

## **Chair's report on Council meeting of 9 & 10 February 2006**

10 out of 12 trustees were present on 9 February, and 11 trustees on 10 February. 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 Finance and Information Services Division (John Shaw), the Campaigns and Policy Division (Phil Bloomer) and the Trading Division (Chris Coe), the Fundraising and Supporter Marketing Director (Edward Fox), the Head of the Programme Policy Team (Becky Buell), the Regional Director for West Africa (Natasha Quist), the Company Secretary (Joss Saunders) and the Policy and Trustees Officer (Anne Gornall).

This was the second meeting of Council's annual cycle for 2006/07.

On Thursday 9 February the minutes of the meeting on 10 December 2005 were approved. Under Matters Arising from the minutes, the Chair gave an update on further discussions around Oxfam India. The Finance Director advised that the Trustee Audit and Finance Group had endorsed a paper on delegation and authorisation levels under the Oxfam Programme and Learning Project.

The Director gave an update on the events and contacts made at the World Economic Forum in Davos (January 2006). She also gave brief details of her trip to look at Oxfam's response to the earthquake in Pakistan in late December 2005.

More generally the Director reflected on recent developments and initiatives in the organisation. Penny Lawrence would arrive in March to take up the position of International Director. The "I'm In" campaign was going well and she would keep trustees updated on this.

Council approved the amended reserves policy, which had also been scrutinised by the Trustee Audit and Finance Group.

The Humanitarian Director, Nick Roseveare, then joined the meeting for a discussion on the Humanitarian Implementation Plan. The plan was projected to build on Oxfam's existing reputation and strengths in water and sanitation, and in public health. It was a large management initiative with wide organisational impact, and requiring maximum organisational engagement. The accompanying paper outlined how it would be delivered via a number of projects.

Trustees reflected on the implications of the plan, both in terms of its scale (a 50% increase) and in terms of its potential funding. A number of points were raised. These included the connection between growth in humanitarian work and long term growth, a clearer communication of indicators and intended/actual outcomes, how humanitarian growth would be integrated with the rest of the organisation, and the extent to which it would impact on development work. All of these would feed into discussions of the Oxfam GB strategic plan.

Council then started its annual review discussions. While this was normally scheduled for the second Council meeting of the cycle (i.e. the February meeting), it was agreed that this time discussions would continue at the July Council meeting. The July meeting would also include a session (facilitated by Pesh Framjee of Deloitte Touche) on the relationship between Council and management.

Trustees noted the Chair's feedback on her meetings with individual trustees which highlighted a number of themes and potential improvements or refinements. They also received an update on developments with regard to governance accountability and the new NCVO code of good governance. They then broke into groups to discuss a number of issues including lead members, the frequency of Council meetings and the effectiveness of trustees as individuals and collectively. It was agreed that the outcomes from these discussions would feed into the July meeting.

The Vice-Chair (Angela Sealey) referred members to her paper outlining a recent visit to South Africa. This had highlighted a number of issues around partnerships and also some reflections on how trustees might become better informed about the challenges faced by programme staff.

Thursday ended with farewells and thanks to Chris Coe (the outgoing Trading Director) and to Caroline Nursey for her work as Acting International Director. A resolution was passed on a legacy in Belgium, and a small fee of £1333 was agreed for a project involving the wife of a trustee.

On Friday 10 February Council continued discussions on the Oxfam International and Oxfam GB strategic planning process (which had started in December 2005). These discussions opened with a presentation from Natasha Quist, the Regional Director for West Africa. Natasha Quist reminded trustees that West Africa was the poorest region of the world and the second largest Islamic region in the world. It included the pivotal country of Nigeria, with its considerable oil wealth but 70% of its population living on less than a dollar a day. Medium term forecasts for the West Africa region indicated a combination of food insecurity and political instability, particularly in certain countries.

Trustees found the West African context particularly helpful for the strategic discussions which followed. It prompted consideration of the interface between international campaigns and the people on the ground (e.g. cotton farmers), and revealed some overarching themes and priorities (e.g. small scale local conflict and restive youth, how best to work with other agencies in Nigeria). Council then spent the rest of the day considering a consultation paper on the Oxfam International strategic plan. Group discussions also took place on some areas where Oxfam might put a greater emphasis in future or consider in more depth (attitudes and beliefs, urban poverty, migration). Background papers were presented to give details of work to date, which ranged from more in-depth analysis to an outline of themes and issues. It was agreed that these discussions would continue and take on board additional key areas at the April and July Council meetings.

Rosemary Thorp  
Chair