

Chair's report on Council meeting of 10 December 2005

10 out of 12 trustees were present. Also present were the Director (Barbara Stocking), the Acting Director of the International Division (Caroline Nursey), the Directors of the Human Resources Division (Jane Cotton), the Campaigns and Policy Division (Phil Bloomer) and the Trading Division (Chris Coe), the Fundraising and Supporter Marketing (Edward Fox), the Head of UK Finance (Alan Todd), the Head of the Programme Policy Team (Becky Buell), the Regional Director for East Asia (Ashvin Dayal), the Company Secretary (Joss Saunders) and the Trustees Officer (Anne Gornall).

This was the first meeting of Council's annual cycle for 2006/07. The Chair therefore welcomed the two new trustees – Maureen Connelly and Gareth Davies.

At the beginning of the meeting the Chair presented Ashvin Dayal (Regional Director for East Asia) with an Oxfam International award. This was to acknowledge his contribution to Oxfam's work on the Tsunami, and his work in building up the Regional Management Centre and the Indonesian programme.

The Director gave an update on Oxfam's participation in and contribution to the World Trade organisation meeting in Hong Kong. She also gave details of the year end reviews on the Tsunami and 'Make Poverty History'. She felt that Oxfam had played a creditable role in working with the UK DEC agencies on the Tsunami, and in inspiring people via 'Make Poverty History' – particularly those who had not previously taken an interest in poverty.

The Director outlined Oxfam's response following the Pakistan earthquake and advised that she would be visiting Pakistan before Christmas. She also reflected on the security situation in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and advised that the 'Oxfam Unwrapped' catalogue was doing well in its second year.

The Chair drew trustees' attention to the communiqué from the Oxfam International board meeting in November. This had included a consultative forum with a number of external attendees who gave their views on the current and future direction of Oxfam International. A number of key decisions had been made on growth and global reach, collaboration, future operation of the Oxfam International humanitarian consortium, and governance arrangements for the Oxfam International Tsunami fund. Trustees reflected on the issues raised.

Council discussed the Oxfam International and Oxfam GB strategic planning process. The Director drew their attention to a number of key issues which would be discussed during 2006 when the two planning processes would run in tandem. Some of the issues were areas needing further analysis and discussion e.g. ideas and beliefs, governance and corruption, basic services, livelihoods, private sector and gender. Others were significant global trends e.g. China and Asia, migration, young people (particularly in urban areas), water, and the effects of the 'war on terror'.

Council then considered the 'Forward Look 2006/7 – 2008/9 which described the external context and Oxfam's plans for the coming three year period. Some improvements were suggested to the draft document which had been submitted;

these included a tightening of the format plus more information on climate change, and the development of people and skills. With these changes incorporated, the 'Forward Look' was agreed.

Ashvin Dayal gave a presentation on Oxfam's work in East Asia. This was a region with stark contrasts between rapid growth and poverty, with associated governance issues. He went into some detail on Oxfam's response to the Tsunami in Aceh and Nias, and on work in Indonesia following a major strategic review. China offered new opportunities and alliances. While there had been some huge challenges, he felt that the resources raised in response to the Tsunami had enabled Oxfam to respond swiftly and decisively. Trustees expressed appreciation for the quality and range of work being done in the region.

Following this there were a couple of brief updates. The Chair gave trustees details of work in hand on the development of Oxfam India Council would be kept updated on this. A trustee (Stan Thekaekara) then reflected on the lead member system and how it could operate more effectively – particularly on programme issues.

The Honorary Treasurer (Frank Kirwan) presented the annual report of the Trustee Audit and Finance Group. This raised some issues around Oxfam's control environment. Council agreed a number of recommendations which would be incorporated in the Council schedule and monitored through 2006. These included the review of significant management initiatives before and after their implementation. The control assurance report from the Corporate Management Team was also noted. Council agreed that a paper on the delegation and authorisation levels within the Oxfam programme budget approval system (OPAL) should be delegated to the Trustee Audit and Finance Group at its meeting in January 2006.

Finally Council agreed the following:-

- Membership of Trustee and Association groups in 2006.
- The election process for the new Oxfam Chair (to be appointed at the AGM in November 2006).
- The Vice-Chair term and election process.
- Delegation to Honorary Officers of power to approve new legal entities.

Under Any Other Business, the Company Secretary advised that US Foundations were now requesting a list of trustees so that they could be checked against the US terrorist list. There were reports on a trustee session with Oxfam's fundraisers, a lunch session on 'Make Poverty History', and a meeting of the Programme Review Committee; all of these had taken place the previous day (9 December), and had been both instructive and informative.

Rosemary Thorp
Chair