

Report of the Committee of Board Chairs  
ICW97  
October 31, 1997

The Committee of Board Chairs was active during the interval between Mid-Term Meeting 1997 and International Centers' Week. We prepared or contributed to four papers which provided input for the System-Wide Review Panel. The four papers included

- a paper on Center governance issues entitled "Governing Complexity";
- a paper prepared with the Center Directors Committee on the "CGIAR's Future Direction in Science";
- a paper also prepared with the Center Directors Committee on the "CGIAR Financial Issues";
- a brief note to the Oversight Committee on issues concerning "System Governance".

These papers represent the collective wisdom of the CBC. They have been provided to the Strong Panel and I again commend them to the attention of the Group. In fact, we will speak to the Panel and the CG Secretariat about providing copies to members of the Group.

The CBC met for a full day on Saturday here at ICW97 and interacted with a number of other CGIAR representatives including the Executive Secretary of the CGIAR, the Chair of TAC, and the Center Directors Committee. In addition, we met with the Chair of the CG and the Chair of the Finance Committee on Sunday. We also met later in the week with the System-Wide Review Panel.

During its Saturday meeting, the CBC discussion focused on the following topics:

1. A Draft Document on the Role of Boards in Gender Staffing Issues

The gender paper, commissioned by the CBC and prepared by the Gender Staffing Program, was designed to provide guidance to center Trustees in fulfilling governance responsibilities with respect to gender issues, particularly with respect to promoting policies that support diversity in staffing. The CBC found it a very stimulating document. After a full discussion, the Gender Staffing group was requested by the CBC to incorporate various recommendations and suggestions, and provide a revised draft to the CBC. We believe the document, in its final version, could serve as a useful guide to senior management in their continuous monitoring of gender issues, and for Boards as a Reference Guide for the oversight responsibilities in gender issues.

2. Impact Assessment and Evaluation in the CGIAR

Our discussions of impact assessment and evaluation centered on the areas

- the coherence of IAE activities within the system as a whole (i.e., the integration of the activities of centers with those of the IAEG0 and feedback to research design and setting priorities;
- the adequacy of the IAEG activities in serving the needs of the CGIAR, including the links with poverty alleviation and the link with the System Wide Review;
- the real need at the center level for workable methodologies for measuring and evaluating impact and sharing experience and competence; and
- the role of the IAEG in providing "peer review" and ensuring objectivity.

We were pleased to see that the report of the IAEG addressed most of those points, and point out again that monitoring the plan of work IAEG for its relevance to System and Center needs must be an integral part of the process.

3. Biotechnology

Our discussions on biotechnology were centered on an update of events since MTM in Cairo where we had discussed the issue in great detail and presented our views to the Group. We look forward to the outcome of the two Panels and will reserve further comment until that is provided. In general, the CBC supports the position of the Chair of the CGIAR in highlighting the issue and moving it to the forefront of the CGIAR agenda. Both the positions taken and the underlying rationale must be made more transparent and better articulated to our partners on all fronts.

#### 4. The System-Wide Review

On governance issues, the CBC is pleased to see that the Panel is cognizant of the wide range of possible governance mechanisms at the center level. The CBC itself, in the paper I mentioned, has provided its wisdom and experience in consideration to that paper. Our feelings is that there are serious governance issues to be considered, due in major part to the crises and upheavals that we have undergone in recent years. However, we do feel that the impact of those events on governance structures and mechanisms is much more serious at the System level than at the Center level. In particular we note the discord between system funding and system governance which we feel is in urgent need of attention by the Panel. This discord is more fully discussed in the paper we helped to develop on financial issues in the CGIAR which has been provided to the Panel. Again, we urge the Panel to make full use of the wisdom and experience of the CBC through a programmed plan of interaction. To facilitate that interaction, we have established a small, ad hoc group, consisting of Wally Falcon, Neville Clarke, Gille Shepard, and Martin Pineiro, which will be the focal point for the CBC interaction with the Panel.

On issues of science and strategic advantage, we feel that it is imperative for the Panel to move from detail, which they are rightfully trying to absorb at this stage in massive quantity, to the broader and somewhat more abstract questions that concern us. Specifically, we see the broad issues as

the role of the CGIAR in the global effort on its mission and mandate  
the positioning of the CG within that effort, and  
the desired impact of the CG along with the form designed to achieve that impact.

Additionally, we believe that the evolution of the CGIAR system and the CG research agenda is often not fully considered, and it is of crucial importance for the review panel to study this evolution in their deliberations.

We remain concerned about information flow and the validity, accuracy and sensitivity issues associated with that flow – both into and out of the Panel.

#### 5. Financial Issues

Our Committee would be remiss in not examining financial issues of the CGIAR to identify any special concerns that we have. We would like to add our voice of concern to those of others with respect to the deteriorating situation of disbursement patterns. We note the positive action of at least one donor on that issue, and urge the other members of the Group to quickly address the problem. We have previously expressed our concern about the increasing proportion of restricted funding being provided to the centers and I can only say here that our concern continues to grow. Along with addressing the disbursement problem, we hope donors will equally give attention to the problem of diminishing unrestricted funding and the resulting financial inflexibility for centers.

#### CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

As Mr. Serageldin announced on Monday, there are two changes in Board Chairs for the upcoming year: Martha ter Kuile left the CIP Board in July and was replaced by Adrian Fajardo; and I will leave the IPGRI Board today and be replaced by Marcio de Miranda Santos. The new Chair of the CBC is Wally Falcon and the Vice-Chair is Martin Pineiro.

In closing, and as I leave this Committee and the Board of IPGRI, I would like to make a few comments about both the CBC and Boards. I leave this Committee knowing that Boards in the System

are strong, diverse, and immensely capable of effectively governing the centers of this system even with the enormous challenges that we have faced over the past few years. In short, Mr. Chairman, your Boards have responded to the challenges that you laid down almost three years ago and they have responded admirably. The Boards have made great contributions to the renewal process and I believe we now can and should speak with a great deal of confidence in the strength of our Boards rather than their weaknesses. So, too, the System has a fine group of Board Chairs. They are knowledgeable, capable, and committed to their tasks; they stand ready to provide advice and a great deal of wisdom on a range of center and system issues. They are one of your greatest resources.