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**INTER-AMERICAN OBSERVATORY ON DRUGS:
PROGRESS REPORT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT
OF CICAD**

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At its twenty-sixth regular session, the Commission considered a report by the Executive Secretariat on the new Inter-American Observatory on Drugs (document CICAD/doc.1028/99). The present paper gives an update on activities since October 1999, and offers some prospects for the immediate future. This paper will discuss:

- The purpose of the Observatory and its background
- How the Observatory will meet the needs of member states
- The work program for 2000 - 2001
- What we ask of member states
- Cost considerations

PURPOSE

The Inter-American Observatory on Drugs will help OAS/CICAD member states produce information and timely, reliable and comparable statistics on the abuse and production of and trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and thus provide an overall picture of the impact of the drug phenomenon in the Americas. A crucial task is to develop a cutting-edge methodology to integrate existing supply and demand data, in order to shed light on the reciprocal interaction between illicit traffic and the consumption of drugs in the hemisphere, and attempt to reconcile Western Hemisphere statistics with world-wide estimates. This can inform key decision-makers in the member states. The potential return on investment in this area is high.

An attractive feature of the Observatory is that it will be pro-active in supporting countries as they:

- enhance their capacity to collect and analyze drug-related statistics, conduct surveys, carry out cross-disciplinary analyses of supply and demand data, and apply their research findings to policy and practice;
- examine the nature and extent of the drug problem in their countries and in the region as a whole, through the analysis of trends in drug use and drug trafficking patterns, and thus
- draw conclusions about the effectiveness of drug control and drug abuse prevention and treatment programs.
- improve their capabilities for collecting, organizing and disseminating drug-related information, documents, books, etc. to support their national programs and the MEM.

The Observatory is an umbrella for and catalyst of national and inter-American drug research efforts, with the goal of building an inter-American community of knowledge and science on the drug problem, and providing a forum in which researchers can learn from each other through the exchange of policy-relevant data and documentation. Administered by the Executive Secretariat of CICAD in partnership with national statistics and information focal points (national "Observatories on Drugs"),

it builds on and expands the work already done by the member states and CICAD over the past ten years in drug-related information and statistics.¹ The Inter-American Data Bank on Drugs and the Inter-American Drug Information System (IADIS) have been subsumed under the umbrella of the Observatory, as has CICAD's electronic information vehicle for the National Drug Commissions (formerly known as RETCOD/NDCs).

The Observatory supports hemispheric policy and cooperation by examining the crucial nexus of supply and demand within the hemisphere and vis-à-vis other regions of the world. Its statistical programs provide the underpinnings for the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) indicators. The Observatory's information section assists in providing INTERNET-based communications and a means for the electronic storage and retrieval of documents.

It has the potential to serve as an early warning system on the appearance of new drugs, new methods of using and manufacturing drugs, and changing trafficking patterns.

THE BASIS FOR THE OBSERVATORY'S WORK

The Observatory receives official statistics and information produced by each member government. Statistics provided by non-governmental sources will be received only with the written authorization of the government of the country concerned. Priority, in the start-up period of the Observatory, is on:

- the demand for drugs, and research on effective prevention and treatment;
- national strategies, policies, and legislation;
- control of trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and chemicals;
- alternative development information;
- implications of the drug problem for OAS member states.

Ideally, valuable MEM data and documents would be incorporated into the Observatory's databases once released by the Commission. **This is a matter for decision by the Commission.** The Inter-American Observatory on Drugs will not deal with real time information on ongoing drug investigations or operations.

HOW THE INTER-AMERICAN OBSERVATORY ON DRUGS WILL MEET THE NEEDS OF MEMBER STATES

A. STATISTICS

The Observatory will help member states collect and analyze statistics on drug use (demand) and on the control of drug trafficking and related offenses. It uses standardized forms, questionnaires and customized software to enable member governments to collect and report these data routinely and easily. The Observatory also provides training in the use of the systems.

¹ In 1987, when CICAD had just been created, a joint PAHO/CICAD Advisory Group on Drug Abuse Epidemiology recommended the development of a standardized system for estimating the dimension and nature of drug abuse and related health and psycho-social problems in the region. Since then, CICAD has helped strengthen existing data sources in the member states, has trained personnel in charge of collecting or reporting data, and has provided seed funds for surveys of drug use.

