

NATIS: Fostering Cooperation, Collaboration, Communication

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If you missed the class in library school about NATIS this is a fifteen minutes cramming / review session. An understanding of NATIS is foundational to today's seminar on *Building the National Union Catalogue*, and so the objectives for this fifteen minutes class are:

1. Overview of NATIS as a generic concept.
2. Historical Overview of the Jamaica NATIS
3. NLJ's roles in NATIS.
4. Mechanisms for Cooperation, Collaboration, Communication.
5. What's in a name, N-LIN or JALIN or NATLIN or?

1. Overview of NATIS as a generic concept

The concept of national information systems (NATIS) originated in the 1970's and was a concept originated and promoted by UNESCO. As promoted by UNESCO, a national information system is an integrated infrastructure of libraries, archives and documentation entities in a country which work together to harness and disseminate information for the expressed purpose of social, economic and national development. The premise of a NATIS is that partnerships / unions are more effective and efficient in managing and disseminating information than stand alone entities.

2. Historical Overview of Jamaica NATIS in the context

Jamaica as usual responded to the UNESCO call for national information systems and in 1973 the government established a National Council on Libraries, Archives and Documentation Services (NACOLADS).

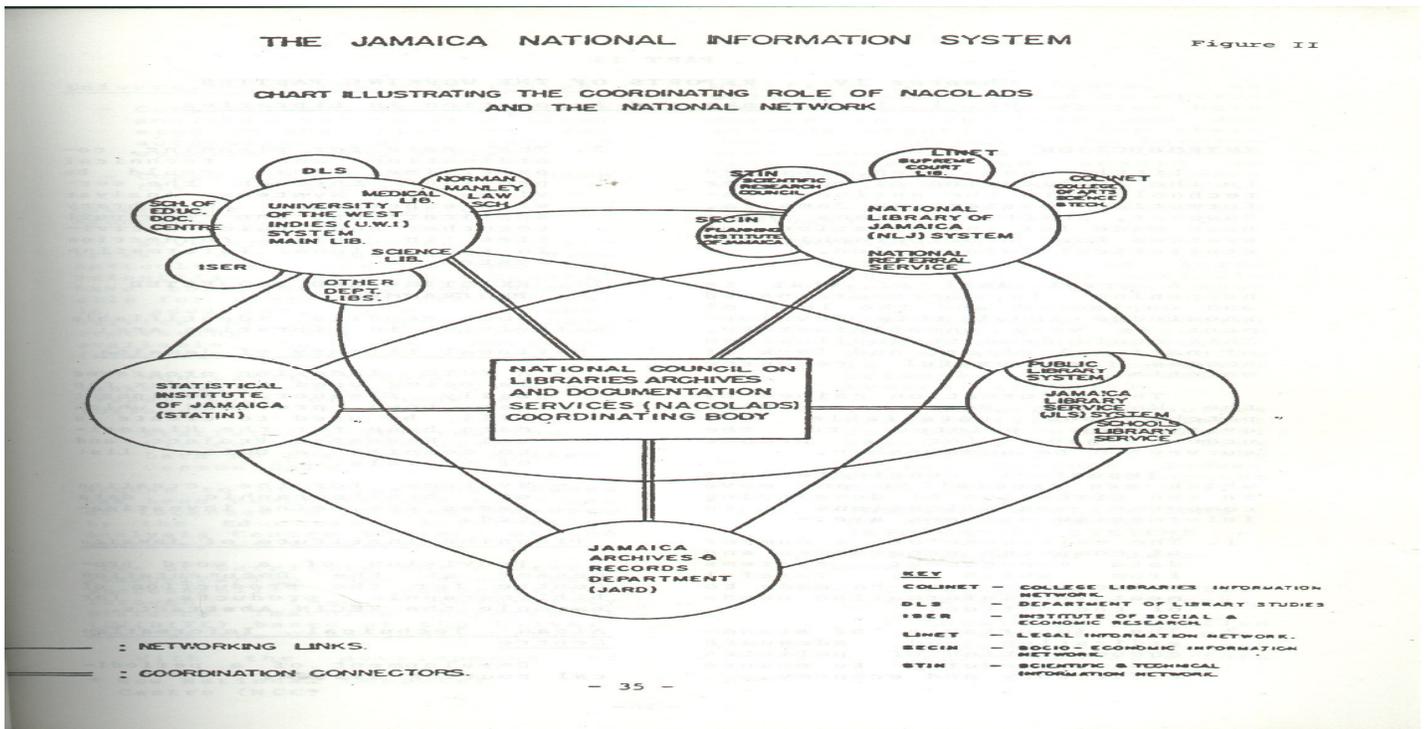
NACOLADS was charged with advising government on how to develop this integrated infrastructure.

