Chair’s report on Council meeting of 20 May 2011

# The following people were present at the meeting:-

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| *Trustees*John Gaventa (Chair)Karen BrownJames DarcyMaja DaruwalaGareth DaviesSandra DawsonAndy Friend Vanessa GodfreyMatthew MartinDavid Pitt-WatsonMarjorie ScardinoNkoyo ToyoTricia Zipfel | *Corporate Management and Staff*Barbara Stocking (Chief Executive) attended during the afternoonBob Humphreys (Finance & Information Services Director)Jane Cotton (Human Resources Director)Penny Lawrence (International Director)Phil Bloomer (Campaigns & Policy Director)Thomas Schultz-Jagow (Communications Director)David McCullough (Trading Director)Cathy Ferrier (Fundraising and Supporter Marketing Director)Joss Saunders (Company Secretary)Anne Gornall (Trustees Officer) |

Apologies were received from Rajiv Joshi. The Chair welcomed Nkoyo Toyo (trustee) to her first Council, and Fikre Zewdie (South Africa Regional Director). This was the third meeting of Council’s annual cycle for 2010/11 and took place in Oxford. |  |

*Matters arising from minutes of March Council meeting*

Cathy Ferrier updated trustees on the results of the Oxfam Paypal partnership, where positive learning would be applied when a second campaign was launched later in 2011. She also gave details about the London Marathon where Oxfam had been the charity of the year; this had been successful with the amount of funds raised and positive coverage for Oxfam.

The meeting then moved on to the business and governance items on the main agenda, as follows:

1. The issues that had been discussed at the Trustee Audit and Finance Group (TAFG) meeting on 6 May. These included Oxfam’s financial position at year end, and an update on various fundraising initiatives.
2. Vanessa Godfrey updated Council about the ongoing work on trustees’ engagement with stakeholders, over and above their designated roles.
3. Joss Saunders introduced the annual report on the Trustee Code of Conduct, which revealed no major concerns or conflict of interests.

*Oxfam International*

The Chair and Karen Brown spoke about a very positive Oxfam International (OI) board meeting in Belgium, in March 2011. Among other discussions, the Chairs had agreed to form a task group to take forward discussions on Oxfam International governance. They also spoke about other important discussions at the board, including the OI strategic plan, the management of reputational risks, and developments in North Africa and the Middle East.

Updates were also received from Penny Lawrence on the progress of implementation of the single management structure (SMS); and from Cathy Ferrier on discussions around Oxfam’s global brand identity across the OI confederation.

The Chair gave Council an update on arrangements for a meeting of representatives from the European Oxfam affiliates, to take place on 14/15 July, which would focus on the changing debates on poverty across Europe.

*Programme-Focused Learning – Strategic Update*

Council were joined by Steve Jennings (Review lead and Head of Programme Policy Team), Sarah Totterdell (Head of Policy and Practice Communications Team) and Jeremy Loveless (Deputy Humanitarian Director, and Knowledge Management Officer, Humanitarian Department).

Steve Jennings and Sarah Totterdell gave a presentation to update trustees on internal learning and external change. They demonstrated a pilot version of the Policy and Practice website and the iLibrary, which would provide an additional and important resource for staff and external users.

Council then considered questions around the role of Oxfam as a knowledge organisation, what information we should actively be disseminating, and how we should be making internal decisions based on learning. Feedback from groups included:

* Support for Oxfam’s growing commitment to the production of knowledge-based learning as a form of change in its own right, and as a tool to change the world on behalf of poor people.
* Oxfam’s need to be clearer on theories of change, and how this will happen.
* There may be a need to review the internal organisation of Oxfam’s knowledge work.
* The strong leadership on learning should continue.

Following CMT discussions later in the year, Council will receive an update on developments in January 2012.

*Regional Update – South Africa*

Fikre Zewdie gave a presentation to demonstrate the Oxfam management structure within the South Africa region, and the role of the regional office in Pretoria. He also gave examples of where Oxfam had been able to make significant programme impact. Much of this linked with Oxfam’s overall work on essential services. Points discussed included how the issue of governance is key in a region with abundant resources, and the considerable potential in promoting uniquely African ways of working within the umbrella of the African Union (AU).

*Aim 2 (Essential Services) – Strategic review*

The Chair welcomed a number of staff members involved in the strategic review of essential services (lead by Max Lawson – Senior Policy Adviser). Trustees were asked to consider how Oxfam was delivering currently in this area, and how it could more effectively hold governments to account on the delivery of services. Max Lawson gave a presentation to outline the scale and scope of Oxfam’s current work on essential services. Initial points and questions included the difficulty of delivering services in the context of a rights-based approach, getting the right balance between accountability and delivery, and the methodology for measuring impact on essential services.

Following group discussions, Council affirmed the importance of Oxfam’s work on essential services, and supported reframing this work in a rights-based context. Engagement via essential services projects could be the way to build relationships with capable governments so that they were able to take it over in due course.

*Trading Division update*

David McCullough and Andy Friend (trading lead trustee) introduced the report, emphasising the range, scope and diversity of Oxfam’s trading operation. David McCullough outlined some of the latest initiatives (eg. with Marks & Spencers and Sainsburys), and Andy Friend advised that investment in shops would need to continue. The report was welcomed as being both inspiring and comprehensive.

*Chief Executive’s Report*

In her regular update to trustees, Barbara Stocking and member’s of Oxfam’s management team covered the following key areas:

*Humanitarian*

Barbara Stocking gave Council information about the policy and media work of the Oxfam International Cairo hub. Penny Lawrence gave details of work in Cote D’Ivoire and Liberia where Oxfam was providing water and sanitation in camps to growing numbers.

*Campaigning*

Phil Bloomer gave further details on work with colleagues in Oxfam International and final plans for the launch of the GROW campaign. As it was a four year campaign, there was scope for refinements and improvements as the campaign was rolled out. Thomas Schultz-Jagow outlined a strategy of engagement with the media to launch and maintain quite a complex campaign, and also to engage with the public.

Council approved a resolution to close Oxfam’s office in Peru. The Chair then advised that the next meeting would be on Friday 15 July, preceded by the European Oxfams meeting on Thursday/Friday 14/15 July.

John Gaventa

Chair