

Chair's report on Council meeting of 10/11 July 2008

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

John Gaventa (Chair)
Maureen Connelly
Gareth Davies
Sandra Dawson
Andy Friend
Vanessa Godfrey
Adebayo Olukoshi
Angela Sealey
Richard Taylor
Stan Thekaekara

Corporate Management and Staff

Barbara Stocking (Chief Executive)
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)
Sarah Ireland (Regional Director for East Asia)
Joss Saunders (Company Secretary & Legal Adviser)
Anne Gornall (Policy and Trustees Officer)

Apologies were received from Susannah Cox and Jackie Gunn.

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

1. On the evening of Thursday 10 July and the first part of Friday 11 July, Council had its main annual strategic discussion. Moving on from discussion in July 2007 about the changing role of international NGOs, trustees took a step back in order to look at the impact of the global economic downturn and how this is likely to affect poverty. Key inputs were made by three speakers:
 - Gerard Lyons, Chief Economist and Group Head of Global Research at Standard Chartered Bank. Gerard spoke about the effects of the global economic crisis on poor people.
 - Chris Coulter, Vice-President of Globescan. Chris spoke about attitudes and beliefs about NGOs and poverty.
 - Duncan Green, Head of Research at Oxfam GB. Trustees considered the key themes from Duncan's recently published Oxfam book (*From Poverty to Power: How active citizens and effective states can change the world*).

Reflecting on the different inputs received, trustees felt that Oxfam should continue to work on a broader 'big picture' analysis - while at the same time realising the organisation's potential to present visions of hope, new models and new channels for action.

2. The strategic discussion was followed on Friday 11 July by the Chief Executive's report. Barbara Stocking gave an update on recent events, which included:-
 - A number of summits and global meetings in June and July - the FAO food summit in Rome, the UN task force on food, and the G8 meeting in Tokyo.
 - Oxfam's work through partners in Myanmar (Burma). After the meeting Oxfam obtained a memorandum to operate to operate in Myanmar and with a small team in Rangoon.
 - Positive feedback on the 'Be Humankind' advertising campaign which was designed to familiarise existing and potential supporters with Oxfam's work.

- The forthcoming first award of the Susie Smith Memorial Prize for a publication on HIV/AIDS. Barbara Stocking would present this to YONECO (an NGO in Malawi which works with young people).
3. Sarah Ireland, the Regional Director for East Asia, then gave a presentation on Oxfam's work in East Asia and outlined the regional change strategy for East Asia. Given the particular challenges in some countries (not least those defined as middle income), it was important to have a clear analysis to enable Oxfam to maximise its presence in the region. The region also had some potential to be a knowledge centre with learning applicable to other regions e.g. Africa.
 4. Council considered and approved the Strategic Steer 2009/10-2011/12. There was some discussion around the different financial context that Oxfam was now facing which, while challenging, gave the opportunity to introduce greater cost effectiveness, to tighten operations and to focus on priorities.
 5. As part of the scheduled programme to review the key areas of Oxfam's strategic plan, the Corporate Human Resources Director and senior managers ran a session entitled 'Developing our People'. After a presentation taking in a wide range of issues and initiatives, trustees considered some questions around the recruitment of regional staff – both in terms of accommodating different cultural approaches and possibly some support to grassroots and educational providers in order to enable staff progression within Oxfam.
 6. Following on the discussion at the April Council meeting, Cathy Ferrier (Supporter Marketing Director) presented her final paper on the proposed group via which Oxfam can engage with high value individual donors. Within the wider context of continuing Oxfam's main emphasis of fundraising from a large number of regular or single givers, Council agreed the paper.
 7. The Chair and Chief Executive gave a number of updates on work being carried out as part of Oxfam International; many of these focussed on governance issues. Additionally Council was advised of the timing for the launch of a new Oxfam (Oxfam India) on 1 September 2008.
 8. Finally Council considered a number of items as follows:-
 - The final Quarterly Report against the objectives for the financial year 2007/08.
 - A possible constitutional update at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting on 5 December, pending the outcome of consultation with the Charity Commission.
 - Process to enable trustee input to the Draft Statutory Report and Accounts prior to discussion by the Trustee Audit and Finance Group and later by full Council in September 2008.

There were a number of other updates (including the recent award of a damehood to Barbara Stocking), and the meeting closed with an evaluation to inform future meetings and agenda planning.

John Gaventa
Chair