

Chair's report on Council meeting of 26 September 2008

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

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

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)
Charles Abani (Regional Director for Southern Africa)
Anne Gornall (Policy and Trustees Officer)

Apologies were received from Maureen Connelly and Sandra Dawson. Barbara Stocking (Chief Executive) joined the meeting by telephone to give her Chief Executive's report, and Joss Saunders (Company Secretary and Legal Adviser) joined the meeting for the discussion on proposed changes to Oxfam's charitable objects and other legal issues.

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

1. Trustees considered the first quarterly report against the objectives for the financial year 2008/09. A number of refinements and changes were suggested which will feed into future quarterly reports.
2. Charles Abani gave an update on the issues and challenges in Southern Africa. These included the issue of inequality, the pivotal role of South Africa in the region and the role of China.
3. As part of the scheduled programme to review the key areas of Oxfam's strategic plan, Charles Abani - supported by Jacob Nanjakululu (Director of the Global Centre of Learning on HIV and AIDS), made a presentation on the HIV/AIDS pandemic. They cited three case studies involving Oxfam's work in India, Angola and Malawi. The implications for Oxfam's programme ranged across development and humanitarian work together with its partnerships and its advocacy. There was also an additional key link to women's rights since many AIDS sufferers were women who had been subjected to violence. Trustees considered these issues in some depth. They reinforced the need for a holistic analysis which empowered the staff in affected regions, informed attitudes and behaviours around violence, and promoted Oxfam's role as a facilitator and enabler. They also felt that the location of the global centre in South Africa was helpful in order to enable exchanges between the affected areas and the sharing of good practice.

4. Barbara Stocking then joined the meeting by telephone from the US where she had been attending meetings with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and a UN event on the Millennium Development Goals. She gave some details on these meetings and also on Oxfam's response to the global economic crisis. The Corporate Management Team was committed to making 10-15 per cent variable cost reductions in Oxfam House. These would be discussed with Honorary Officers (the Chair, Vice-Chair and Honorary Treasurer) prior to the strategic plan update at the December Council meeting.
5. Trustees then considered some proposals on the future growth and governance of Oxfam International in order to give input to the Oxfam International board meeting in November. This was an ongoing discussion; both trustees and management were encouraged to share any further observations with the Chair.
6. The Honorary Treasurer (Gareth Davies) updated trustees on issues discussed at the recent meeting of the Trustee Audit and Finance Group. Council then considered and approved the draft annual report and accounts for 2007/08 and raised some issues for future consideration. They confirmed compliance with their statutory responsibilities, and approved the accounts to go forward to the Annual General Meeting on 5 December 2008.
7. With some minor amendments and reviewing process in place, Council approved an amended strategic plan planning process to enable close alignment with the six year Oxfam International planning cycle and a rolling three year budgeting process.
8. With input and advice from the Company Secretary and Legal Adviser (Joss Saunders), Council approved an updated paper on the specific delegation arrangements between governance and Oxfam management. They also considered proposed changes to Oxfam GB's charitable objects and authorised Honorary Officers to sign off on the final wording. The timing of any final agreement on this wording was subject to the outcome of further discussions with the Charity Commission.
9. Council then approved proposed appointments to Council and the Association to go forward to the AGM on 5 December 2008. Trustees also considered the annual report of the Recruitment and Development Group (a sub-committee of Council which is concerned with recruitment to Oxfam's governance together with the induction and training of governance members). They expressed appreciation for the group's work during the year.
10. Finally trustees received a number of updates on forthcoming events, and agreed an ex-gratia payment in connection with an Oxfam legacy.

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

John Gaventa
Chair