IFLA's ISBD Progamme:
Purpose, Process, and Prospects

John D. Byrum, Jr.
Chair, ISBD Review Group
Chief, Regional & Cooperative Cataloging
Library of Congress
Washington, D. C. 20540

Origins, purpose, and coverage of the ISBDs

The ISBDs date back to 1969, when IFLA's Committee on Cataloguing sponsored an International Meeting of Cataloguing Experts. This meeting produced a resolution that proposed creation of standards to regularize the form and content of bibliographic descriptions.

As a result, the Section on Cataloguing put into motion work that ultimately would provide the means for a considerable increase in the sharing and exchange of bibliographic data. This work resulted in the concept of the International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD), which has now endured for more than 30 years. Bibliographic agencies, national and multinational cataloguing codes, and cataloguers throughout the world now use the individual formats to which the ISBD concept has been applied.

The first of the ISBDs to be published was the *International Standard Bibliographic Description for Monographic Publications (ISBD (M)),* which appeared in 1971. There have followed projects to produce ISBDs for Serials, Non-book material, Cartographic materials, Rare books, Printed Music, and, most recently Electronic resources. For article level publications, *Guidelines for the application of the ISBDs to the description of component parts* was issued.

During the early years, especially in relationship to the first two ISBDs, that for monographs and that for serials, there was clearly lacking a consistent foundation for the program in terms of definition of data elements and specification of principles for bibliographic description across all formats. So, it developed that ISBD(S), for example, deviated from ISBD(M) in some basic ways; the most prominent difference was in their variant rules for recording titles and statements of responsibility. As a result, and to insure that the separate ISBDs would thereafter be harmonious in their treatment of data elements and prescribed punctuation, IFLA representatives met with the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR to prepare the ISBD(General). ISBD(G) has provided a framework to which all ISBDs have been made to conform ever since.

First General Review Project

Next there followed what might be called "the first general review project". To conduct this project, an ISBD Review Committee was formed. It first met in August 1981 and has been in place to serve as the IFLA Cataloguing Section's Maintenance Agency ever since (although for a period of time its name was changed to the ISBD Maintenance Committee for reasons that will

be explained below). Ultimately it was renamed the ISBD Review Group.

There were three major objectives set out for the first general review project:
(1) to harmonize provisions, achieving increased consistency,
(2) to improve examples, and,
(3) to make the provisions more applicable to cataloguers working with materials published in non-roman scripts.

In addition, two narrower objectives motivated this particular revision effort:
(1) to review the use of the equals sign (as its use in bibliographic descriptions had been the source of some controversy); and,
(2) to consider proposals regarding the ISBD for Non Book Materials emanating from specialist groups such as the International Association of Music Librarians (most prominent of which was to remove "machine-readable data files" as a format from this standard).

By the end of the decade, the ISBDs had been thoroughly considered, and they were re-published in "Revised editions." In addition, a separate ISBD was created for machine-readable data files. This appeared in 1988 as the International Standard Bibliographic Description for Computer Files (ISBD(CF)). However, because of rapid advances in technology, the need for revision of this ISBD quickly arose, resulting in the publication of the ISBD for Electronic Resources (ISBD(ER)).

Second General Review Project

In the early 1990s, the Cataloguing Section with the cooperation of the Section on Classification and Indexing set up a Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR). One immediate consequence of this development was the decision to suspend most revision work on the ISBDs while the FRBR Group pursued its charge to "recommend a basic level of functionality and basic data requirements for records created by national bibliographic agencies." Also suspended to await the results of the FRBR study was a project then in progress to identify the components of a "Concise ISBD(M)" – that is, a standard setting out the minimal bibliographic features of an acceptable record. This project was put on hold because it was expected that FRBR's findings would in effect provide such a baseline. During this period, the ISBD Review Group became the ISBD Maintenance Group, a change of name reflecting a decision that it should deal only with ISBD problems that needed attention prior to issuance of the FRBR recommendations.

In 1998, the FRBR Study Group did publish its Final Report after the (then) IFLA Section on Cataloguing's Standing Committee approved its recommendations.[i] At that time the ISBD Review Group was reconstituted to resume its traditional work. As expected, Cataloguing's Standing Committee asked the ISBD Review Group to initiate a full-scale review of the ISBDs. The objective of this "second general review project" was to ensure conformity between the provisions of the ISBDs and FRBR's data requirements for the "basic level national bibliographic record."

