

Chair's report on Council meeting of 15 October 2010

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

John Gaventa (Chair)
Gareth Davies
Sandra Dawson
Andy Friend
Vanessa Godfrey
Rajv Joshi
Matthew Martin
Adebayo Olukoshi
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 (Trustees Officer)

Apologies were received from Maureen Connelly, Maja Daruwala, and Marjorie Scardino. This was the fourth and final meeting of Council's annual cycle for 2010/11 and took place in Oxford.

The Chair also welcomed the following observers: James Darcy (Trustee designate); Tony McMullan (Chair, Oxfam Ireland); Jim Clarken (Chief Executive, Oxfam Ireland); Tracey Dyer (Executive Assistant and Governance Co-ordinator, Oxfam International).

Matters arising from minutes of July Council meeting

The Chair advised that Honorary Officers had signed off the Oxfam International single management agreement and the accountability report.

Following approval by Council in July, the Association had agreed that the annual report and accounts could be publicised before the AGM, and it had been printed and made available on the website.

Chief Executives Report

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

In anticipation of the anniversary of the Haiti earthquake, Barbara Stocking gave details of Oxfam's often innovative work on water, sanitation and livelihoods.

Work continued in Mali and Chad, with the ongoing food crisis. In Pakistan, large numbers were also being reached. However, Oxfam and the wider humanitarian community were faced with challenges on how best to respond to disasters of this scale.

At recent meetings in Rome, Oxfam had been commended for its work on dealing with food in protracted crises, but interventions needed to be long-term and sustainable.

Development and programme issues

Barbara Stocking updated trustees on the anticipated launch of the Oxfam/Unilever stock cubes initiative in early November.

Campaigns

Barbara Stocking spoke on discussions with the coalition government over the summer, particularly with regard to 'leaks' about government aid spending. Trustees reiterated that aid was important to development, and also morally legitimate and practical.

Organisational and reputational issues

Members of CMT and Council then updated the meeting on issues of: advertising standards, with a climate change complaint not upheld; archives, regarding the transfer to the Bodleian library; Oxfam history, with a commemorative piece planned to celebrate 75 years; and anti-corruption legislation, with the stringent provisions of the UK Bribery Act.

Barbara Stocking also drew trustees' attention to reports on security and Oxfam's programme in Afghanistan. These would be considered at greater length at the meeting in January 2011.

Oxfam International

Following July's discussions Council considered a further draft of the Purpose and Values Statement. The updated statement and observations of the Chair and CMT were generally supported and some additional suggestions were also made.

Strategic Steer 2011/12 – 2013/14

Barbara Stocking and Bob Humphreys introduced the Strategic Steer, and its focus on food justice in a resource constrained world, effective private sector engagement, and the centrality of women's rights. The Trustee Audit and Finance Group (TAFG) recommended the steer to Council, as the financial elements were sound. With some suggestions from the trustees incorporated, the steer was approved by Council.

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

1. Issues discussed at the Trustee Audit and Finance Group on 1 October. The Strategic Steer had been the main item, along with the organisational risk register and a progress report on impact reporting and outcome measurements. The group also had its annual private session with PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (Oxfam's auditors).
2. Review of Oxfam GB's partnership policy implementation. Audrey Bronstein (Deputy International Director) summarised the key points from the review, and identified some areas for action. Points raised and responded to included the priority of capacity building, the usefulness of feedback from partnership relationships, and partnerships with the government and private sector. Further details were also given about partnership within Oxfam International. The Chair expressed appreciation for the review.
3. Vanessa Godfrey (Vice Chair of Trustees) updated Council on the search for a new Chair of Trustees. Council voted unanimously to recommend the appointment of Karen Brown as Chair Designate, with effect from January 2011. Council also noted the potential future appointments of a Treasurer Designate, and a trustee based in Africa. The Chair thanked all who had taken part in the Chair search process.
4. Vanessa Godfrey introduced the annual report of the Recruitment and Development Group (RADG). Tricia Zipfel reflected that it had been a busy year for RADG, with recruitment activity for Council, the Association, and the Chair, together with three new trustees joining Council and being inducted.
5. The Remuneration Committee annual report was introduced by Jane Cotton (HR Director), emphasising the constructive relations with the Union (OJTUS) during the pay negotiations. Jane advised that constructive work was taking place on remuneration alignment within the Oxfam Confederation.
6. Council noted the first quarterly report for 2010/11.

Finally Council bade farewell to two trustees, Adebayo Olukoshi and Maureen Conelly, who were well respected members of Council. Adebayo reflected that the sacrifices he had made to be at Council meetings had been well worth it, and he had received as well as given during his time as a trustee. Maureen was unable to attend the final meeting but had shared her reflections with fellow trustees. The Chair expressed his gratitude to both Adebayo and Maureen.

Council then adjourned for a meeting of the Oxfam Association, the Annual General Meeting, and the annual Friends of Oxfam meeting.

John Gaventa
Chair