Board Report 2000

The President’s Message

by

John Duncan, President of CIB

The year has again been an exciting one for CIB, with major implications for the future in some of the events that have occurred. The reports on the Board Committees’ activities, and on the membership structure, provide evidence of the changes that have occurred and of the issues that have arisen. I believe that as we hand over to the new Board, CIB has a number of new potential developments before it, and one of the important tasks of the incoming Board will be to prioritise the developments, which are undertaken so that they consolidate CIB for the future.

The fact that we are in this position is due in no small measure to the enthusiasm and leadership shown by the Coordinators in all the CIB activities. This commitment is highly valued by me and the Board, and is a point I will reiterate to the Coordinators Meeting which CIB is hosting as part of the Congress.

It is also due to the efforts of the staff at the General Secretariat, who have done their very best to provide the services that the Board, Coordinators and Members have sought. A key staff change at the Secretariat was the retirement at the end of 2000 of the Deputy-Secretary General, Chris Pollington, after 23 years service to CIB. To many, Chris was the face of CIB. The Board made a small presentation to him in recognition of his devoted service during our meeting in Sao Paulo in November 2000. Following a review of the tasks to be carried out by staff in the Secretariat, the position of Assistant Secretary-General was advertised and Dr Marleen Hermans accepted this post in September, but she has recently advised that different career options will mean that she will be leaving CIB. The position is expected to be advertised again.
In commending this commitment from the staff, and thanking them for it, I want to highlight in particular the activities led by the Secretary-General, Dr Bakens, in developing the proposal to the European Union for the Performance-Based Building project. This project is still under negotiation at the time of writing but looks as if it will not only bring many opportunities to position CIB activities firmly in the view of all those involved in developing new ideas in the building and construction sector, but also result in significant funding for coordination of some of those CIB activities from sources other than membership fees.

The “proactive approach”
This theme of ‘Performance-Based Building’ is one of the elements of what was labelled ‘the ‘proactive’ approach’ in the Strategic Planning Meeting in South Africa in May 1997. I referred in my report last year to our efforts to explain better to members the planned role of these themed activities in creating a specific position for CIB in the networks of researchers and of information distribution in the building and construction sector. The performance-based building theme seems to have captured the interest of a significant number of groups, and I hope reflects that we have better explained the purposes of these themes. It underlies the theme of the 2001 Congress.

The element of the ‘proactive’ approach, which was addressed first – Sustainable Construction - resulted in the CIB Agenda 21 booklet, which has been widely disseminated and is increasingly being quoted. CIB Agenda 21 has now been translated into Spanish and Portuguese, and was a central item of a significant Symposium in Sao Paulo in November. It is clear that there are differences in the implications of ‘sustainable construction’ for countries at different stages of development. The Board agreed in Sao Paulo to apply some CIB funds to partly underwrite a project, which will look specifically at these issues through the eyes of developing countries.

A third planned element of the ‘proactive’ approach refers to an analytical look at how buildings projects happen – in popular terms, ‘Building Process Re-Engineering’. Following a report to the Board meeting in Sao Paulo of an initial workshop on this topic, a scoping study is now being carried out which will define how CIB can best be involved in this issue.

CIB Student Chapters
Another future-focussed innovation that has been formally introduced over the triennium has been the concept of ‘CIB Student Chapters’, building it from the ideas expressed during the Gavle Congress by Rick Coble and Gary Smith. The student chapters do not receive CIB funds directly as a result of their recognition, nor do their members pay any fees to CIB. The most important effect of these student chapters, from CIB’s point of view, is to put the CIB ‘brand name’ in front of students while they are still at the training stage, in the hope that it will stick with them as they move onto careers where they need to access information sources. The Board has laid down a number of criteria for having our name attached to them, which appear to be accepted by the educational institutions. We now have chapters formed in educational institutions in USA, China, and UK, with preliminary interest also expressed from Netherlands, Chile, and Sweden.

