

Chair's report on Council meeting of 21 May 2010

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

John Gaventa (Chair)
Maureen Connelly
Gareth Davies
Sandra Dawson
Andy Friend
Vanessa Godfrey
Rajv Joshi
Marjorie Scardino
Tricia Zipfel

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)
Thomas Schultz-Jagow (Communications Director)
Joss Saunders (Company Secretary)
Anne Gornall (Policy and Trustees Officer)

Apologies were received from Maja Daruwala, Matthew Martin and Adebayo Olukoshi. This was the second meeting of Council's annual cycle for 2009/10 and took place in Oxford.

The Chair welcomed Thomas Schultz-Jagow for his first Council meeting as Communications Director.

In her regular update to trustees, Barbara Stocking and members of Oxfam's management team covered a number of key areas as follows:-

Humanitarian issues

At the Chair's request, Barbara Stocking updated Council on some of her activities as part of international humanitarian and ngo consortia. These included the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) and the Global Humanitarian Platform. She had chaired SCHR for two years and would be standing down in July. She was also co-chair of the Global Humanitarian Platform which met annually.

Barbara Stocking told trustees about work in hand to prepare for a six month review following the earthquake in Haiti. She felt that Oxfam could be proud of its work on water and sanitation together with the provision of plastic sheeting and innovative cash for water programming.

Barbara Stocking and Penny Lawrence (International Director) gave details of Oxfam's response to the food crisis in West Africa. Funding had now been agreed and food vouchers were being distributed in Niger, Mali and Chad.

Development and programme issues

Barbara Stocking gave details of a recent trip to Georgia and Azerbaijan by herself and Bob Humphreys (Finance and Information Services Director). In Azerbaijan they had viewed work with the Unilever-funded project to produce vegetables for Knorr stock cubes.

Campaigns

Phil Bloomer (Campaigns & Policy Director) updated trustees on work with the new coalition government in the UK. It was encouraging that both parties in the coalition were committed to 0.7% of national income for aid. There were also some areas which Oxfam would need to monitor e.g. the proposed link with the military. Trustees commented on other possible areas for discussion and work, given the mix of people and policies in the new government. With the anticipated cuts in expenditure they also reflected on the importance of economic forecasting, which was very much part of Oxfam's ongoing management agenda.

Phil Bloomer also gave an update on Oxfam's climate change campaign, both in terms of Oxfam GB and also the wider Oxfam International family. Trustees agreed that Oxfam GB remain committed to campaigning on climate justice.

Barbara Stocking then gave an update on the recent Oxfam International Board meeting. Following on from this, the Chair shared the first draft of a revised Oxfam international purpose and values statement. A process was agreed for sign-off of the key legal documents to implement the new Oxfam International single management system. As this was a change to Oxfam GB's governance arrangements, Oxfam's Association would be updated and it would be discussed at the annual Association meeting in October 2010.

Council and the Corporate Management Team then took part in the seventh in the series of strategic reviews agreed in 2007, in this case the ongoing area of culture change. After introductions by Barbara Stocking and Jane Cotton (Human Resources Director), there was some reflection on a discussion the previous evening where individual trustees had reflected on their personal experience and the implementation of culture change within their own organisations. There was an acknowledgement of the depth and strength of Oxfam's culture based on the organisation's history of campaigning, innovation and solid programmes together with individuals' commitment to their work. In order to maximise on this in terms of delivery, initiatives were in place to improve project management skills and to facilitate cross-divisional working. In three discussion groups a number of useful suggestions were made to feed into the ongoing work. These identified a number of important elements, including the importance of leadership across Oxfam as a whole.

Looking back to the first strategic review of the cycle in 2007 (on fundraising), trustees also received an update on recent initiatives and work in this area. This was led by Cathy Ferrier (Fundraising and Supporter Marketing Director) and staff who updated trustees on plans for regular giving, the work of fundraising partnerships, and community fundraising. Trustees expressed appreciation for the variety and quality of the work in Supporter Marketing Division. This consolidated Oxfam's experience and past relationship with its donors while reaching out to new supporters and engaging in many different ways.

The rest of the Council meeting covered the following:-

- Issues discussed at the Trustee Audit and Finance Group on 7 May.
- Organisational risk register. Trustees felt that the 2009/10 analysis of risks and mitigating controls was adequate to support their statement in the annual report and accounts. They also approved the major organisational risks identified for 2010/11. The final register was signed off but it would also be underpinned by the assurance of further registers at a divisional level, which would be reported on in October 2010.
- An update on Oxfam's engagement with the private sector as a way to help lead people out of poverty. This work was ongoing and Council would be kept informed.
- The framework for the new accountability report (Oxfam's accountability commitments 2010-13). The final draft would come to Council in July 2010.
- The 11th annual report on the Trustee Code of Conduct, which was approved.
- The schedule for Council meetings in 2011.

Finally Council welcomed a number of humanitarian support personnel who had attended a Humanitarian Learning Forum in Oxford during the week. Trustees appreciated the opportunity to share some of the challenges faced by these staff who are deployed across the Oxfam programme, often at very short notice.

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

John Gaventa
Chair