

Chair's report on Council meeting of 9/10 July 2009

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

John Gaventa (Chair)
Gareth Davies
Sandra Dawson
Andy Friend
Vanessa Godfrey
Matthew Martin
Adebayo Olukoshi
Richard Taylor

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)
David McCullough (Trading Director)
Biranchi Upadhyaya (Regional Director for South Asia)
Joss Saunders (Company Secretary)
Anne Gornall (Policy and Trustees Officer)

Apologies were received from Maureen Connelly, Maja Daruwala and Stan Thekaekara.

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

1. On the evening of Thursday 9 July and the first part of Friday 10 July, Council had its main annual strategic discussion. Trustees and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) reflected both on long term questions and in particular on the importance of national and local level change, especially in the light of the current economic crisis. They concluded that Oxfam needs very specific demands to those in power, attuned to the times and recognising what is achievable.

Key inputs were made by four speakers:

- Naomi Hossain, Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
- Yao Graham, Director, Third World Network Africa.
- Duncan Green, Head of Research at Oxfam GB.
- Sam Bickersteth, Head of Programme Policy Team, Oxfam GB.

Council considered the inputs and the issues in some depth. Trustees acknowledged that, while the challenge in the short to medium term was to understand the impacts of the global economic crisis on poor people, further work was needed at the national and global level to understand the broader global changes that were occurring. The priority was to remain flexible in order to adapt, change and come up with new solutions to the problems faced by poor people.

2. The strategic discussion was followed on the afternoon of Friday 10 July by the Chief Executive's Report. Barbara Stocking and other Directors gave an update on recent events as follows:-
 - Two awards at the Association of Charity Shops Annual Awards, and the Institute of Fundraising award for best corporate partnership.
 - A well known Oxfam volunteer (Barbara Walmsley) had won the award for Volunteer Fundraiser of the Year. Barbara was well known for a number of initiatives e.g. fasting in Cookham, Oxfam Bridal, and as Oxfam's 'Green Granny' on YouTube.
 - David McCullough (Trading Director) gave details of recent shop conferences, attended by around 1000 volunteers.

- A range of issues relating to Oxfam's humanitarian work. These included efforts to secure media coverage and funding for Oxfam's work in Pakistan
 - The ongoing Climate Change campaign **Here & Now**.
 - Work with Oxfam International to establish a single management system in individual countries.
 - Some current new fundraising initiatives.
3. Council then considered a number of governance and business issues as follows:-
- The fourth quarterly report for 2008/09, including an update on health and safety issues.
 - The updated reserves policy, which was approved.
 - Governance of Oxfam's digital responsibilities – recognising that this form of communication was evolving at some speed.
 - Accountability issues. These included work on expenses in tandem with other charities.
 - Proposed changes to Oxfam's constitution to bring it in line with the Companies Act 2006.
3. Following their recent deaths, Council then paid tribute to Michael Harris (Overseas Director 1972-84) and Guy Stringer (Oxfam Director 1983-85); both had long careers with Oxfam and had made a huge contribution to Oxfam's work and mission. They also thanked John Shaw, the outgoing Finance and Information Services Director, for his service to Oxfam. John had been a huge support, particularly over the last year in very challenging economic circumstances.

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

John Gaventa
Chair