The fee structure
Opportunities have been taken, wherever possible, to relate CIB activities to projects which other agencies are seeking to fund, so that some of CIB’s objectives can be attained by being funded from other sources than membership fees, in a way that defrays some of CIB’s corporate expenses.
But the cost of operations at the office in Rotterdam to meet the needs and expectations of members continues to outstrip the income from membership fees, and the Board has determined that a new fee structure be proposed to the General Assembly to help to address this. The fees have not changed in the period 1999-2001, having been set in October 1998 to cover this whole period, and a significant fraction of the changes address inflation compensation.

At the same time, the Board has proposed a structural change to the fee system. Careful analysis of the benefits accruing to, and costs attributable to, different classes of members suggests that there is a significant inequity between those in the two levels of Associate members, and between the Full and Associate Member classes. The proposals therefore aim to gradually close the membership fee gap between the two levels of Associate Members, and more slowly to close the gap between the Full and Associate Member classes.

Some arguments were advanced that the Full Member subscriptions should not rise at all. The Board rejected these, because it believed that the Full Members, by their nature, are those more likely to benefit from the activities of the Secretariat in promoting the ‘proactive’ approach, and therefore should not be exempt from fee rises.

The proposed new fees structure would still not cover the costs, if membership did not grow, but it would lessen the annual deficit. The reserves of CIB are healthy, and can cover a small annual deficit. Indeed over the term of this Board the reserves have risen in nominal terms, primarily due to good performance of CIB investments. The Board is conscious that as CIB enters on a phase of obtaining and applying or further disseminating funds from agencies such as EU, it must not allow the mind-set that this source of funds, nor continued highly positive investment returns, is permanent. Thus even if at present these activities have allowed the reserves to be maintained, the organisation cannot develop a dependency on them without the potential to suddenly need to curtail activities, in a way that might be very disruptive to services to members and CIB activities.

**Sebestyen Awards**
The Officers Committee is charged by the Board with administering the Sebestyen Award. This Award honours Gyula Sebestyen, a long-serving Secretary-General of CIB, and is presented to a young researcher from a CIB Full or Associate Member each year to allow pursuit of a project in another CIB Member organisation. CIB regards the award as meritorious, and lays down a number of conditions regarding applications for it. After very careful consideration the Officers Committee meeting in Sao Paolo decided that the 2001 award should be made to Dennis Macozoma of CSIR Boutek in South Africa, the title of whose project is ‘Realising the full potential of the secondary construction materials market’, which he plans to study at University of Florida.

The Officers remain concerned that despite the considerable efforts made by the Secretariat to publicise the Award it continues to attract small numbers of applicants. They reported this to the Board, and the Board was advised that there would be proposals forthcoming for a change in the way CIB makes this award. The Board have not, at the time of writing this report, reviewed these new proposals.

**My personal thanks**
I wish to thank my colleagues on the Board, over half of whom are not available for re-election, and especially the Officers, of whom none but myself are eligible. They have willingly accepted
responsibility for tasks, for which they have received no recompense from CIB, to address the strategic issues that are referred to in the various components of this Report to members, in addition to the duties their employers expect them to carry out as their everyday professional work. I trust that reflection from the future will show that we have taken actions to position CIB well for the future, and to have positioned CIB even more explicitly as a highly-relevant central point for all those who are interested in new knowledge in the building and construction sector, no matter what discipline or industry sub-sector they work in.

I wish to thank my employer, BRANZ, for their support to me in my term and in particular for their support for the Congress preparation. Without the efforts of a number of my BRANZ colleagues, and in particular our Project Planning Manager Sue Hill, the Congress would not have been so smoothly developed.

It has been a time of great challenge and great change, both for CIB and for the organisations, which are members of CIB, but it has been an exciting era in which to have been CIB President, and I am indebted to the members for the privilege which they have provided to me.

Thank you.

John Duncan