The “Road Maintenance Handbook” first appeared in the early 1970’s under sponsorship by the governments of France, Germany and Britain, and published by the Economic Commission for Africa. It comprised three volumes and was available in French and English. The Handbook was written for maintenance foremen and workers in Africa. Its purpose was to give instruction in maintenance techniques to the men and women at the operational level to ensure that they are suitably skilled to carry out their work, while also encouraging their interest and motivation. Its clear and concise style soon made it widely popular and it became used far beyond Africa, serving as a training guide as well as a maintenance manual. Furthermore, it helped to bring home the maintenance message to those engaged at policy level.

The past thirty years have seen a much greater prominence given to maintenance, with corresponding emphasis on maintenance policy and management. The Handbook series was revised in the 1980’s in the light of its broad appeal and world wide readership. It was expanded to four volumes, to strengthen the Handbook’s international application. The range of maintenance problems addressed was extended to incorporate more information on labour and tractor-based techniques, the development of manpower management, and safety on site.

The review was funded by DFID, with the collaboration and assistance of PIARC (World Road Association) and the World Bank. PIARC has always recognised the importance of maintaining a nation’s road network in order that the road system can fulfil its vital role in the country’s economy. Now PIARC has taken over the copyright and takes responsibility for publishing the Handbook as an example of international best practice.