

Chair's report on Council meeting of 30 September 2005

11 out of 12 trustees were present. Also present were the Director (Barbara Stocking), the Directors of the International Division (Jasmine Whitbread), the Human Resources Division (Jane Cotton), the Campaigns and Policy Division (Phil Bloomer) and the Trading Division (Chris Coe), the Fundraising and Supporter Marketing Director (Edward Fox), the Head of UK Finance (Alan Todd), the Regional Director for Southern Africa (Judith Flick), the Company Secretary (Joss Saunders) and the Trustees Officer (Anne Gornall).

This was the last meeting of Council's annual cycle. It took place just before the AGM where two trustees retired (Scarlett MccGwire and Shriti Vadera) and two new trustees were appointed (Maureen Connelly and Gareth Davies). The retiring trustees were thanked for all the good work they had done for and with Oxfam during their six years as trustees. Trustees also thanked the outgoing International Director (Jasmine Whitbread) who was moving on to become the Director of Save the Children UK. Council noted retirements from and appointments to the Association of Oxfam (a wider group which has responsibility for the appointment of trustees).

The Director gave an update on the progress of Oxfam's work in Niger, Mali and Mauritania. Sadly the world had been too slow in picking up on the Niger crisis, reinforcing the importance of the UN review of humanitarian response systems. She also gave updates on the September UN summit and on Hurricane Katrina where Oxfam America was working.

This meeting was the first opportunity to consider Oxfam GB's input to the Oxfam International Strategic Plan which will be finalised in 2006. The Chair advised that two Council meetings in 2006 would devote considerable time to making input to the strategic plan process.

Trustees welcomed the paper and the opening up of the issues. However, some members were keen to make a pragmatic choice on a limited number of issues. They were also anxious to follow through on some of the important initiatives in 2005 e.g. Make Poverty History.

Some more specific analysis was requested as follows:-

- The changing meaning of 'security' – Oxfam International needs to stand for 'human security' and not militarisation of the term.
- More work on the nature of alliances i.e. a strategic search for local as well as international alliances.

The meeting then moved on to a substantial item on HIV/AIDS. This was presented by Jasmine Whitbread, Judith Flick (Regional Director for Southern Africa) and Wayne Myslik (Global HIV/AIDS Programme Director). As an introduction, Judith Flick showed a video to show how Oxfam is mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in Malawi and the practical issues which need to be addressed.

Trustees asked Judith Flick to express Council's appreciation to the staff on the ground who are delivering the programme. On considering the issues raised they concluded:-

1. There is a need to share learning and to push on national advocacy, based on existing programme in the relevant countries. The recent G8 agreements give the opportunity to lobby at the national level for proper monitoring on whether programmes are being put in place.
2. The work on HIV/AIDS raises questions about Oxfam's wider role and where it could add best value e.g. on the co-ordination of healthcare, improved access to education and the macro-economics of AIDS-affected communities.
3. While there are challenges on the ground – possibly in working with new allies and partners – Oxfam needs to think big on HIV/AIDS.

Three of Council's lead member trustees gave reports on their particular areas of responsibility. The Trading lead trustees (Jackie Gunn and Richard Taylor) reminded members of the three key roles of Trading i.e. to make money for Oxfam's work, to make money in a way that is secure, and the integral role of the shops in how the UK public perceives Oxfam. The current improved performance in the shops is due to the hard work of management and volunteers; the volunteers' gift of time is critical to their fundraising success. Work is also in hand to develop new businesses in order to increase Trading unrestricted income.

Angela Sealey (lead member for Human Resources) reflected on changes and developments during her four years in this role. During this period the human resources role has been considerably strengthened and the value of this had been demonstrated at times of major demand e.g. the Tsunami. There is still more work to do in making further improvements to the performance management system and in ensuring that Oxfam both attracts and retains high calibre individuals to enable it to deliver its mission.

Trustees expressed their appreciation for the progress that had been made in Trading and Human Resources, and expressed the hope that areas of good practice can be replicated in other parts of Oxfam.

During the afternoon trustees joined the larger meeting of the Oxfam Association in order to consider the Director's formal report and annual accounts, and to take part in a discussion about 'Make Poverty History'. This adjourned to the AGM, and in the evening Council and the Association were joined by the Friends of Oxfam who attended for their annual meeting.

Rosemary Thorp
Chair