NACOLADS accomplished the mandate by way of establishing a Secretariat located in the Office of the Prime Minister and establishing working parties to advise it on the shape of this Infrastructure. The output of the working parties was published in what, always to my mind is a masterpiece of Jamaican Librarianship and which is required reading for this crash course. This masterpiece is the Plan for a National Documentation Information and Library System in Jamaica published by NACOLADS in 1978. The publication documented the rationale for a National Information System; proposed a configuration for the NATIS, made recommendations regarding a National Information Policy, the NLJ, JLS, Government and Special Libraries and the Reports of the 10 working parties. **Some of the Recommendations:**

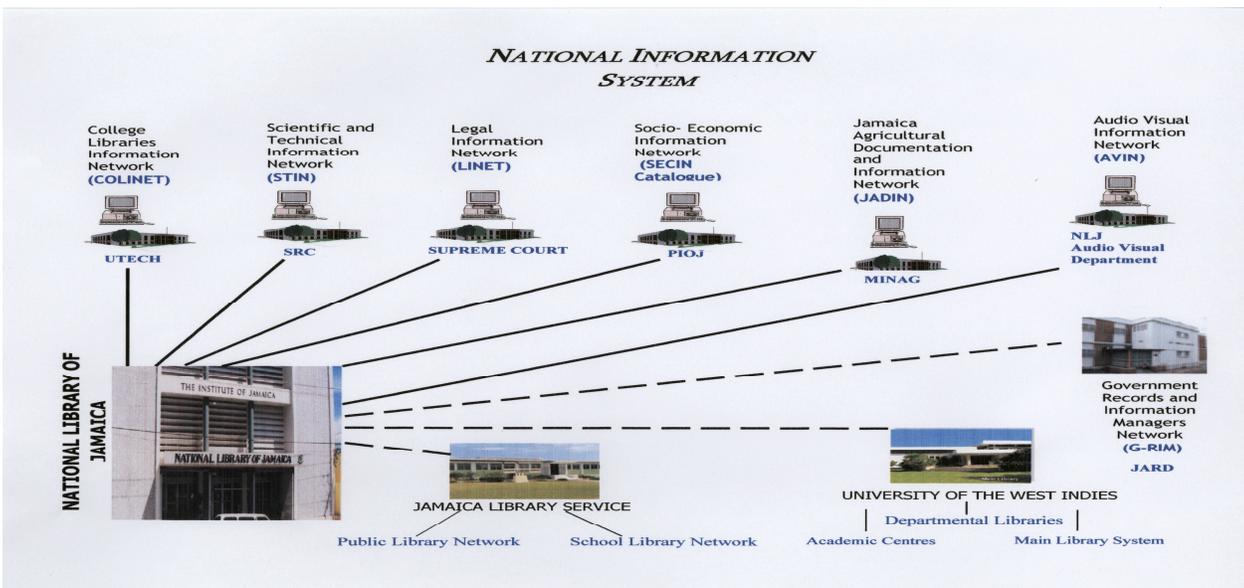
- ◆ Top priority be given to the provision of effective library and information services to Government including Parliament, the Courts, Ministries and other units of Government.

- ◆ In order for these government libraries to provide effective service the library should be placed in a strategically located position within the administrative structure.
- ◆ The Librarian should report directly to a policy level officer who should ensure the provision of a specific budget.
- ◆ National Bibliographical control.

The publication was followed in 1986 by a Second Plan which in essence updated the recommendations and added new matters such as A National Conservation Centre and a National Audio Visual Library. The NATIS as then envisioned in the second plan looked like this:



Today NATIS is configured as follows:



3. NLJ's roles in the NATIS

The major change between then and now is that NLJ has replaced NACOLADS as the coordinating entity. How did this come about? Three reasons:

1) **The First and Second plan** for the development of a NATIS in Jamaica had articulated that a national library was key to the development of this network of library networks and should be the focal point of the national information system. As a result NACOLADS recommended that the research library of the IOJ, the West India Reference Library be reconfigured into a National Library which would amongst many functions take on the function to aid the embryonic libraries in government departments to bring themselves up to standard. As such the NLJ was established in 1979 and soon thereafter a national referral and a library development programme was put in place.

2) **Secondly, in 1999 NACOLADS was decommissioned and its functions** reallocated by the Office of the Prime Minister to different entities. The OPM assigned the following responsibilities to NLJ:

"Coordinate and advise the Government on the continued development on an integrated National Information System in order to ensure the orderly growth and development of the Networks which comprise the NIS.

"Collaborate with the Jamaica Archives and Records Department to develop policies and standards for proper management of information resources in the new electronic environment" in order "to ensure standardization and authenticity."