STATISTICS ON THE DEMAND FOR DRUGS

The Observatory recommends the *Inter-American Drug Use Data System (SIDUC)* as the means of collecting and analyzing statistics on use/abuse/misuse of all kinds of substances.² *SIDUC* is a standardized drug epidemiology system developed by CICAD. It is relatively inexpensive and the findings of *SIDUC* surveys are quickly available to decision-makers when they need them. It provides for compatibility among cities, countries and regions on certain core indicators³. All surveys are confidential.

It is recommended that each member government send to the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs its official statistics on drug use among its own population.

LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS (CICDAT)

The CICDAT system on drug control statistics helps governments report statistics on seizures of drugs, chemical substances, equipment, arms, money, and real estate as well as persons arrested for trafficking, possession, laboratories discovered and areas of illicit cultivation eradicated. Approximately twenty-five member states currently participate in the CICDAT system, and some also use it as the basis for their reports to the United Nations and the International Narcotics Control Board.

PUBLICATIONS

The annual *Statistical Summary* showing standardized, updated time series presents key data from member states. The *Statistical Summary* will continue and be enhanced under the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs. Over time, the *SIDUC* and *CICDAT* data allow for regional comparative analysis, trends, comparative growth indexes and the examination of possible related variables. The Observatory also publishes and keeps up to date a Directory of national authorities responsible for drug control, and in the future, will publish to the INTERNET short news bulletins on the latest research.

B. INFORMATION SYSTEMS

As CICAD member states engage in their MEM assessment of the results of national policies and programs against illicit drugs, national information systems that can compile and analyze the documentation and data gathered become ever more important (see MEM indicator No. 6). The Observatory's long-term goal is to support the development and consolidation of national information systems based on the INTERNET and assist in training of national personnel.

THE OBSERVATORY PROGRAM FOR 2000 - 2001

The Observatory will be formally launched in the summer of 2000, with two workshops on aspects of statistics on drug use, and the inauguration of the Observatory's Regional Web Page.

The Executive Secretariat of CICAD has reorganized its statistics and information sections, and will shortly hire a senior drug epidemiologist to ensure solid technical management of a critical area. He or she will be charged with ensuring that the research efforts remain focused on the policy and planning concerns of governments.

² Tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, crack, basuco, heroin and other opiates, hallucinogens, amphetamine-type stimulants, and others. In the coming years, *SIDUC* will also develop a means by which member governments can also gather information about the misuse of prescription drugs.

³ Core indicators are: prevalence of drug use among different population groups, incidence (rate of new users each year), age of first use of different drugs, which type of drugs drive users into treatment, and related socio-demographic variables.

1. *Support development by governments of a national research capacity in the epidemiology of drug use*

- The Observatory will provide training for national personnel in the collection, analysis and publication of data on drug use, using the SIDUC system. A revised SIDUC Manual and training materials will be completed by the summer of 2000. In the Caribbean region, the Observatory will cooperate with a new CARIFORUM drug epidemiology project financed by the European Union, by providing SIDUC to the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC), and offering training in the system.
- On request, the Observatory will assist national research teams in setting up an ethics committee (sometimes called a Human Subjects Review Committee), to ensure that the privacy and dignity of people who participate in research studies is respected. Generally, a prerequisite for obtaining an international research grant is that the research project should have been approved by the national research ethics committee.
- The Secretariat is actively seeking out international fellowship opportunities for drug epidemiologists from the region.

2. *Consolidate SIDUC in the Americas as a common methodology that is low-cost, able to be assumed by the national governments, and that provides timely data on a rapidly changing phenomenon*

- In the first few months of 2000, the Observatory provided financial support to a number of member states to conduct one round of surveys of drug use in emergency rooms and one survey in drug treatment centers. Each participating government officially designated its SIDUC coordinator. Data will be ready by summer 2000, in order to be included in the next Statistical Summary.
- The SIDUC questionnaires are being revised by an outside consultant, who will shortly recommend adjustments to help countries answer key MEM questions Nos. 16 (average age of first use of any illicit drug) and 17 (annual incidence of new drug users). These recommendations will be reviewed by an advisory group, which will be asked to recommend a reliable survey method for these two MEM questions. An INTERNET-based chat room is being tested to allow the members of the advisory group to exchange views quickly and inexpensively about the questionnaires and methodological problems in advance of the meeting.
- The SIDUC high-school survey questionnaire will be piloted and validated for use in both English and Spanish. The questionnaire will shortly be available in French and Portuguese.
- The Observatory will provide member states with financial support for surveys of drug use by high-school students, as a priority activity.
- The SIDUC software will be upgraded in 2000.
- Cooperate with the European Observatory on Drugs (EMCDDA) and with the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP) on the development of indicators of drug use that may be used in the simplification of the UN's Annual Reports Questionnaire (ARQ).
- Over the longer term, the goal is to investigate risk-factor profiles among specific populations, for application to drug abuse prevention and treatment interventions.

