

Chair's report on Council meeting of 4 December 2009

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

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

Corporate Management and Staff

Barbara Stocking (Chief Executive)
Bob Humphreys (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 Maja Daruwala.

The Chair welcomed two incoming trustees (Tricia Zipfel and Rajiv Joshi) who attended this meeting as observers. A third incoming trustee (Marjorie Scardino) had sent her apologies.

This was the fifth and final meeting of Council's annual cycle for 2009/10 and took place in Oxford.

The meeting started with updates from the Chief Executive (Barbara Stocking) and members of Oxfam's management team. These were as follows:-

Humanitarian issues

Barbara Stocking and Penny Lawrence (International Director) updated trustees on Oxfam's recent work in East Asia and Pakistan, East Africa (the food crisis) and Afghanistan. They advised that efforts continued to try and enable Oxfam to operate again in South Sudan.

Development and programme issues

Barbara Stocking gave details about the Enterprise Development Programme which had been set up to provide support to enterprises in the developing world. Penny Lawrence also gave details of a recent strategic review of Oxfam's livelihoods work.

Campaigns

Barbara Stocking and Phil Bloomer (Campaigns & Policy Director) updated trustees on 'The Wave' climate change demonstration which was taking place the next day (Saturday 5 December). Climate change would remain the campaign focus in 2010 but be reviewed in more depth both by the Programme Review Group and by Council during 2010.

An update was also provided on preparations for the UK General election together with meetings between both Oxfam representatives and representatives from different political parties .

Finance and fundraising

Cathy Ferrier (Fundraising and Supporting Marketing Director) made some projections on the performance of Oxfam's fundraising which came from a number of diverse sources.

Oxfam International

Barbara Stocking briefed trustees on progress with the planned single management structure for Oxfams in individual countries. This is a three to five year project which aims to improve the way Oxfam affiliates work across the world. Trustees expressed appreciation for the range of work that had been carried out in order to move this forward, and reiterated their support for the key purpose of this exercise i.e. to improve the impact that Oxfam could make on the lives of poor people. Further work would be done to assess the decision-making progress and outcomes together with the key risks. This would initially be taken forward by the Trustee Audit and Finance Group in early 2010.

The meeting then moved on to the business and governance items on the main agenda as follows:-

1. The Honorary Treasure introduced papers which had been initially considered by the Trustee Audit and Finance Group (TAFG). These were the TAFG Annual Report, the Control Assurance Report and the Risk Register Report. A number of points were raised with regard to Oxfam's financial management and diversification of funding streams and the improved level of financial controls. At the same time trustees recognised the many challenges which lay ahead including the implementation of the Oxfam International single management system and the UK general election in 2010. A more comprehensive review of the risk register would take place in the spring of 2010.
2. Council approved a framework for enterprise governance to enable Oxfam to support the establishment of programme focused new business ventures and partnerships.
3. Council noted the second Quarterly Report for 2009/10.
4. Prior to the Annual General Meeting later in the day, trustees approved the membership of the sub-groups reporting to Council together with the re-appointment of the three Honorary Officers:
 - John Gaventa (Chair) renewed for a further term of two years.
 - Vanessa Godfrey (Vice-Chair) renewed for a further term of two years.
 - Gareth Davies (Honorary Treasurer) renewed for a further term of three years.
5. Council approved the process to enable appointment of the next Oxfam Chair to succeed John Gaventa after the 2011 AGM.
6. Andy Friend, the lead trustee for Trading, spoke to his paper updating Council on work being carried out in Oxfam's Trading Division. Trustees acknowledged the energy and creativity of the Trading Division and Oxfam shops which were operating in a very challenging retail environment. They also welcomed a recent very positive volunteers survey and audit. David McCullough (Trading Director) thanked Andy Friend for his support. He also expressed appreciation for the support of Oxfam's shop volunteers who provided a key link to communities in the UK.
7. Maureen Connelly (Co-Chair of the Programme Review Group) provided a report on the group's activities over the past year. Trustees on the group confirmed that the discussions were extremely useful and provided an opportunity to give more in depth consideration to issues which came to Council. The papers were available to all trustees.

Finally Council bade farewell to two trustees who had made a significant contribution to Council (Richard Taylor and Stan Thekaekara). Both Richard and Stan reflected on their time on Council, made some suggestions for future discussions, and shared their perspectives with some humour. Council then adjourned for a meeting of the Oxfam Association, the Annual General Meeting, and the annual Friends of Oxfam meeting.

John Gaventa
Chair