---

[i] Available at http://www.ifla.org/VII/s13/frbr/frbr.htm

In the ISBDs, national bibliographic agencies are called upon to "prepare the definitive description containing all the mandatory elements set out in the relevant ISBD insofar as the information is applicable to the publication being described." To facilitate implementation of this principle, the ISBDs designate as "optional" those data elements that are not mandatory when applicable; in the case of particular ISBDs, a review of the Outline (consistently provided in each standard at paragraph 0.3) will reveal which data elements are optional. Therefore, the main task in pursuing the second general review has entailed a close look at the ISBD data elements that are mandatory to make optional any that are optional in FRBR. (In no case is a data element mandatory in FRBR but optional in the ISBDs.)

The ISBD Review Group began by examining the ISBD(M), last revised in 1987. Following current procedures, as described below, the 2002 version of ISBD(M) was approved and published in PDF format on IFLANET last summer. Also published last year was ISBD(CR): International Standard Bibliographic Description for Serials and Other Continuing Resources, the successor to the ISBD for Serial Publications. The ISBD(CR) first appeared in print as volume 24 in the UBCIM Publications, New Series, and in January 2003 it was also published in PDF format on IFLANET. Currently undergoing revision to incorporate the FRBR recommendations regarding the basic level national bibliographic record are ISBD(G) and ISBD(A), both of which should be published in 2003. ISBD(ER) is also under revision at this time, but its provisions are being updated to resolve additional problems having to do with the nature of the medium. Work will soon begin on revision of ISBD(NBM) which probably will be published in 2004.

This work then leaves only the ISBD for Cartographic Materials and the ISBD for Printed Music to be processed within the Second General Review Project. Regarding the former, a project was initiated by IFLA's Geography and Maps Libraries Section two years ago to incorporate provisions to deal with electronic versions of publications within the scope of (CM). This project did not reach fruition, however, and will need to be re-started.

Thus, after 30 years, IFLA's ISBD program has yielded standards for representing bibliographic data for all types of library materials and maintained these standards through one or more revisions. To make the ISBDs more readily available and to make them available at no cost, the ISBD Review Group has begun to convert the texts to machine-readable form for posting on IFLANET. To facilitate tracking of the status of the several ISBD and their different versions, the Review Group arranged for publication of an authoritative list of the "ISBD Family" on IFLANET.[ii] In addition, UBCIM is soliciting through its regional offices information regarding translations of the ISBDs for the purposes of identifying for the public definitive versions available in languages other than English. So far, information regarding Arabic, Catalan, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Lithuanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Ukrainian language translations has been provided and can be accessed through links on IFLANET.[iii]

[ii] Available at http://www.ifla.org/VI/3/nd1/isbdlist.htm

[iii] Available at http://www.ifla.org/VI/3/nd1/isbdtran.htm

Schedule and procedures for issuance of new or revised ISBDs

Procedures are essential in all standardization work in order to ensure that the steps by which a document becomes a new or revised standard are well known and meticulously accomplished. The ISBDs are no exception to this rule. As a result, at the 1989 IFLA Conference, the Section on Cataloguing adopted a schedule and established procedures for development and distribution of such documents as new or revised ISBDs.

Originally it was thought that each ISBD should be considered for updating on a five-year cycle. More pragmatically, they have been revised as the need arose to implement general applicable changes (e.g., the First and Second General Review Projects described above) or by the evolution of library materials, such as those that resulted in publication of ISBD(ER) and ISBD(CR).

During the IFLA 2002 Conference, the Cataloguing Section reviewed and approved an updated policy covering the schedule and procedures for development and publication of new or revised ISBDs. The purposes of the changes were to take advantage of the opportunity to publish new or revised ISBDs electronically, both in draft and final form; to speed up the review process by using email to announce the availability of drafts for review; and to enable quicker communication of recommendations regarding these drafts to the ISBD Review Group.

