

Chair's report on Council meeting of 20 & 21 July 2006

9 out of 12 trustees were present at this meeting. Also present were the Director (Barbara Stocking), the Director of the International Division (Penny Lawrence), the Directors of the Human Resources Division (Jane Cotton), the Finance and Information Services Division (John Shaw), the Campaigns and Policy Division (Phil Bloomer), the Trading Division (David McCullough), the Fundraising and Supporter Marketing Director (Edward Fox), the Head of the Programme Policy Team (Becky Buell), the Company Secretary (Joss Saunders) and the Policy and Trustees Officer (Anne Gornall).

This was the fourth meeting of Council's annual cycle for 2005/06.

1. On Thursday evening Council received a presentation from Pesh Framjee of Deloitte which covered the current issues facing the governance and management of charities. Trustees and the Corporate Management Team reflected on this and particularly on areas which were pertinent to Oxfam. A number of suggestions were made on how trustees and management could make better use of their pool of skills, and how they could work most effectively together. It was agreed that some of these suggestions would be considered at future Council meetings or implemented in the coming year.
2. The Director gave an update on recent events. These included:-
 - Work in hand to gear up Oxfam's response to the Middle East crisis when access problems were resolved.
 - Quick and substantial response to the Indonesian earthquake.
 - Deteriorating situation in Darfur and Sudan generally.
 - Meeting with Vladimir Putin (President of the Russian Federation) before the G8 meeting, the G8 meeting itself, and the Trade meeting afterwards.
 - UN Humanitarian Response Review, where progress had been made on partnership rules.
 - The 'Oxjam' musical events initiative which had already attracted a very positive response.
3. The Director, the Chair and the Chair Designate (John Gaventa) gave details of the Oxfam International Board meeting in May. This had made progress in defining a common focus and work to take forward. Discussions had taken place on the future of Oxfam in India, and these would continue at the November Board meeting.
4. The Director then introduced the draft Strategic Steer 2007/8 – 2009/10 (the planning guide for the organisation). Eight programme templates had been produced as a key input to the Steer, which had been shared with trustees before the meeting. Council also considered a paper on goals, objectives and measures which suggested how to monitor or measure some of key changes proposed for the next three years. Trustees felt that the paper provided a helpful framework.

Further discussions took place on the main text of the Steer. A number of changes were requested and it was agreed that these would be incorporated in the final document.

5. Council held a workshop on risk and considered the Corporate Risk Register. This was formally approved with some minor changes, and it was agreed that the register would be reviewed alongside the strategic plan in future. Trustees also had a wider discussion about risk appetite. Three scenarios were considered which exposed some issues in greater depth and revealed a range of views.
6. Trustees received an update covering the work of the Recruitment and Development Group and considered two post implementation reviews – a review of the Oxfam Programme, Accountability and Learning system (OPAL) and the end of project review of the Oxford relocation to Cowley.
7. Council reflected on the Oxfam Assembly of June 2006 which had been a positive experience.
8. The Finance Director (John Shaw) then outlined some issues arising from the first draft of the Annual Report and Accounts which would be submitted to Oxfam's Annual General Meeting in November. These included a new section and undertaking from trustees required by the Companies Act. The annual investment policy was agreed together with new arrangements on Oxfam executors for legacies.
9. Some initial action was approved with regard to governance codes, but a wider discussion was planned for a future meeting. Further Council discussion was also scheduled on a proposed Oxfam policy on partnership. Work towards this policy had been outlined in an information paper for this meeting.
10. Finally Council thanked Sir Richard Jolly who was retiring from Council. Richard reflected on the positive experience of being an Oxfam trustee, and shared his thoughts on Oxfam's programming where he had had a particular involvement as Chair of the Trustee Impact Group (latterly the Programme Review Committee). He made some suggestions on how Oxfam – in tandem with its regional and international focus - could develop a country-based framework for both operations and advocacy. These were noted, and Council thanked Richard for his informed and generous contributions to its debates during a six year term.

Rosemary Thorp
Chair