3. *Improve and expand CICDAT*

- The CICDAT software is now being improved to create a multi-user, INTERNET-based system. This upgrade will allow member states to send their reports on line and consolidate data sets from various sources of statistics within the country.
- Technical work will be conducted to improve comparability of the data, and ensure that CICDAT is capable of providing statistics needed for the MEM.

- Technical assistance missions will be provided to member states, on request, to advise on the improvement of statistical techniques, data gathering systems, presentation and analysis of data, the structuring of a National Information System, and the use of statistical information in the analysis of the problem and in decision-making.
- A longer-term goal is to perfect methods of reporting or estimating illicit arms shipments, diversions of chemicals, and money laundering transactions.

4. *Interpreting the data and using research findings*

The intention of the Observatory is to provide senior government policy-makers with clear information and an analysis of the data produced around the hemisphere as a basis for setting priorities and enhancing national drug control programs. An important area of the Observatory's work will therefore be on identifying those data that are crucial to decision-making in demand reduction, supply reduction, and other areas; highlight those issues and areas in which more information is needed, and seek to explain the statistics to the general public and the media.

5. *Support for national drug information systems*

- Provide assistance to national drug commissions on building national drug information systems and web pages, and on on-line management of information, documentation and statistics. In 2000, additional computers and INTERNET connections are being donated to Central American and Caribbean governments. This centerpiece is made possible thanks to grants from the Spanish Government and the European Commission.
- The Observatory's new Regional Drug Web Site is now being tested. National Drug Commissions and National Observatories are invited to provide links to their own Web sites.
- INTERNET chat rooms will be set up for specialized interest groups working on a particular project. The first Observatory chat room will concern the improvements to the SIDUC questionnaires, and participants will be able to comment on the proposed changes, by e-mail, in advance of the meeting. Chat rooms will be established for any kind of discussion; they are useful because they save considerable time and money, and allow for a written record of the conversations.
- The future of RETCOD/NDCs: This CICAD project was set up in 1997, as part of an effort to help strengthen national drug commissions by providing them with computers, software and INTERNET connections. The Secretariat believes that RETCOD/NDCs has fulfilled its purpose, in that the national commissions are now communicating with each other rapidly by e-mail, and are using the INTERNET as an ever more indispensable tool. It is therefore being phased out as a stand-alone project. As funds permit, the Observatory will continue to provide computer upgrades and INTERNET connections, and encourages national commissions to continue to exchange information among themselves by e-mail and through Web pages.
- An improvement on RETCOD is the Inter-American Observatory's Web page. Member states and the Observatory are encouraged to post short news bulletins in English and Spanish on latest research findings, and provide electronic links with other Web sites, so that CICAD delegates, national drug commissions, and GEG members can keep up to date. The Observatory will not send out news clippings of the day's news, not wishing to duplicate the excellent service being provided by the national and international media.

6. *Preparation of research proposals*

- The Observatory will prepare research proposals on different aspects of the drug issue, for submission to potential donors and scientific collaborators.

