

CBC REPORT TO AGM
1 November 2002 – Manila, Philippines

A POSITION STATEMENT

Thank you Mr Chairman for the opportunity to interact directly with the membership of the CGIAR System – something that the CBC will be doing to a greater and more intensive degree in the future. I have much to tell you on behalf of the CBC in a very short time, but we will continue the dialogue through our website, as well as through the column that we will be contributing to the Quarterly Newsletter produced by the secretariat, “CG News”, and through the Annual Report. Before continuing let us acknowledge once more the life of one of our leading members Dr David MacKenzie, and recall his contribution to CIP, CBC and the CG System. We miss his counsel and wisdom.

In September this year, CBC held its first retreat in Rome where we examined how we, as Board chairs, could rise to the new challenges confronting the System and more effectively contribute to the reforms and change processes that are occurring. We did this over three days of hard work and under the theme “Becoming More effective as Boards of Trustees”. The report of this meeting will be posted on the CBC website for your perusal and comment. We believe it is a good start, but only a start in our collective journey to help the System achieve its awesome mission and goals. We attempted to cover all elements of the role and functions of an effective Board; some we could address in detail at the retreat, others required more and better information. We are beginning to assemble this through various avenues – many jointly with CDC. All these initiatives will in some way impact on the corporate spirit and common behaviour of the Centres. Our “big picture” agenda is to change the culture of the System through the Centres so that it is aligned with, and both drives and facilitates, the changes required for a 21st Century global research enterprise.

Let me quickly highlight some of our findings.

The first is the recognition by the System that we are Boards of Trustees and we will serve and act in that capacity to the extent that we are legally capable. You as the investors, donors and stakeholders, entrust to us the responsibility and authority to use the resources that you provide, efficiently and effectively to achieve the goals that you have set for the System. Collectively, we the boards, hold in trust from you, the donors/investors/stakeholders, the physical, financial and human resources of the centres. We endorse that relationship and respond to it. We, as trustees respect the agreed signals and messages that we receive from stakeholders. We also acknowledge that within the framework of 16 legally independent Centres, with variations in their constitutions and host country agreements, there are constraints to achieving total uniformity. Our aim, and our wish, is to act corporately, and in concert, to serve the System, to the extent that it is possible within our legal mandates. Recognition that we are Trustees for the resources of centres that vary in their governance obligations, is fundamental to understanding the CBC approach to enhancing our role. Collectively, as CBC, we have no legal status but, with the agreement of our boards, we can deliver on principles decided collectively in CBC.

High on our agenda as trustees is the development of performance indicators for centres that are meaningful, measurable, and can be readily and easily conveyed to stakeholders, through the review procedures or, through other channels that may be established. We anticipate that our performance indicators will contribute to, and be aligned with, indicators that may be produced for the System as a whole.

Human resources policies are a major powerhouse of change. These include remuneration and benefits, terms and conditions of employment, appointment procedures and processes, grievances and appeals processes, personnel and other contractual arrangements, training and career building, performance evaluation that includes incentives and disincentives to productivity and behaviour, codes of personal conduct at all levels of management and governance, G&D issues and several others. Recognising the diversity of cultural and national conditions under which we operate, we ask you as contributors to the trust, as your trustees, to look for consistency of principles and rationale rather than for absolute uniformity. In the coming months and in cooperation with CDC will be reviewing many of these elements with a view to rationalising principles and practices.

In the light of the needs of Challenge Programmes, the CBC will be working with CDC to develop guidelines for inter-centre and inter-organisational cooperation. These will extend beyond issues of personal conduct, fiduciary responsibilities and integrity, to IP, PP (physical property) and personnel matters. We will be monitoring closely the type and effectiveness of the governance of the CP with a view to minimising the legal entanglements and maximising the likelihood of the CP to deliver effective outcomes. We will also closely monitor the impact of Challenge Programmes on the unrestricted core funding of the Centres. The continuing erosion of this source of funds is a major concern to us and I know also, to many of our investors.

In relation to our own – CBC and centre board – performances, we are examining the way we can reform and renew ourselves, the skills we need in the coming years, and our composition. We will be driving this through a CBC governed training and orientation programme. We will be seeking even greater consultations with stakeholders in this process and invite you to come directly to us to make your wishes clear. We want to streamline board selection processes through the revision and revitalising of the existing databases of potential board candidates and through improved consultation processes. We, as your trustees, want to ensure that your best interests are served, firstly by having all board members acting corporately and as part of a System, (as well as acting in the best interests of the investors and supporters of their particular centres), and secondly by implementing processes that are consultative and attractive to the best candidates. It is important also, in order to maximise accountability, that the boards be held accountable for their membership and performance through existing or revised review processes. CGIAR members can play a more significant and influential role in enhancing board performance firstly through providing the names of the best potential candidates with their biographical data

to the database, secondly by making submissions to the various review processes that occur and thirdly through direct contact with the board that you feel is not satisfying the needs of the centre or the System.

Mr Chairman, while we are getting these changes implemented we will be also monitoring carefully the changes that the System is undergoing and offering advice, from our perspective on Centre performance, to the higher governance structures in the System such as SC, ExCo and its committees, and the AGM.

My final words, Mr Chairman, are communication and cooperation. We seek to enhance these with the membership. We, as the trustees of your assets, are your instruments through which reform can be hastened and our goals achieved. Use us wisely and effectively.

John Vercoe
Chair CBC
November 2002