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cicad

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**INTER-AMERICAN OBSERVATORY ON DRUGS**  
**Report by the Executive Secretariat of CICAD**

## **INTER-AMERICAN OBSERVATORY ON DRUGS**

### **Report by the Executive Secretariat of CICAD**

The Inter-American Observatory on Drugs was created by the Commission in May 2000 as an umbrella for and catalyst of drug-related statistics, information and research in the hemisphere. The Observatory covers both statistical and non-statistical information related to the drug problem, and attempts to integrate the demand side with supply side statistics and documentation. It gives priority to the use of new information technologies, and is geared to developing or enhancing national drug information systems (national “observatories” on drugs) to support the work of the National Drug Commissions and their component Ministries. The Inter-American Observatory cooperates with CICAD’s program, financed by the Government of Spain, to strengthen member states’ national drug commissions and national observatories. The support provided by the Inter-American Observatory provides the statistical underpinnings for the collection of information for the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM).

### **STATISTICS IN 2001**

In the statistics area, the Observatory’s goal is to improve the collection and analysis of drug-related data in the member states, promote the use of standardized data systems, and provide for scientific and technical training and the exchange of experiences among statisticians and researchers working on the drug problem. The Observatory provides technical, material and financial support for the development and strengthening of national drug statistics and information systems, including customized forms, questionnaires and software developed by CICAD for the systematic gathering, analysis and reporting of drug-related statistics: CICDAT, for reporting statistics on the supply and control of illicit drugs, and SIDUC, the Inter-American Uniform Drug Use Data System, for surveys on drug use.

### **DRUG EPIDEMIOLOGY AND STATISTICS ON DRUG USE**

The reports from the first round of the MEM recommended to many member states that they endeavor to estimate the prevalence of drug use in their countries; as a result, the Inter-American Observatory has begun a program to help countries conduct periodic surveys of drug use among secondary school students.

Much technical preparation was needed for this project. The Observatory thus:

- Completely revised the methodology for conducting surveys under the Inter-American Uniform Drug Use Data System (SIDUC), and produced new questionnaires and Procedures Manuals. This revised system was considered by national SIDUC coordinators at a meeting in the Dominican Republic in February 2001, and approved and recommended for use by all member states, if they so wish.

- Organized and financed the pilot of the new high school survey instrument in Bolivia and Belize. The pilot high school survey conducted by the National Drug Abuse Control Council (NDACC) in Belize will serve as a model for other countries in the Caribbean that are planning to do similar surveys in 2002, with the coordinated support of CAREC, UNDCP and CICAD.

As a result, in the second half of 2001, Belize, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela conducted surveys with technical and financial support from CICAD. Argentina conducted a high-school survey using the SIDUC instrument, supplemented by questions of national interest on attitudes towards drugs. Other countries will complete their surveys in 2002. The Observatory assisted in the sampling, and in the data analysis. Thanks to the Government of Suriname and the support of the European Commission office in Barbados, the SIDUC survey instruments have now been translated into Dutch.

In a related project in the Caribbean, the Observatory signed an agreement with the Caribbean Epidemiology Center (CAREC), to assist, along with UNDCP, in planning and executing the Drug Abuse Epidemiological and Surveillance System Project, financed by the European Union and executed by CAREC. This project supports the fifteen CARIFORUM member states in improving their information on drug use using the SIDUC methodology. The project, set to last for two years, began in May 2001. CICAD is providing its SIDUC methodology as the basis for the project, and is conducting the training component of this combined effort.

The Observatory also helped the countries of Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic to complete the PACARDO drug abuse research program, which is being led by Dr. James Anthony of the Johns Hopkins University. This research project explored high concentrations or "clusters" of drug use of a representative sample of 15-17 year-old high school students. The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) funded the research. The preliminary national reports are completed, and the consolidated findings are expected to be published in late 2001 or early 2002. The results of the highly sophisticated analysis being done at Johns Hopkins University will be made available to the governments of the participating countries in advance of the time for the submission of national reports for the second round of the MEM; it is recommended that these findings be used to answer the MEM indicators that address statistics on drug use.

Progress on the high-school surveys, and planning for future research will be examined at a meeting of SIDUC coordinators to be held in Costa Rica in December 2001.

## **STATISTICS ON DRUG SUPPLY CONTROL**

In 2001, the Observatory

- Published the ninth annual ***Statistical Summary on Drugs*** (CICAD/doc.1130/01), which uses the figures supplied by member states through the CICDAT system.

- Assigned user names and passwords to the National Drug Commissions to allow them access to the CICDAT on-line/off-line software CICDAT. The new INTERNET-based software, agreed on at a technical standardization meeting of twenty-five member states in Mexico City in November 2000, is now being used by some countries, and in its initial phase, is proving a more efficient means of collecting and reporting data on drug-related arrests, crop eradication, destruction of drug laboratories, seizures of drugs and chemicals and other law enforcement data. This software, along with possible expansion of the CICDAT system, will be examined at a technical meeting in Costa Rica in December 2001.