There are essentially five phases in the development of a new and revised ISBD. (Since the role of the UBCIM Programme Director is not clear at the time this overview is being prepared, all references to that position's involvement, as set out in the Approved Procedures, have been eliminated from the summary below.)

- Creation of draft text. During this phase, a working group may be appointed comprising cataloguing experts and, when appropriate, format specialists from other groups both within and outside of IFLA, unless the Review Group believes that it possesses sufficient expertise to accomplish the objectives of the revision. Typically, when a working group is set up, an editor is designated to prepare the text according to the decisions of the working group.

- Worldwide review. Once a draft text is completed, it is ready for worldwide review and comment. At this point, the text is forwarded for posting on IFLANET, together with an introduction to explain the status of the document and the terms of the worldwide review. Once posted, an announcement is sent to IFLA-L, the membership of the standing committees of the sections sponsoring the working group that prepared the text, and other appropriate electronic discussion groups. Normally, two months are allowed for review of an ISBD undergoing revision and perhaps an additional month if the text is entirely new. At the end of the review period, comments are due to the chair of the group that has proposed the draft.

- Final revision. All comments are reviewed and the editor revises the draft accordingly, seeking advice from the group producing the document when appropriate. At this point, special attention is given to provision of examples in a variety of languages in the text

and appendices and preparation of an index. When a final text is determined, the ISBD Review Group as a whole reviews the text, principally to ensure conformance with ISBD(G), and approves it for balloting.

- Voting. The final version of the new or revised ISBD is sent to the chairs of the Cataloguing Section's Standing Committee and any sponsoring Section or to persons to whom the task of distributing copies of the document and compiling comments has been delegated. An accompanying memo prepared by or approved by the ISBD Review Group chair highlights major features or changes of the text. The ballot provides options to approve or disapprove. Editorial comments may be submitted, but not substantive proposals as they are normally put forward during the worldwide review period. Ballots not returned by close of voting are considered to be affirmative votes. One month is allowed for this phase.

- Publication and workshop. The balloting results are announced. If the outcome is a vote of approval, a publication schedule is next determined. (If the vote is disapproval, the text is to be remitted back to the originating group for further work, but this contingency has never occurred.) In all cases the text is published in electronic format, although the e-text may be delayed at the request of the publisher if the text is also to be published in print. Review Group members post announcements concerning the availability of the ISBD to IFLA-L, other appropriate email networks, and groups responsible for national and multinational cataloguing codes. As the final step in the process, the members of the Cataloguing Section's Standing Committee will consider the desirability of sponsoring a workshop or other event by which to promote use of the publication.

Beyond these considerations, ISBD standardization procedures should be continuously reviewed to enable IFLA to maintain its cataloguing leadership during what is now proving to be yet another transition period. Such standards as the ISBDs have guided the work of national cataloguing committees in updating their codes to foster internationally accepted practices. Today's publications patterns are changing, largely as a result of the electronic environment in which we increasingly function. As interest in metadata to promote control and access to electronic resources increases, the ISBDs will enjoy new opportunities to influence content and use of these schemes, since most of them will define data elements already familiar to the ISBDs. On the other hand, not only are there new bibliographic situations to consider, but also not every bibliographic practice already in place continues to be as useful now as it was formerly.

Therefore, it is necessary for IFLA to maintain leadership in coordinating such projects with its own standardization efforts and to rekindle commitments of national libraries and national and multi-national cataloguing committees to cooperation in maintaining bibliographic practices that will enable exchange of cataloguing data in the cost-effective manner that will benefit users throughout the world.

Current priorities and activities

The Review Group's highest priority is to complete the Second General Review Project by

completing the work already underway to revise G, A, ER, and NBM and to initiate work on revision of CM and PM.

Meanwhile, the Review Group is engaged in study of other problems and developments that may lead to another revision cycle for the ISBD family as a whole. First, there is the matter of terminology used in the ISBDs in contrast to that used in the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, raising the question as to whether such terms as "work," "expression," "manifestation," and "item" should be introduced in place of such terms as "publication." These changes would be a logical extension of the Review Group's charge to implement FRBR to the largest extent practicable. Since the principles of FRBR are already widely understood and widely applied, incorporation of the terminology would foster better comprehension of the ISBDs throughout the information community and encourage interoperability with other standards. Alternatively, as Patrick Le Boeuf in his paper "Brave New FRBR World" forcefully argues: "…FRBR terminology should *not* be merely incorporated such as it stands into the ISBDs and cataloguing rules, but [these] should keep their own specific terminology, and provide accurate definitions showing how each term in this specific terminology is conceptually related to the FRBR terminology" (p. 4; see also p. 9-10).

