

**Notes for The Report of Center Board Chairs Committee
to
The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
Mid-Term Meeting**

May 29, 1998

Background:

The Center Board Chairs Committee (CBC) met three times during the Mid-Term Meeting in Brasilia during the week of May 24-29, 1998. The committee devoted a majority of its time together to responding to the several propositions for action made by the CG Chair on matters related to biotechnology, management of intellectual property, and relationships with public and private institutions. The major points for this report were developed by the CBC at its final meeting of May 28, 1998. The report was prepared in anticipation of a presentation to the Group on the final day of the meeting. Time did not permit reports from the standing committees making this written submission to the Group the record of the CBC activities during the MTM.

World Bank Funding:

The CBC expressed gratitude to the CG Chair for his continuing efforts to retain World Bank funding for the CGIAR in the face of major pressures on the Bank arising from the Asian financial crisis. It was noted that continuing advocacy for these funds will be needed in the year 2000 and thereafter. At adjournment of the Mid-Term Meeting, final decisions by the World Bank on 1999 funding had not been made.

Streamlining the Meeting:

The Chairman proposed streamlining this and future meetings of the Group by earlier distribution of background materials, providing some items of information for awareness and not discussion, and initiating the meeting by setting out well focused propositions for action that form the basis for discussion and decision making. Ten such proposals were made in the opening session of the MTM. The CBC wishes to strongly endorse the procedures that have been introduced. Not only did this provide for a much more efficient engagement by the Group, it also substantially enhanced the productivity of our committee and provided an opportunity for more timely and focused input to the Group, both formally and informally.

Indirect Cost Recovery:

The CBC expresses thanks to the CG Chair and the Finance Committee for the attention given to

the matter of recovery of indirect costs as a part of total cost recovery for all projects. The CBC is sensitive to the positions of individual donors regarding full cost recovery, especially those who contribute significant unrestricted core funding to centres. The CBC notes, however, the very rapidly increasing percentage of total centre funding from restricted funds, some of which come from donors outside the CG. As this continues to grow, and as unrestricted core funds decrease proportionately, centres are using unrestricted core funds to supplement funding from donors on restricted projects, thereby further decreasing the flexibility to undertake new research. The CBC agreed that individual Board Chairs will encourage their Management to ensure that, where it has not yet been done, a full and complete audit of indirect costs be made. The CBC wishes to ask that the CG Secretariat provide guidelines to the centres which identify the elements of expense that should be considered in computing indirect costs. The committee recognizes that indirect cost rates will vary from centre to centre, but suggests that a common basis for the calculation of these costs could help ensure consistency and improve communication with donors.

Unrestricted Core Funding:

The CBC continues to be concerned about the decline in percentage of unrestricted core funding going to the centres. Unrestricted core funds are vitally important to centres to ensure stability and flexibility of operations and to provide funds for early exploratory research and for longer term strategic research. The committee thanks the CG Chair and Finance Committee for their analysis and recommendations to donors, both of which implore donors, where possible, to maintain or enhance their contribution of unrestricted core funding to centres.

External Programme and Management Reviews:

The CBC endorses TAC's intent to streamline the EPMR process. The committee concurs with TAC's intent to make better use of the Center Commissioned External Reviews as input to the EPMR process.

System Review:

The CBC expresses thanks to the Group and the Review Team for the opportunity to have meaningful engagement with the team during the MTM. The CBC wishes to identify itself with the comments made by Mr. Andrew Bennett of the U.K. regarding the importance of the team ensuring that its principle focus is strategic; that it provide a vision for the future. The CBC recognizes that most critical issues remain to be explicitly addressed and extended its continuing offer for engagement with the review team as appropriate during this next phase of their deliberations.

Drs. Ragnhild Sohlberg and David MacKenzie drafted a set of issues proposed to serve as further

input to the Systems Review Team. These were discussed at the last meeting of the CBC on May 28, 1998. The CBC agreed that the list of issues will be redrafted and shortened to include the most critical issues by the authors and provided informally to the review team on their behalf as soon as possible (recognizing that the team will be drafting its report beginning immediately after the MTM. Further, it was agreed that the shortened version would be circulated to members by e-mail within 15 days and that members would then offer any comments to the authors. Several members of CBC provided feedback to the authors during the last day of the MTM. Members of the CBC will also indicate to the Chair of the committee their wishes as to whether the revised document should be sent formally to the Systems Review Team from the CBC.

Biotechnology, Intellectual Property Rights, and Relationships with Other Institutions:

In response to the CG Chair's request, a major part of the CBC's work at the MTM dealt with consolidating and amplifying the agreements that CG Centres have been developing and using in dealing with these matters over the last several years. The joint effort by the CBC and CDC in this activity offered a rich opportunity for interaction at the level of the two committees. The report of this joint effort, distributed to members on May 29, 1998, was recognized by the Chairman as being fully responsive to the several propositions for action made on the first day of the meeting. Continuing efforts to expand and further clarify the procedures to be used by centres in dealing with these matters will occur during the next several months and reported to the Group at ICW-98.

Enhancing Effectiveness of the CBC:

Members of the committee recognize the need to make more efficient use of the limited time together at meetings of the Group and also note the need for actions to continue during the interim between meetings. The committee agreed with the Chair's proposition for more exchange among members by e-mail and to move towards a more focused set of agenda items for its future meetings. The new procedures adopted by the Group for streamlining its meeting, including identification of issues to be deliberated in advance of its meetings, should offer new opportunity for the CBC to improve its effectiveness and to continue effective engagements with the CDC and the Group.