

Chair's report on Council meeting of 15 March 2013

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

Karen Brown (Chair)
James Darcy
Maja Daruwala
Vanessa Godfrey
Rajiv Joshi
Matthew Martin
David Pitt-Watson
Marjorie Scardino
Gavin Stewart
Steve Walton
Tricia Zipfel

Corporate Management and Staff

Penny Lawrence (Acting Chief Executive)
Jane Cotton (Human Resources Director)
Paul Clarke (Supporter Marketing Director)
Bob Humphreys (Finance & Information Services Director)
Andrew Horton (Trading Director)
Olga Ghazaryan (Acting International Director)
Sarah Ireland (Communications Director)
Max Lawson (Head of Policy and Advocacy)
Joss Saunders (Company Secretary)
Anne Gornall (Trustees Officer)

Apologies were received from Nkoyo Toyo and Phil Bloomer (Campaigns & Policy Director). The Chair welcomed Mark Goldring, the incoming Chief Executive, starting his Oxfam induction and attending the meeting as an observer. This was the second meeting of Council's annual cycle for 2012/13.

Chief Executives Report

Departure of Barbara Stocking February 2013. Penny Lawrence thanked trustees for their input to the outgoing Chief Executive Barbara Stocking's leaving events in February.

Annual planning. Penny Lawrence updated Council on CMT's annual planning exercise. Projections for 2013/14 had been shared with staff on 4 March. Staff were aware that key priorities for 2013/14 were to increase income and to cut costs.

Campaigns. Max Lawson updated trustees on the *IF* campaign - work leading up to the UK budget announcement re 0.7% GNP (week commencing 18 March), plans around the G8 and Hunger summit in June, and the September UN Assembly meeting. He also gave details of *Behind the Brands*, an Oxfam International campaign around the food supply chain which had been launched in the past fortnight. This involved some positive messages and engagement with some of the major food companies. He and Penny Lawrence encouraged trustees to visit the website at <http://www.behindthebrands.org/>.

Trustees reflected on other recent initiatives e.g. the pre-budget advertisement in the 'Financial Times'. This came over well in terms of encouraging the UK government's 0.7% commitment for aid, but could be difficult in the context of UK benefit cuts and their impact on poor people. Max Lawson and Penny Lawrence explained the need for a segmented approach in order to reach different audiences and build the sense of a moral imperative – on the one hand to protect international aid, on the other to reduce inequality and build a sense of solidarity with poor people.

Department for International Development (DFID). Penny Lawrence updated trustees on the ongoing positive engagement with Justine Greening (Secretary of State for International Development). She also spoke about the Independent Commission for Aid Impact which was looking at the strategic funding of NGOs.

Syria and Mali. Olga Ghazaryan spoke about the political crises in both these countries and Oxfam's work to date. This was a challenging fundraising environment and a Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal on Syria was planned for the following week; funding from the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA) had also been agreed for?. In Mali work with 400,000 displaced people was continuing through Oxfam France, following on previous work to address the drought.

International Women's Day 8 March (and Get Together events). Penny Lawrence updated Council on the many events which had been held in a number of countries. Trustees and CMT talked about Get Together events they had hosted.

Oxfam's Strategy: Oxfam GB's Priorities 2013-16

The Chair welcomed Kate Wareing (Strategy Development Manager), who explained how the three year Oxfam GB priorities and corporate objectives fitted within the overarching Oxfam Strategic Plan. The one year corporate objectives for 2013/14 were a subset of overall activity that enabled Oxfam GB to have a strong organisational focus on specific areas – humanitarian response, food, income generation and cost effectiveness

Council reflected on how the priorities and objectives would be monitored, including: how a Country Director would use and interpret the document; the need to be more explicit on continuing work that is business as usual and areas where improvements are planned; and the importance of realistic goals and indicators.

Council approved Oxfam GB's Priorities 2013-16, and CMT undertook to provide information from their divisional plans to allow trustees visibility of key areas of the OGB delivery plan (i.e. the enabling change goals). This would be done via a combination of reporting to trustees and utilising the lead trustee relationship as suggested.

3 Year Plan – Financial overview

The Honorary Treasurer and Bob Humphreys introduced the financial elements of the Three Year Plan, particularly the first year. The recommendation now reflected input from the Trustee Audit and Finance Group meeting on 1 March and CMT on 4 March. The ongoing economic downturn, attrition of individual giving and lower turnover in the shops, means there will be greater focus on raising funds and saving costs. Therefore Council was being asked to agree the plan on the basis of 'Plan A' + 'Plan B', acknowledging also that more was being done by CMT to identify further savings.

July Council would consider how to increase regular giving. It was suggested that this might need to consider a more radical range of options, such as more investment if Oxfam is to return to its position of being on the cutting edge in this area, and a review of other financial and fundraising policies. The financial plan for 2013/14 was therefore agreed on this basis, and Council would be kept informed as the financial year progressed.

Oxfam's Strategy: People Enabling Change Goal

Vanessa Godfrey (lead trustee for Human Resources) and Jane Cotton welcomed the following staff from Human Resources in Oxfam GB and Oxfam International: Maret Laev, Tim Burrige, Darryl Crowley, Alice Wooler, Audrey Bronstein, Nora Winkler, Maureen King, Nicole Breeze, Jenny Whitfield, Daniel Manyika.

Vanessa gave Council a context for this discussion and referred briefly to Council's discussions about people in 2008 and 2010, and to the discussions in Nairobi in July 2012; whilst there were many strengths to build on there were several areas to work on to become the best we could be, such as: becoming less risk averse; being simple rather than complicated in our processes and communication; and showing more courage in choosing to do fewer things better.

Trustees discussed Oxfam's capability, culture and leadership, and systems, processes and structure. Feedback would be absorbed by the Human Resources team and contribute to parameters for planning and development of this key change goal of the new strategy. An information report would come to Council in July or October, reflecting progress following the Council discussion and how Council's input had been absorbed.

Oxfam International Board meeting: 20/21 March 2013

Penny Lawrence and Bob Humphreys drew particular attention to some key points for Oxfam GB regarding the financial health of affiliates, campaigns and advocacy, and the level of progress on humanitarian planning. If there were developments at the OI Board meeting, Oxfam GB might need to set up working groups to discuss these areas further. The Chair also updated Council on recommendations around future Oxfam International governance structures.

Governance

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

- Issues that had been discussed at the TAFG (Trustee Audit and Finance Group) meeting on 1 March, including a discussion on fragile states, and a fundraising update.
- The organisational risk register was considered and approved by Council, with TAFG taking forward the work on divisional risk.
- An update on the meetings of the Programme Review Group (PRG), including discussions on high risk countries and campaigning.
- Recruitment and Development Group (RADG) work on Trustee and Association recruitment.
- Guidelines for trustees on assessing possible conflict of interest issues between their Oxfam and working lives.
- Council discussed the third quarterly report for 2012/13.

Council Review

Trustees and CMT considered the Council Review paper, on how trustees and management could work more effectively together going forward. It was agreed that there should be a focus on scrutiny, and forward planning, to ensure Council input is sought at the most strategic moment. It was also decided that the Oxfam GB governance review in 2014 should include an independent element. These suggestions and others would be implemented and taken forward, and Council would be kept informed.

The Chair advised that further details of the meeting Thursday 11 / Friday 12 July 2013 would follow in due course.

Karen Brown
Chair