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<th>Expert Group Meeting on Integrating Information Systems Technology in Local Regional Development Planning: Singapore, Oct 31-Nov 4, 1988 (Vol 1): [welcome address]</th>
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Welcome Address

By

Hidehiko Sazanami
WELCOME ADDRESS

Hidehiko Sazanami, Director, UNCRD

(Expert Group Meeting on Integrating Information Systems/Technology in Local/Regional Development Planning, Singapore, 31 October-4 November 1988)

[The Honorable Tan Chin Nam, Chairman of the National Computer Board of Singapore; Mr. David M. Thorup, Deputy Regional Representative, United Nations Development Programme, Malaysia, Singapore, and Negara Brunei Darussalam; the officers of the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (Dr. Vijay Menon, Secretary-General; and Dr. Benjamin V. Lozare, Joint Deputy Secretary-General); distinguished guests; and participants.]

As Director of the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), I am pleased to welcome the participants in this Expert Group Meeting on Integrating Information Systems/Technology in Local/Regional Development Planning. This meeting provides an opportunity for development planners, information and communication specialists, and scholars from nine countries and from United Nations and other international and regional organizations, to talk to each other and exchange information on the problems and ways of designing and implementing information systems (IS) and information technologies (IT) for planning. At present there is little communication and interaction between information specialists who produce the data and development planners who use the results. This lack of dialogue may lead to the creation of information systems/technologies far too sophisticated for, or irrelevant to, the needs of planners in developing countries.

The capacity of local/regional development planners to use new communication and information technologies for their development and planning
duties and day-to-day tasks is an important concern, and is of special interest to UNCRD. We at UNCRD recognize that if development planning is to be improved, we must continue efforts to assist planners in strengthening their capability to formulate and implement effective plans.

Within this context, it is my expectation that this meeting will achieve its objectives, and that it will deliver a tangible product. I encourage participants to discuss and share their concerns, so that the report of the meeting will represent a consensus of participants' views.

No one could be more pleased than I am to join our host and collaborator, the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC), our cosponsor, the National Computer Board of Singapore, and our cooperating organizations, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Development Research Centre Regional Office for South East and East Asia, and the Department of Sociology of the National University of Singapore, in conducting this meeting. I believe that this Expert Group Meeting represents the practical advantages of international and institutional cooperation in the solution of international development problems.

In many ways, UNCRD's Information Systems Unit (which is one of UNCRD's seven major operational units for research and training) shares the same concerns as AMIC. Inasmuch as we are deeply committed to the same goals, it might be useful to look back and see how the UNCRD Research Project on Information Systems for Local/Regional Development has developed.

UNCRD initiated the project in 1983 and has been documenting and disseminating the research findings through publications and international seminars or meetings. The research findings gathered to date allow us to draw several firm conclusions about the use and effectiveness of informa-
tion systems in support of development planning.

The first conclusion is that information systems for planning in developing countries are still evolving. The costs of developing information technology-based information systems are great, and the inadequacy of financial and information resources, and limited information and communication technologies, facilities, and technological know-how are among the fundamental constraints to improving information management in developing countries.

A second conclusion is that, although progress in the implementation of information systems projects has been slow, planning agencies are now beginning to recognize the value of systematizing information for more effective application in their planning activities. They are beginning to recognize that information systems have an important function to fulfill in local/regional development planning. Thus, the emergence of information systems projects is one of the more hopeful developments in local/regional planning in developing countries.

A third conclusion concerns the need for adequate training to harness information technology to enhance the quality of information for planning in developing countries. In particular, there is a felt need for training in the following areas: (a) Management skills and techniques; (b) Organizational change; (c) Economic and social development; (d) Planning and project methods, models, and implementation and monitoring and evaluation techniques; (e) Information systems, including understanding the organizational environment, establishing goals, the economics of information, information systems tools and capabilities, service delivery mechanisms, and effective provision of information systems capabilities; (f) Personal skills and attitudes; and (g) Training, including the training
of trainers.

The ongoing UNCRD Research Project (Phase I) on "A Study of Critical Success Factors in Information Systems Implementation in Developing Countries" attempts to respond to this training priority. In order to respond to the main objective of the research project — to develop strategies to guide the use of information systems/technologies in planning — UNCRD decided to organize this Expert Group Meeting jointly with AMIC. The objectives of the meeting are:

(1) To bring together the knowledge and experience of information systems project managers, information systems professionals, development planners, and scholars for the purpose of reviewing strategic problems and issues of implementing information systems/information technologies in local/regional development planning in developing countries;

(2) To review methodologies, approaches, trends, and practices concerning the application of information systems/information technologies in local/regional development planning;

(3) To identify "lessons learned" based on country regional planning situation analyses of information needs and on information systems project case studies, and to discuss ways these lessons can be applied during information systems project design and implementation;

(4) To discuss the issues that impact the successful implementation of information systems/information technologies in local/regional development planning;
(5) To make recommendations to planners for using information systems/information technologies in development planning;

(6) To make recommendations to the meeting sponsors with respect to future research and training activities in information systems.

To accomplish these objectives, the Expert Group Meeting will focus on the following issues:

(1) What are the critical factors that contribute to the successful implementation of information systems projects?

(2) How should information systems/information technologies be used in the local/regional development planning process?

(3) What are the implications of using information systems/information technologies in local/regional development planning?

These key issues will be extrapolated from the country experiences with information systems/technology and used to identify important lessons that can be learned about the continuity and sustainability of information systems projects in developing countries.

I urge the participants in this meeting to provide new insights and inspiration on the themes of the meeting, so as to improve the usefulness of the results to developing country users. One of the outcomes of the meeting will be recommendations to improve the implementation of information systems/technologies for planning in developing countries.

In a final note let me state clearly that AMIC has greatly honoured us by collaborating in this meeting. Dr. Vijay Menon, Secretary-General was understanding of our purposes; and Dr. Benjamin V. Lozare, Joint Deputy...
Secretary-General was ingenious and helpful in finding ways and means to accomplish them. We are grateful to them and trust that they will accept our thanks on behalf of UNCRD. To all the members of the meeting we are grateful for their participation. Most of all we are grateful to Mr. Tan Chin Nam, Chairman of the National Computer Board, and Mr. David M. Thorup, UNDP Deputy Regional Representative, for coming to the opening ceremony to deliver speeches and to meet participants from different countries and from various development and planning organizations.

For those who are not familiar with UNCRD, the Centre was created in 1971 by an Agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Japan. The principal aim of UNCRD is to enhance the capabilities of the developing countries in local/regional (subnational) development and planning. Towards this aim, UNCRD organizes international training courses and seminars, promotes international collaborative research on substantive issues in regional development, extends technical advisory services, serves as a forum for exchange of experiences, and disseminates publications which include a semiannual Newsletter, a quarterly journal, the Regional Development Dialogue, books, meeting reports, and country bibliographies. Of special interest, perhaps, to participants in this meeting is the publication of the Report of the Expert Group Meeting and selected papers and country studies.

Thank you.