GEORGIA TECH RESEARCH

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GEORGIA TECH HELPS EGYPT BUILD

NATIONAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

For Immediate Release

January 31, 1983

ATLANTA, GA -- When manufacturers buy equipment or start new product lines, they need a variety of technical data to make intelligent decisions.

American companies take for granted the availability of such information but in developing nations these resources are severely lacking.

To meet this need, Georgia Tech is leading a $4.5 million program sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) to build a computerized network of information services for the nation of Egypt.

"This is the first time a developing country is attempting to build a distributed network of public information services," says Dr. Vladimir Slamecka of Georgia Tech, the director of the project. "The data will be available in microcomputers accessible by telecommunications from nearly anywhere in the country."

This three-year project will set up a consortium of organizations to collect and computerize information in these subject areas: industry, science, health care, energy, agriculture and housing. These organizations will gather data which is present in Egypt and provide access to data banks and information not currently available in the country. Egyptian data banks will include such diverse information resources as research findings, human expertise, manufacturers' directories and price lists for raw materials.

The project includes a crash program to train 1,000 Egyptians to operate and use the national information system. Another challenge is to develop a stable political and management infrastructure for this system so that it can continue evolving and weathering changes in governmental leadership.

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Slamecka, who is a professor in Tech's School of Information and Computer Science, designed this information system over the past two years. The hardware for the network will consist of latest-generation, super microcomputers which do not require support by highly skilled programmers and can be used easily by individuals without computer experience. Its software will be sufficiently standardized to run on a number of commercial computer models.

One notable technical innovation of this system is the "bilingual" nature of the software.

"The system will store data in Arabic and English," explains Slamecka. "Persons seeking information can formulate their queries in either language and receive all the relevant data in both Arabic and English."

In the world's industrialized nations, information resources of the kind being developed in Egypt have been built up gradually and naturally over the last three centuries. However, developing countries do not have the luxury of proceeding at the same deliberate pace. Most face pressing economic problems which call for rapid solutions.

Slamecka is convinced that information services lead to better economic performance.

"In the United States, there is clear empirical evidence of a positive relationship between productivity and investments in information services," he says.

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