WHAT WE ASK OF MEMBER STATES

- Officially designate a national SIDUC coordinator, as well as a national contact point for CICDAT data.
- Name a Webmaster who will manage the National Drug Commission's Web page, and serve as the Inter-American Observatory's contact point for the Regional Web Page.
- Designate the national information focal point through which the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs will channel its cooperation.
- Encourage the use of INTERNET resources for drug control activities and information.
- In the area of drug epidemiology, do a national sample of high schools, preparatory to conducting a survey of drug use among high-school students. Such a sample is essential to ensuring that the results of the survey are representative of the situation in the entire country. National Commissions may wish to seek assistance in this from the National Statistics Bureau, a university, and/or the Ministry of Education.
- Continue to provide the Observatory with data on drug control on a regular basis.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

The maintenance of regional databases and the production of annual statistical reports is labor-intensive, even with the revolution in information technology. Both member states and CICAD need to invest in people who collect, process, analyze, and publish drug-related statistics and information. Since 1991, the Executive Secretariat of CICAD has provided financial assistance to a considerable number of member states to enable them to conduct epidemiological studies on drug use, has donated more than 200 computers and software to member states, continues to finance INTERNET connections, has conducted scores of training seminars in statistics and information management, and has developed, at a cost of over US\$1 million, the two statistical systems being used by many member states.

The Inter-American Observatory on Drugs currently has eight staff, three of whom are also working in other sections of the Executive Secretariat.⁴ As noted above, a drug epidemiologist and a systems analyst are being recruited, and consultants will need to be engaged for short periods for specific technical assistance to member states. In 2000, thanks to contributions from the European Commission, and the Governments of Spain and the United States, the Observatory has been able to finance drug use surveys in drug treatment centers and emergency rooms in a number of member states, and to provide a limited amount of training and technical assistance in both supply and demand statistics. In order for the Observatory to live up to expectations, however, it will need to grow and take on new challenges. Funding in addition to the current availability will be needed. An estimated budget for 2000 and 2001 is provided on the next page.

⁴ The contracts of three of the current staff, plus the new epidemiologist and the systems analyst are financed out of external funds.

**INTER-AMERICAN OBSERVATORY ON DRUGS
BUDGET**

ACTIVITY	COST IN US\$	
	2000	2001
1. STATISTICS ON SUPPLY (CICDAT)		
• National and subregional seminars for training in new CICDAT INTERNET software, and statistical techniques for MEM	US\$90,000	75,000
• Statistical publications (Inter-American Observatory)	35,000	35,000
• Data base maintenance (Inter-American Observatory)(<i>funded for 2000</i>)	---	56,000
• Project administration, CICAD (<i>funded for 2000</i>)	---	10,000
Subtotal	125,000	176,000
2. INTER-AMERICAN DRUG USE DATA SYSTEM (SIDUC)		
• Technical coordination meeting, countries participating in SIDUC, to determine priorities for MEM	60,000	---
• Draw representative sample of high schools in 4 countries/year, prior to conducting surveys on drug use	35,000	35,000
• National/regional training seminars on epidemiological methods and analysis, & sampling techniques (Caribbean/Latin America)	50,000	50,000
• Financial support to member states to conduct surveys in drug treatment centers and emergency rooms (<i>funded for 2000</i>)	---	---
• Pilot testing of high school survey in 2 countries (1 English, 1 Spanish speaking)	50,000	---
• Translation and testing of SIDUC questionnaires in French and Portuguese	50,000	---
• Financial support to an estimated 10 countries to conduct high-school surveys (average of \$25,000/country). Includes technical assistance, data processing, & preliminary publication of findings	---	250,000
• Science advisory committee meeting to examine SIDUC findings (<i>funded for 2000</i>)	---	40,000
• Publication of statistical report by Observatory	20,000	20,000
• Data base administration, Inter-American Observatory (<i>partially funded for 2000</i>)	25,000	56,000
• Senior drug epidemiologist June – Dec. 2001, Inter-American Observatory (<i>funded through June 2001</i>)	---	54,000
Subtotal	290,000	505,000
3. ON-LINE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT & REGIONAL WEB PAGE		
• Webmaster/systems analyst (funded for 2000)	---	75,000
• Technical assistance & financial contributions to member states for construction of Web pages & chat rooms (estimated 10 countries/year at US\$8,000 each) (<i>funded for 2000</i>)	---	80,000
• Computer upgrades & maintenance for member states (estimated 15/year at \$2,000 each)	30,000	30,000
• Information specialist, Inter-American Observatory (<i>funded for 2000</i>)	---	56,000
• Project administration CICAD(<i>funded for 2000</i>)	---	10,000
Subtotal	30,000	251,000
4. RESEARCH PROPOSALS		
• Analyst/researcher, prepare research proposals (<i>financed until June 2000</i>)	28,000	56,000
Subtotal	28,000	56,000
TOTAL	US\$473,000	US\$988,000