

Chair's report on Council meeting of 4 February 2008

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

John Gaventa (Chair)
Maureen Connelly
Susannah Cox
Gareth Davies
Andy Friend
Vanessa Godfrey
Jackie Gunn
Adebayo Olukoshi
Angela Sealey
Richard Taylor
Stan Thekaekara

Corporate Management and Staff

Barbara Stocking (Director)
John Shaw (Finance & Information Services Director)
Jane Cotton (Human Resources Director)
Penny Lawrence (International Director)
Phil Bloomer (Campaigns & Policy Director)
Cathy Ferrier (Fundraising & Supporter Marketing Director)
David McCullough (Trading Director)
Joss Saunders (Company Secretary)
Anne Gornall (Policy and Trustees Officer)

Apologies were received from Sandra Dawson. The Chair welcomed Judy Mitchell from Oxfam International and Oxfam Australia; Judy later presented the Oxfam International governance peer review with trustees (see below).

This was the first meeting of Council's annual cycle for 2007/08 and took place in Oxford.

1. The Director gave an update on recent events. These included:-

- *Marks & Spencers clothes exchange.* David McCullough (Trading Director) gave details of the launch on 28 January. This was an arrangement with Marks & Spencers whereby clothing handed into Oxfam shops which had their label was exchanged for a voucher to spend in their shops.
- *World Economic Forum, Davos.* Reflecting on the recent meeting, Barbara Stocking said that further progress was needed in developing the relationship between international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and global companies/big.
- *Afghanistan.* Barbara Stocking gave details of recent briefings which had outlined Oxfam's concerns about the delivery of aid in Afghanistan - including difficult but important issues around the amount and quality of aid, and the connection between development and security.
- *Kenya.* Penny Lawrence (International Director) advised that the unfolding events in Kenya were being closely monitored. Primary support was being provided to partners working at the community level on civil society and conflict resolution.
- *Middle East.* Barbara Stocking spoke about her trip to Gaza early in 2008 and gave details about ongoing advocacy work which was running in tandem with humanitarian delivery in the area.

2. The meeting then moved on to the second of six scheduled reviews of the strategic plan. Jane Cocking (incoming Humanitarian Director) introduced a session to look in some depth at Oxfam's work on humanitarian assistance and protection. She was supported in her presentation by Maureen Connelly (lead trustee for humanitarian work), Penny Lawrence (International Director), and a number of

humanitarian staff. All in the ensuing discussion acknowledged that the central purpose of Oxfam's humanitarian response was to enable people to rebuild their lives with dignity. The key conclusions were the importance of an integrated humanitarian, advocacy and development approach, the importance of working effectively with partners and local institutions, and the fact that the best people to fix problems were those closest to the ground.

3. Leading on from the above discussion, Andy Friend presented his report on a recent trustee trip to Uganda and Ethiopia. This again had demonstrated the importance of Oxfam working closely with local democratically elected institutions in order to ensure effective delivery and sustainability of programmes.
4. The Honorary Treasurer (Gareth Davies) gave his regular report from the recent meeting of the Trustee Audit and Finance Group. This had included a useful update from Penny Lawrence on control and financial issues in the International Division together with implementation of the partnership policy agreed by Council in July 2007.
5. Judy Mitchell presented a paper on the Oxfam International governance peer review and thanked Oxfam GB trustees for their response to a recent questionnaire on governance. A number of points were raised, which will feed into Judy Mitchell's report to the Oxfam International Board later in 2008. John Shaw (Finance Director) also presented a paper demonstrating Oxfam GB's compliance with external codes.
6. Council then carried out its annual review. Most of the recommendations made at the last review in February 2007 had been implemented. Trustees on three key points arising from appraisal discussions between the Chair and individual trustees – how to further refine debates and input at the strategic level, the balance between strategic and monitoring activity, and the most effective way to receive input from people at grassroots level. A number of points were raised, many of which will feed into the Council meeting and travel programme for the coming year.
7. Following agreement of the accountability report in November 2007, Council approved an open information policy which outlined a structure for the release of information into the public domain. This would be implemented in the coming months.
8. Council also agreed a process for the transfer of assets and programmes from Oxfam GB to the new Oxfam India. Trustees sent congratulations to all the staff who had contributed to the process so far, and gave best wishes to the incoming board, management and staff of Oxfam India.
9. Finally Council agreed proposals to diversify and widen stakeholder engagement in Oxfam. These were proposed both to replace the Oxfam Assembly and also to engage at greater depth with some key constituencies e.g. programme staff and partners, shop volunteers, people with a long relationship of contribution to Oxfam.

The meeting closed with an evaluation to inform future meetings and agenda planning.

John Gaventa
Chair