## **ESTIMATING THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC COST OF DRUGS**

Governments, policy-makers and research agencies have shown a growing interest in examining the economic and social impact of drugs, and the first round of CICAD's Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism included an indicator on this subject. The Plan of Action of the III Summit of the Americas recommended "developing within the framework of CICAD, a long-term strategy that includes a three-year program to establish a basic and homogeneous mechanism to estimate the social, human and economic costs of the drug problem in the Americas, and to support countries through the necessary technical assistance."

Some preparatory work has been done on methods that might be used to estimate the economic and social impact of drug abuse. The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA), with support from CICAD, has brought together a group of researchers from around the world to develop detailed methodologies, and has published some important monographs on the subject of the costs of drugs. In November 1998, CICAD, with the support of the Canadian and Chilean governments, held a seminar in Santiago, Chile on how to identify realistically obtainable data and determine the most appropriate theoretical model for that country.

In 2001, in response to the Summit mandate, the Executive Secretariat began to develop a plan to strengthen in the member states existing machinery or systems that provide basic statistics for cost estimation (SIDUC on prevalence of drug use, for example; emergency room admissions for morbidity figures; Ministry of Health data on life expectancy, etc.).

## **COOPERATION IN THE REVISION OF THE UN ANNUAL REPORTS QUESTIONNAIRE**

The Observatory cooperated with UNDCP's statistics section on the revision and simplification of the demand reduction portion of the Annual Reports Questionnaire (ARQ). The Executive Secretariat participated in several technical meetings that led to development of the new reporting form, adopted by the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its forty-fourth session. The demand reduction indicators for the second round

of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism were designed to reflect as closely as possible the core data reported by member states using the ARQ, to avoid duplication of effort.

## **RESEARCH ON DISPLACEMENT**

At the twenty-seventh regular session of CICAD in May 2000, delegates from Argentina and Venezuela requested the inclusion of “displacement” as an agenda item for the following regular session. During the twenty-eighth regular session, the Commission directed the Executive Secretariat to begin a study, in cooperation with interested governments, on drug-related displacement under the aegis of the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs.

The first CICAD meeting on the subject (February 2001 in Miami, Florida), attended by national coordinators from seventeen member states, considered regional approaches to defining, assessing and cooperating on the displacement phenomenon. They subsequently undertook a rapid assessment to evaluate the displacement situation in their countries. In a second meeting in May 2001, fourteen member states presented reports on their findings and recommended to the Commission that in-depth, ongoing research and monitoring of the displacement phenomenon should continue. The topic of displacement also appeared in the official records of the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in April, and the OAS General Assembly in June 2001.

A third meeting on the subject was held in November 2001 in Caracas, Venezuela.

## **CICAD ON THE WEB**

In 1996, the Executive Secretariat of CICAD constructed a website [www.cicad.oas.org](http://www.cicad.oas.org) that described the Commission’s Statute and its Regulations. Since that time the website, frequently updated, has been greatly expanded to report on new projects and events, and keep the member states up to date on developments with the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism. An electronic bulletin board with restricted access for special interest groups was established in 2001.

The Inter-American Observatory also provided help and technical assistance to national drug commissions in designing and updating their own web sites.

## **THE OBSERVATORY’S REGIONAL WEB PAGE**

The Observatory has also developed a regional drug information web page, which can be accessed at <http://www.cicad.oas.org/oid>. This web site is designed to be a collaborative effort among national observatories on drugs and the Inter-American Observatory, to provide links to virtual libraries, national congresses, universities, regional/international organizations, and national drug commissions. In 2001, the content continued to be expanded, and the regional web page is also hosting some country pages that allow national drug councils to publicizing their work and achievements.

## **SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL DRUG COMMISSIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND NATIONAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS**

In early 2001, Observatory sponsorship of earlier workshops to promote national drug information systems in Belize resulted in the formulation of a national plan for automating MEM-related information. Belize's National Drug Abuse Control Council (NDACC) formed inter-ministerial Committees to work on this activity, for which it is also receiving technical support from the University of Belize. Similar national workshops to develop drug information systems were held in Trinidad and Tobago and the Dominican Republic during the second half of the year.

National drug information systems capable of automating, integrating and exchanging information on an intra- and inter-governmental level require advanced information technology. To make this technology available, the Observatory is cooperating with the United States' National Science Foundation (NSF) and a number of its researchers from United States universities to design and implement projects on drug-related information incorporating such technologies as machine translation, computer learning, wireless networks and digital government. A US\$72,000 planning grant for a digital government project design financed the execution of the workshop in Belize. The results of this workshop and design input from Observatory staff provided the basis for the University of Purdue's presentation of a transnational digital government project to the NSF for financing for over US\$2,000,000. NSF approval of this project would be key to enabling CICAD member governments to automate information flows in public-sector institutions and facilitate completion of the MEM questionnaire.

The Observatory has also worked with the NSF to develop a project to foster communications between Colombia's central government and the country's Siona Indian population. The project will make possible automatic and instantaneous computer translation between Spanish and the language of the Siona. Discussions are underway for the implementation of a similar project utilizing Quechua as the target language.

The project monitoring software developed for the Government of Peru by the Anti-Drug Foundation of El Salvador (FUNDASALVA), under contract to CICAD, was translated into English in 2001. Subject to the availability of funding, software installation and training in interested countries are projected for early 2002.