

Foreword by the Chair

In this foreword, I would like to draw attention to some aspects of the development of CICRED and of the role of the Council in this development. CICRED was created in 1972 and re-launched in 1994 at the General Assembly of Montreal on the basis of the “Collomb Report”. Since then, the statutes have been modified and the election of the Council and of its Chair was made more democratic. Francis Gendreau was elected as Chair in 1994, and re-elected in 1998, while Philippe Collomb served as Executive Director over this period and up to the beginning of 2005. Their vision and foresight have enabled CICRED to play a constructive role in the interests of its member centres, a role which we aim to enhance in future activities.

CICRED is an association of centres. The specific role of CICRED is to serve as a catalyst: to assist its member centres to be in touch with one another, to help unite them in a community, and to function as a network. CICRED must be attentive to the centres’ concerns and must respond to their needs. The role of the elected members of Council is to express the centres’ needs, from as wide a perspective as possible. That is why a balance is necessary in the kinds of centres represented on Council: both a geographic balance and a balance regarding other characteristics of centres that make up CICRED’s membership. The three ex officio members and the Chairperson contribute to the breadth of knowledge on the Council of the international demographic community.

Elected Council members, while they are responsible to the CICRED membership as a whole, and do not ‘represent’ regions in any formal sense, can nevertheless play an important role in ensuring that issues of particular importance in their region are given appropriate recognition by CICRED, and by presenting views to CICRED that may be particularly prominent in their region. If Council members are to play their role optimally, there needs to be close communication between Council members and other member centres, among Council members, and between Council members and the CICRED secretariat.

CICRED, of course, does not have to rely only on the Council to represent the views of member centres. It can communicate directly with all its members, as it has done recently through a brief survey to ascertain their needs and priorities in capacity building, the results of which will be presented to this General Assembly. But the Council members have a special role to play in setting and approving CICRED policies and programs, and guiding the work of the secretariat in meeting CICRED’s goals.

In recent years, CICRED has organized one major seminar each year. It has also developed a number of programs of collaborative research, involving significant fundraising and

the valuable involvement of its consultants. A considerable volume of publications has fed the results of these seminars and research projects into the scientific discourse. CICRED has no research capacity of its own. Its task is to facilitate collaborative research between its member centres. Effectively designed collaborative research programs can help meet a number of CICRED's objectives, including the transfer of knowledge between member centres, the involvement of centres of the South in research on issues confronting them, and the capacity building of poorly resourced centres.

Centres from the South must not be left on the fringes of the international scientific community, in terms of the training of their staff, their access to electronic forms of information, and their influence on research priorities adopted by funding agencies. The Council in its two most recent meetings has been concerned to assist in capacity development, through facilitating resource sharing between better-resourced and poorly-resourced centres. CICRED must play a more dynamic role in future in meeting this objective, and we seek the views of member centres about how this can best be done.

How can we maximize the involvement of the centres in the activities of CICRED and their access to the resources CICRED can make available? We need mechanisms to learn of and assess the needs of the centres, as well as effective ways to respond to their needs. This is more easily said than done, given the large number of member centres and the enormous variability in their scale and resources. Current rehabilitation of the website is one important facilitating factor, enabling two-way communication between the secretariat and member centres.

CICRED's resources are limited. CICRED cannot do capacity building and institutional development on its own, and it would not be sensible to aspire to do so, given that our member centres are involved in many networks and relationships that can help to meet their needs. But by 'working smart' and cooperating with other programs that follow similar objectives, we should be in a position to contribute significantly.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the current Council, the small and hardworking secretariat staff, and the ex-Executive Director, Philippe Collomb, for their sterling efforts over the term of the present Council, and to thank Christophe Guilmoto for his hard work since taking over the reins as Executive Director.

It has been a privilege to serve as Chair of the CICRED Council over the past four years. My best wishes go to the Council currently in process of being elected, which will take up its duties at the beginning of 2006.

Gavin Jones