

Proceedings of the Seminar on  
**THE NEEDS OF DEVELOPING INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
IN THE FIELD OF  
WATER, SANITATION AND ENVIRONMENT**

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## I INTRODUCTION

ENSIC Nepal with its 25 focal nodes is attempting to timely disseminate relevant information in the field of water, sanitation and environment as per the user's needs. Information are also exchanged within the ENSICNET countries with the help of ENSIC/ADB, AIT Project in a timely and orderly fashion.

There is an increasing demand on current and dependable information for different purposes by different institutions and individuals. Most of the organizations involved in information exchange systems have relevant and up-to-date information rather their use is limited primarily because of the lack of an effective information exchange system even within their parastatals and related agencies. Hence the main problem is not the dearth of varied nature of information but is related to the accessibility, use and exchange of such information. Generally question arises how to exchange these information, with whom and when with what mechanism?

Access to information has been the constitutional right of a Nepalese people. In this perspective, it is felt necessary to work-out on current trends of information exchange system in Nepal, at least within the ENSIC Nepal focal nodes in order to strengthen the existing facilities and their effective use and establish a more functional relationship between these focal nodes. This has been done, to some extent, by organizing a seminar which facilitated to list and identify the problems and establish a functional relationship between them.

A Seminar on **The Needs of Developing Information Systems in the Field of Water, Sanitation and Environment** was held at Kathmandu during January 24-25, 1993, jointly organized by the Nepal Water Supply Corporation and ENSIC/ADB, AIT Project, Bangkok with an aim to address on how to exchange information knowing user's need, preferably within ENSIC Nepal focal nodes, as an initial step for strengthening institutional capabilities of the ENSIC Nepal. The seminar attempted to identify major problems faced during information sharing, discuss appropriate measures to solve the problems with emphasis on attaining sustainability in information exchange system in Nepal in the field of water, sanitation and environment.

In order to meet the above objectives, five perspective papers were presented during the seminar in order to facilitate discussion. The programme was participated by information professionals of and out of ENSIC Nepal focal nodes. It was rather a follow-up to the seminar on **Environmental Sanitation Information Exchange Through Focal Nodes** held at Kathmandu during June 11-12, 1991.

The programme was inaugurated by Dr. K. L. Shrestha, Vice-Chancellor of Royal Nepal Academy for Science and Technology (RONAST) by lightening the panas. In his inaugural address, Dr. Shrestha emphasized for proper flow of information unto the users and to look into possibilities of sharing information. He urged the participants to come with a

concrete action programme to user education with a view to develop an useful information system with user's participation. Mr. S. B. Pradhanang, Chairman of the Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC), from the chair, highlighted the state of environment in Kathmandu Valley and emphasized on actions to be launched to restore the environmental quality of the Valley in order to attract more tourists. He also emphasized on the need to the free flow of information. Mr. P. R. Bista, General Manager, NWSC while welcoming the participants and guests informed that ENSICNET programme has been a very worthwhile programme and information management may be regarded as crucial to NWSC's success. Addressing the august gathering, Mr. A. H. Vespry, Director, ENSIC/ADB, AIT Project advised to approach to self-sustaining of the project and know what is happening in the field of water, sanitation and environment in Nepal and make access to information to the users. Mr. R. Shah, Member-Secretary, RONAST informed that new management of RONAST has given top priority on information collection and sharing and urged to provide concrete suggestions and recommendation to strengthen information sharing system in Nepal. Ms. K. Aryal, Asst. Manager ENSIC/ADB Project, NWSC highlighted the activities of ENSIC Nepal. Mr. N. M. Pradhan, Senior Manager, NWSC while giving the vote of thanks also highlighted on the needs of sharing existing information.

On January 24, 1993, two technical papers were presented under the chairmanship of Mr. A. H. Vespry. Mr. A. Dixit presented a paper on User's Participation and Need for Information while Mr. B. Chapagain's paper was on Co-relation between Consumer Education and Community Participation Programme and Environmental Information Systems. Each paper presentation was followed by a discussion. From the chair, Mr. Vespry advised that users are ultimately very important in information sharing and each should attempt to attain sustainability with an understanding that information is not free and each information has a cost. He also said that information packages are sometimes developed without knowing the needs of the users which is of no use. He also advised to develop information systems suitable to Nepal, knowing what types of information, users need. Mr. D. L. Bryant, Chief Technical Advisor, NWSC informed that few pieces of crucial information would also be valuable and sustainability of the programme is not a problem if information services are adequately provided.

On January 25, 1993, three papers were presented under the chairmanship of Dr. Kiran Bhattarai, Project Manager, ENSIC/ADB Project, AIT. Mr. B. Pathak, Mr. D. R. Poudyal and Mr. B. K. Uprety presented papers on Co-relation between CDS/ISIS and Information Systems in the field of Water, Sanitation and Environment; Developing Information Systems in the Field of Water, Sanitation and Environment as Beneficiaries and; Developing an Environmental Information Systems in Nepal respectively. Dr. Bhattarai advised the information professionals to have knowledge on problem solving on information sharing, impart information so that industrialists also know pollution mitigation measures. He also emphasized on more coordination, at least amongst ENSICNET members. He also advised to set-up and up-grade their documentation centre and generate awareness to use information, also with a view of marketing strategy.

In summary, it is agreed that ENSICNET is a good initiative and needs strengthening; there is a need of training to the information professionals, developing a culture on information sharing, and there is also a need of consumer education and marketing strategy.

Mr. N. M. Pradhan, Senior Manager, NWSC concluding the seminar, urged information professionals to provide more information so that sustainability issue, raised during discussion, could be solved to some extent.