3) **Thirdly, the NLJ ACT** which has received Cabinet and Legislative Council approval lists 10 functions of the NLJ, 5 of which have direct bearing on NLJs role to coordinate and advise Government on the continued development of an integrated National Information System. These are:

- i. Coordinate and facilitate the development of sectoral library networks;
- ii. Provide for co-operation between public libraries, school libraries, tertiary education institution libraries, private libraries, museums and the Jamaica Archives and Records Department;
- iii. Develop a National Bibliographic database and facilitate access thereto;
- iv. Promote by agreement amongst the library networks the maintenance of the National Bibliographic database
- v. Develop and promote national standards for the operation of libraries and the processing and delivery of information

Fourth Topic for this cramming review session:

1. **The Mechanisms for cooperation, Collaboration and communication**

i. **ACNIS**

- ii. **CDS/ISIS distribution and support**
- iii. **National Union Catalogue Committee**
- iv. **Network Coordinators Meetings**

ACNIS (is acronym for Advisory Committee on the National Information System and is made up of the heads of the focal points(JARD, JLS, NLJ, UWI, Mona, the heads of the sector networks) and representatives from related organizations. ACNIS is chaired by NLJ and it has terms of reference which requires ACNIS to, among other things:

- Provide advise to government through relevant ministries, regarding policies and plans for the development of libraries, archives, documentation units etc.;
- promote network activities within the National Information System to heighten availability of information.

National Union Catalogue Committee

In light of the above ACNIS and NLJ presented the seminar last year on Networking for National Development and today's seminar is an outcome of that conference. That conference had indicated the need to advance the national union catalogue and ACNIS has since established a **National Union Catalogue** subcommittee with representatives from across the sector. The tasks of this National Union Catalogue Committee include: Review and make recommendations regarding :

- 1) scope of the National Union Catalogue;
- 2) the CDS/ISIS issues which impact on the union catalogue and
- 3) systems to ensure compliance and adherence to standards .

Towards those tasks a compliance contract to govern the receipt of CDS ISIS and NLJs harvesting of cataloguing records from CDS/ ISIS users are in development and today's seminar and the development of a cataloguing manual and data entry work sheet are in keeping with the tasks of the Union Catalogue sub-committee of ACNIS

CDS/ISIS is one of the keys fostering the cooperation and collaboration and communication in support of NATIS. NLJ is the sole distributor of CDS/ISIS and to date it is the library management system of over 300 libraries.

CDS/ ISIS may not have the bells and whistles and the razzamatazz of other library management systems; but I always remind myself that if it had not been for CDS/ ISIS many of us in this room would still not have had the experience of automated catalogues, circulation and serials tracking means. So as they say; if you can't be with the ne you love, then love the one you are with especially when the one you would want is prohibitively expensive.

Network Coordinator's Meetings

The NLJ aims to convene a meeting of the coordinators of the networks once per year to address those issues which cut across all the networks; mainly issues having to do with CDS / ISIS and the National Union Catalogue.

Finally, WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Feedback and environmental scanning suggest that the name / title NATIS needs to be reviewed. The word NATIS is generic, the Information Systems portion has new connotations and has been appropriated by the ICT sector which is genuinely puzzled about the underlying library concept and the juxtaposition of library and system. A name modification may save energies in having to give lengthy explanations and advance the cause. Some alternatives have been put forward: JAMLIN, NILIM, JAMLIS. Suggestions are needed for a catchy acronym which captures the concept of libraries networked to efficiently and effectively manage and

disseminate information and which is distinct and not echoing of any other existing entity. Please look out for our poll asking you to name your network

In Conclusion

The 1978 and 1987 plans for a National Information System for Jamaica are as relevant today as they were then. Please do not disregard the plans for the NATIS only because they predate the Internet; be reassured that major premises of the Jamaica NATIS have been validated in this century by the World Summit on the Information Society and closer home by the national policy JAMAICA2030.

I appeal to all of you here to put NATIS high on your library or information unit agenda. NATIS Jamaica style, cannot happen without your contribution, collaboration and our constant communication.

Let us work the plan. For Further information on NATIS in Jamaica please consult the following:

Aarons, John. *Coordinating a National Information System: an Expanded Role for the National Library of Jamaica*. Alexandria, 16 (1), 2004.

Lampart, Sheila. **NACOLADS (1973 – 1989) and NACOLAIS (1999 -2000). Library and Information Association of Jamaica BULLETIN 2002.**

NACOLADS. Plan for A National Documentation, Information and Library System for Jamaica. NACOLADS. Kingston, Jamaica 1978.

National Library of Jamaica. Libraries networking for National Development.

http://www.nlj.org.jm/NLJ_conference.htm