

Chair's report on Council meeting of 15/16 July 2010

The following people were present at the meeting:-

Trustees

John Gaventa (Chair)
Maja Daruwala
Gareth Davies
Sandra Dawson
Andy Friend
Vanessa Godfrey
Rajv Joshi
Matthew Martin
Adebayo Olukoshi
Marjorie Scardino
Tricia Zipfel

Corporate Management and Staff

Barbara Stocking (Chief Executive)
Bob Humphreys (Finance & Information Services Director)
Jane Cotton (Human Resources Director)
Penny Lawrence (International Director)
Phil Bloomer (Campaigns & Policy Director)
Cathy Ferrier (Fundraising & Supporter Marketing Director)
David McCullough (Trading Director)
Thomas Schultz-Jagow (Communications Director)
Joss Saunders (Company Secretary)
Anne Gornall (Policy and Trustees Officer)

Apologies were received from Maureen Connelly. This was the third meeting of Council's annual cycle for 2009/10 and took place in Oxford.

On the evening of Thursday 15 July and the first part of Friday 16 July, Council had its main annual strategic discussion. Trustees and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) looked back at strategic discussions in previous years which had focused on the changing economic crisis and its impact on poor people. This year they looked more broadly at a variety of resource constraints, and their interrelationship. The discussion took on board some key information on globalisation and scarcity and looked at a possibly new approach to development through the concept of 'wellbeing'. It was acknowledged that Oxfam had a role to communicate a number of positive yet complex messages, and to demonstrate them in practice through its programmes.

Key inputs were made by three speakers:-

- Arunabha Ghosh (Fellow of Oxford-Princeton Global Leaders Programme). Arunabha spoke about resource constraints and sustainable development.
- Alex Evans (Fellow, Center for International Co-operation, New York University). Alex spoke about globalisation and scarcity.
- Professor Allister McGregor (Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex). Allister spoke about development discourses around the concept of wellbeing.

While a major change in approach was not required, trustees acknowledged that Oxfam would need to change in order to make best impact on the lives of poor people in increasingly difficult economic and global conditions. This would be taken forward in the coming months.

In the afternoon of Friday 16 July Barbara Stocking gave her regular Chief Executive's Report to Council as follows:-

Humanitarian issues

Barbara Stocking reflected on the six month anniversary of the Haiti earthquake earlier in the week. There had been a small number of factual inaccuracies, but generally the reporting had been very balanced.

There had also been some very helpful media coverage on West Africa which had helped to raise awareness of the food crisis. The World Food Programme had increased supplies to Niger and Chad, and Oxfam had some very active programmes.

Advocacy and campaigning

Barbara Stocking reported on the early period of building relationships with the new UK coalition government, together with ongoing discussions around the agreed aid allocation of 0.7%. Trustees agreed that it was important for Oxfam both to work with other agencies in this area and to demonstrate that aid was important, both for development and as a demonstration of British ethical values.

Barbara Stocking then updated Council on the latest developments with regard to the Oxfam International single management structure. Joss Saunders (Company Secretary) explained the details of the single management agreement, and a process for sign-off was agreed.

Trustees considered the draft accountability report for 2010 and accountability commitments to 2013. The new report built on the original version which had been published in 2007, and took on board input from an external panel. A number of suggestions were made on how the report could be further refined, but trustees expressed appreciation for the depth and rigour of Oxfam's work in this area. This had been positive not just for Oxfam but for the sector generally. Again Council agreed a process for sign-off of this report to enable publication on the Oxfam website.

Moving on to the Draft Annual Report and Accounts 2009/10, the Chair welcomed Liz Hazell who was representing Oxfam's Auditors (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP). Bob Humphreys (Finance and Information Services Director) introduced the accounts; he advised that there were no material issues used in preparing the accounts which depended on the judgement of the Corporate Management Team. Liz Hazell advised that the auditors were happy to support their report to trustees on page 43 of the draft accounts. She and Bob Humphreys gave details of work Oxfam was doing with other agencies to further tighten controls across the sector e.g. on fraud and bribery. The accounts were approved to go forward to the Annual General Meeting on 15 October 2010. Council also approved the reserves and investment policies as articulated on pages 27 and 38 of the draft report.

The rest of the Council meeting covered the following:-

- Revised terms of reference for the Pensions Committee and the Trustee Audit and Finance Group.
- Recommended appointments to Oxfam's Association (to be taken forward to the AGM on 15 October).
- An update on trustee recruitment 2010/11.
- An update on the process for recruitment and appointment of a Chair to take over from John Gaventa after the 2011 AGM.
- The fourth quarterly report for 2009/10.
- The Health and Safety Annual Report, submitted as an information paper to the meeting. This reflected a range of work and issues, both internationally and in the Oxfam shops.

The meeting closed with an evaluation to inform future meetings and agenda planning.

John Gaventa
Chair