During the programme ENSIC Nepal displayed some posters and reports for the benefit of the participants.

The major issues raised in papers and by the participants are documented in chapter II. the suggestions, made in the paper and raised during discussion are presented in chapter III.

## II MAJOR ISSUES RAISED

In order to meet the seminar objectives, five working papers were presented, followed by paper-wise discussion. The issues raised by paper presentators and participants in developing information systems in the field of water, sanitation and environment are separately briefly summarised below.

### a. Issues Raised in Papers :

1. Information and its dissemination is crucial to know what and why the activity being done, make better decision, build credibility with the affected, understand public concerns and values and inculcate democratic values.
2. Beneficiaries are to be made partners and trusted on development programmes with adequate flow of information.
3. Information are too little on the status of quality and quantity of water, effects of climate change on coastal belt and Himalayan snow line.
4. It is necessary to share the knowledge to improve and provide better services in the future.
5. Raw data, without processing practically has little or no use.
6. Flow of information is extremely poor. However, efforts made by ENSIC have been worthwhile as compared to the past situation.
7. Initiatives should be taken to make ENSIC programme sustainable.
8. The important task is to provide current information to decision-makers.
9. Quality of information can not be improved as long as data collection continues to be a low paid job. It also demands for training of information professionals to facilitate the screening of information and improve the quality of work.
10. It is necessary to set-out procedures through Acts to make information sharing mandatory.
11. The Consumer Education and Community Participation (CECP) Project provides messages under broad framework of conservation and proper use of scarce water resources, illustrations of water-borne diseases, maintenance of water and sanitation systems, control of direct pumping and illegal connection and timely payment of water bills.

12. The CECP and ENSIC Nepal have to develop a capacity for information management, with proper care of internal information flow, monitor and assess relevant information resources in the field of water, sanitation and environment.
13. The available information is yet to be processed, stored and channelized.
14. ENSIC Nepal has yet to identify various project's needs and devise mechanism to assist them effectively.
15. The CECP and ENSIC Nepal, though within the same organization have yet to devise effective two-way communication for better performance.
16. Even the collected information are not recorded and are in disorder, making difficult to locate them.
17. Community is also unaware on existing information systems.
18. Systematic effort, including screening of information is required for ready application of information to the users.
19. There do not exist national information policy in Nepal. Information centres (IC) are operated in isolation.
20. Not a single agency has the responsibility of collecting and disseminating the information. There is not a single centre that collects information only on water or sanitation or environment.
21. Information produced in many of the Governmental and non-governmental organizations have not been properly recorded.
22. Lack of resources is the main constraints to develop and provide information services.
23. There is a need to make a standards of information processing compatible with the national system if available.
24. Existing flow of information has not adequately considered the need of the users.
25. There do not exist a sector specialised or centrally managed information centre in the field of environment.
26. Some information are restricted for public use and available ones are also not easily available to the users.
27. Past tendency of holding information has been changed due to Nepal's constitutional right to be well informed.
28. Some level of environmental information are available on project specific impact assessment, guidelines and key problems.

29. Information centres (IC) are handicapped not only due to the lack of resources and adequate staffs but also lack of job description and confusion on individual's responsibility.
30. Existing ICs should at least know where and in which areas, the information are available.
31. ICs should also assess their strength and weaknesses and prepare and implement a time-bound **action plan** to provide information to more users by strengthening information centres and make them sustainable.

**b. Issues Raised by the Participants :**

1. IC should know themselves what types of information are collected including the quality and quantity of information.
2. It is necessary to disseminate correct and rational information.
3. Each information has to be charged for making ICs sustainable, following marketing strategy.
4. Culture of sharing information has yet to be developed in Nepal.
5. ENSIC information are rather of high level for Nepal and it is necessary to know what level of information is required to our users.
6. Level of information would be different for different users and it is also necessary to think about payers.
7. ADB should continue to support ENSIC programme until it becomes sustainable, however efforts are to be made to attain sustainability as early as possible. IC in Nepal could not be fully sustainable as users do not have purchasing power to pay for information.
8. It is necessary to conduct in-house CDS/ISIS training and encourage more ICs to use CDS/ISIS - a software package.
9. There is also a lack of communication between ICs which need fully considered by themselves.
10. Need of coordination between the users and information professional is urgently required.
11. Librarians are facing problem on the technicality of the information and hence, a training is required for information professionals in the field of water, sanitation and environment to have at least little knowledge on the subject(s).
12. Emphasis should be given to institutionalise information system because a tendency of personal collection would not only limit the scope of information sharing system but also may make

institutionalising the informational sharing system weak.

13. It is necessary to facilitate ICs to cooperate each other on case by case issues.
14. It is also necessary to generate awareness on information, advertise the information and have a marketing strategy to be self-sustained in future.



### III RECOMMENDATION

The participants appreciated the initiatives taken by the ENSICNET to establish an information sharing system in Nepal. The participants also realised that information sharing is the need of the hour and these facilities need to be strengthened keeping in view the sustainability of the information system as well.

Considering that information are vital to research, planning and decision-making, a seminar on **The Need of Developing Information Systems in the Field of Water, Sanitation and Environment** held at Kathmandu during January 24-25, 1993 recommends that;

- \* A training is required to information professionals to make them aware on and help to screen subject(s) in the field of water, sanitation and environment.
- \* There is a need to devise a marketing strategy to make the information sharing system sustainable and reduce dependency on donor's assistance.
- \* There is also a need of consumer education to make them informed for using the available information.
- \* ENSICNET should also be strengthened as it being a good initiative in information sharing in Nepal.

Participants are hopeful that successful implementation of these recommendations would provide a direction for the free/adequate flow of information and make the information sharing system sustainable with user's participation.