

Chair's report on Council meeting of 6 February 2009

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

John Gaventa (Chair)
Maureen Connelly
Maja Daruwala
Gareth Davies
Sandra Dawson
Andy Friend
Vanessa Godfrey
Matthew Martin
Adebayo Olukoshi
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)
David McCullough (Trading Director)
Joss Saunders (Company Secretary)
Anne Gornall (Policy and Trustees Officer)

Apologies were received from Susannah Cox. The Chair welcomed Matthew Martin and Maja Daruwala for their first meeting as trustees.

This was the first meeting of Council's annual cycle for 2008/09 and took place in Oxford.

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

- Work in Oxfam International to finalise criteria for new affiliates and to establish a single management structure for Oxfams in individual countries. These would be developed through the year and discussed at future Council meetings.
- The World Economic Forum at Davos. As one of the NGO leaders invited to attend with fees being waived, she had been able to use the forum as an opportunity to spread Oxfam's message - on climate change, food, and the effect of the current economic crisis on poor people.
- With additional input from John Shaw (Finance and Information Systems Director), Penny Lawrence (International Director), and Gareth Davies (Honorary Treasurer), Barbara Stocking updated trustees on the current financial situation with particular reference to the second quarterly report for 2008/09. While a more in depth discussion would take place when the annual plan was presented to Council in April 2009, the organisation was looking towards the medium term. This was likely to involve some programme cuts in the financial year 2010/11.
- Trustees then reflected on the recent Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) Gaza appeal and issues arising from this, given the fact that the BBC had declined to broadcast the appeal. Trustees raised a number of concerns, particularly with regard to future humanitarian space for organisations like Oxfam. It was agreed that a joint letter from the Chief Executive and Chair would be sent to the DEC to express these concerns. Trustees also confirmed that they fully backed the DEC decision to go ahead with the appeal despite the BBC's decision.

As part of its regular programme of reviews on key areas of Oxfam's work, Council considered Oxfam's work on gender. This was supported by a number of presentations, including one from Olga Ghazaryan (Regional Director for Middle East, Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States). Olga outlined the challenges involved but also the progress made with

Oxfam's gender equity work in Yemen. This included legal services for women in prisons and communities, work on health and gender budgeting, and the campaign against early marriage. These programme examples informed much of the subsequent discussion and reflection. Trustees endorsed the direction of the organisation's work on gender and its implementation in a complex context together with an increased emphasis on monitoring in order to demonstrate the work more clearly. Given the fact that 70% of poor people are women, it is important always to ask the question of our programmes: 'How will this affect women?'

Council considered a paper 'Enterprise Governance and People's Power', and agreed processes to reinforce the governance and management of new non-Trading related enterprises. With regard to the specific case of People's Power, Council delegated the final decision to the Honorary Officers (John Gaventa, Vanessa Godfrey and Gareth Davies) together with Andy Friend, who would then report back to Council.

Updates were provided on a number of issues which would be discussed in more depth at the April and July Council meetings. These were:-

- Work in hand to refine and expand engagement with supporters in the UK. This included 'Oxfam Live', Trading and Campaigning events, and a second 'Oxfam Connects' meeting on 1 October.
- Trustee input to date on the three year review of the risk register, which would feed into the paper for April Council.
- Ongoing discussions on the Oxfam International review of ownership and use of the name 'Oxfam'.

Trustees and the Corporate Management Team then took part in the annual review of Council. They agreed that trustees would where possible take a higher profile at Oxfam events, visit shops, and combine Oxfam representation if feasible in the context of their professional activities or international trips. The Corporate Management Team expressed appreciation for trustees' contribution to strategic discussion, in particular on future scanning and insights that might be missing from the current analysis. Some suggestions were made on how trustees could make input on future agenda setting and agenda planning. Finally Council agreed a more comprehensive reporting structure for Health and Safety, Corporate Manslaughter and Security. In addition to lead trustee input, this would now be combined with the Quarterly Report statutory item on the Council agenda.

Finally John Gaventa presented a report on his recent trip to Angola, and Andy Friend updated trustees on arrangements for the Trustee/Corporate Management team for Trailwalker in 2009; the team had been named 'Any Other Business'.

John Gaventa
Chair