The question of FRBR terminology is also under consideration by the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR, and the Review Group will certainly want to consider fully the outcomes of these JSC investigations as it studies the possibility of incorporating FRBR terminology into the ISBDs.

The Review Group is also attempting to provide improved guidance with regard to use of the ISBDs for bibliographic description of publications in multiple formats, such as an e-book or serially issued maps. Recognizing the increasing incidence of resources published in more than one physical medium, and the challenges that these publications pose for bibliographic control, an ad-hoc committee of the IFLA ISBD Review Group was charged with investigating the treatment of publications in multiple formats. Within this context, the Study Group considered (1) the use of multiple ISBDs and the use of multiple general material designations ([gmds]), (2) the order in which elements for multiple formats should be treated, and (3) the number of bibliographic records to be created for multiple versions. Those discussions have resulted in a number of proposed additions or changes to the ISBD(M) text which are now being issued for worldwide review. A paper outlining proposed changes and additions to the family of ISBDs in relation to these issues was posted on IFLANET to enable a worldwide review that was concluded late last year. The Review Group is awaiting analysis of the results of this survey, which is expected to be available soon – in time for discussion of some particular concerns by the Meeting participants.

To address another area of interest, the Review Group established last autumn the ISBD Series Study Group with Françoise Bourdon and Joëlle Bellec, Bibliothèque nationale de France as co-chairs. This effort reflects the Review Group's concern that some inconsistencies and ambiguities appear to have developed regarding the rules for recording information in area 6 for Series and related information presented in area 7 for Notes. The Study Group's mission is to set out how these areas are treated in all the ISBDs and then propose a common phrasing for the rules examined. The Study Group will also take into account relevant prescriptions from AACR2 and the ISSN Guidelines.

Another issue that is before the Review Group and also before JSC is the matter of matter of standard numbering, currently the subject of Area 8. With the proliferation of numbering schemes and other coding by which to identify, refer to, or in some cases, such as remote electronic resources, provide direct access to particular publications, what pertinent information belongs in Area 8 and what might be better recorded in Area 7 (for notes) is a topic that has come to the forefront and would benefit from wider discussion to include experts from several disciplines, but especially cataloguers.

Finally, the Review Group is monitoring work undertaken by other groups within IFLA's Cataloguing Section and participating in projects where collaboration is appropriate. In particular, we are interested in the activities of the Working Groups on Use of Metadata Schemes and OPAC Display Guidelines. The Review Group is also contributing to the MulDiCat Project that is seeking to construct a database containing authoritative terminology used in library cataloguing, since many of the terms to be entered will be derived from the ISBDs.

Questions for discussion by the IFLA Meeting of Experts on an International Cataloguing Code participants:

1. Are the objectives set forth for IFLA's ISBD Programme relevant to today's information environment and do the provisions of the ISBDs, covering such topics as prescribed punctuation and sources for description, continue to promote the cause of cost-effective exchange of information?

2. Are the ISBDs used as published by national cataloguing committees and national bibliographic agencies as the basis for recording bibliographic information in lieu of national cataloguing rules covering the same topics (i.e., bibliographic description)?

3. Should the ISBDs be collapsed into a single document where rules for the full range of publications would be consolidated area by area in order to encourage consistency of treatment, or should they continue to be presented in separate issuances devoted to particular kinds of publications, as is currently done?

4. Does the process for updating the ISBDs provide sufficient opportunity for input by national cataloguing committees and bibliographic agencies?

5. Are the Review Group's current and prospective agenda and activities sufficient in scope and coverage or are there additional initiatives or involvements that should be undertaken?

6. What steps and strategies can IFLA's Cataloguing Section undertake to promote the use of ISBDs by developers of ONIX, Dublin Core, creators of portals, and other key players in today's information industry?

May 5, 2002