demand for ESDS services? How was this demand encouraged to grow? What is the profile of the current market?

What is the potential demand? How can this demand be fostered? How expensive will it be to service this demand? What changes would have to be made in CDIE/DI? What limitations would effect growth?

Organization

Are the current operations appropriately located in CDIE/DI? If not, suggest alternatives.

What organizations and staffing changes, if any, should be made in the ESDS?

Should there be an ESDS?

In performing this assessment, the contractor will conduct interviews with CDIE staff and contractors who support the products and services under this activity. Interviews will also be conducted with A.I.D. staff contractors and other consumers of this service. Usaid field missions will be queried to assist in determining needs. A draft report will be prepared and presented to CDIE management. Based on input stemming from this report, a final report will be prepared.

ATTACHMENT B

PERSONS INTERVIEWED

PERSONS INTERVIEWED

Maury Brown, Chief, PPC\CDIE\DI

Lee K. White, PPC/CDIE/DI

Wendy Stickel, PPC/CDIE, Deputy Associate Assistant Administrator

Robert Baker, PPC/DCIE/DI/ESDS

Andrew Karlyn, ESDS

Joseph Nassif, ESDS

Cheryl Crow, ESDS

Kate Edmunds, ESDS

Donald Embowski, PPC/CDIE/DI Retired (Former ESDS Project Officer)

Ravi Aulakh, PPC/CDIE/DI Retired (Former ESDS Project Officer)

Linda Leonard, R&RS

Mark Bidus, R&RS

Jeanne Tift, R&RS

James Walker, LAC/DP

Clarence Zuvekas, LAC/DP

Margaret Bonner, AFR/DP

Jerome Wolgrin, AFR/DP/PAR

Michael Croswell, ANE/DP

Don Sillers, ANE/DP/PA

Thomas Mahoney, ANE/DP/PA

Peter Davis, ANE

Gerald Britan, PPC/CDIE\PPE

Tom Morris, PPC/PDPR

Sarah Tirmazi, USAID/Pakistan

Luis Arreaga-Rodas, USAID/Peru

Nilka Varela, USAID/Panama

Paul Bisek, USAID/Belize

Paul Davis, USAID/Honduras

Henry Welhouse, USAID/Dominican Republic

Mireille Peloux, USAID/Haiti

Richard Byess, USAID/Bamako

Seth Vordzorgbe, USAID/Lesotho

Richard Greene, USAID/Senegal

Jacques De Fey, President, Pragma Corporation

Carter Brandon, The Development Group

Patricia McPhelim, Checchi and Company