

Chair's report on Council meeting of 5 December 2008

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

John Gaventa (Chair)
Maureen Connelly
Susannah Cox
Gareth Davies
Sandra Dawson
Andy Friend
Vanessa Godfrey
Jackie Gunn
Angela Sealey
Richard Taylor

Corporate Management and Staff

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 Adebayo Olukoshi and Sam Thekaekara. The Chair welcomed Matthew Martin (an incoming trustee) and Joris Voorhoeve (Chair of Oxfam Novib); both were attending as observers.

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

1. The Chief Executive gave an update on recent events. These included:-
 - Oxfam's work on water and sanitation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
 - Work on food aid in Zimbabwe and a public health programme following the outbreak of cholera.
 - Agreements reached at the Oxfam International Board meeting in November. These included a more streamlined governance structure and the agreement to move over time to a single management structure for Oxfams in any given country.
2. Council considered Oxfam's strategic plan update 2009/10-2011/12, especially in the light of the impact of the worsening economic situation on Oxfam. The new strategic plan took into account some changes emerging from Oxfam's Fit for the Future review, and approved a framework for future changes if necessary. Before approving the update, trustees made a number of suggestions and reflected on the lessons learned during previous recessions.
3. Council then considered a paper on Oxfam's digital vision i.e. how Oxfam may use developments in digital technology to engage differently or more creatively with supporters. Trustees expressed enthusiasm about the possibilities for digital engagement with supporters, and it was suggested that the web could be used to amplify and articulate the voice of poor people. They then considered an update on the Information Strategy Review which would contribute to the developing digital vision. The Trustee Audit and Finance Group will review implementation.

4. The Honorary Treasurer (Gareth Davies) presented the annual report of the Trustee Audit and Finance Group. Trustees also received the annual Control Assurance Report from Oxfam's management. It was noted that the auditors (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP) had delivered a positive management letter and the group was not making any new recommendations to Council. Gareth Davies expressed appreciation for the steady management of Oxfam's finances in a difficult environment.
5. Council agreed the majority of trustee and group appointments for the year 2008/09, and noted the proposed appointment of a second trustee (Maja Daruwala). The appointments went to the Annual General Meeting later in the day.
6. Finally Council and management paid tribute to Jackie Gunn and Angela Sealey, who were retiring as trustees. Jackie had made a particular contribution as lead trustee to the Trading Division, while Angela had served as Vice-Chair and in a number of committee roles. Both Jackie and Angela shared some final reflections with Council.

During the afternoon trustees joined the larger meeting of the Oxfam Association and received an update on Oxfam International. This included a contribution from Joris Voorhoeve on the work of Oxfam Novib. This meeting adjourned to the AGM, and in the evening Council and the Association were joined by the Friends of Oxfam who attended for their annual meeting.

John Gaventa
Chair