

Note of Oxfam Australia Board Meeting – 12 June 2020

The Oxfam Australia (OAU) board met on Friday 12 June 2020, with no apologies recorded. It was a meeting held virtually in accordance with pandemic protocols, however still an efficient and effective means of transacting Oxfam's board business.

After standard formalities, the Chief Executive (CE) gave her report. She commenced with a briefing on the organisational changes and associated transition plan occasioned by the impacts of COVID-19 but also to give effect to more fundamental structural change that external conditions require. Part of this involves significant changes to staff numbers, which have been reported in the media. The Board regrets that these measures are necessary to secure Oxfam's future and its ability to combat poverty and injustice. The board recognises the pain in farewelling a number of valued staff members and thanks them for all they have contributed to the organisation over time.

The CE reported on the agency's work not only in protecting our team from corona virus impacts but fieldwork too, one example of which is providing handwashing facilities in the very remote Oecussi Province of East Timor. Routine program work such as in partnership with First Nations people and an extension to the DFAT-funded Mekong Area Water Governance Project, were discussed. The CE discussed the recent supporter forum, which was attended by over 60 people, most of which long term supporters – feedback suggests this was very well received and arrangements for more frequent online briefings including where possible country participation, are under consideration.

There is a great deal of activity at the Oxfam International level, with decisions on our global country coverage, future operating model and governance arrangements being debated and made in the current period. The pressures felt by Oxfam Australia through structural trends in the INGO sector and through the pandemic are similarly evident almost throughout the confederation and the meeting received briefing on the work of special taskforces addressing these issues.

Led by the chair of the Finance Audit and Risk Committee, the meeting considered the finance report including detail on the change measures mentioned above and an update on the asset performance review currently underway. It approved the 20/21 budget, acknowledging that we are in a volatile environment which calls for frequent review points and, if necessary, reforecasting budgets and plans. The board received the risk report and expressed its appreciation for the thorough and structured approach to identifying and mitigating organizational risks.

The board then received and discussed updates from the Public Engagement and Governance Committees. In line with recent legislative the board approved the strengthening of the agency's whistleblowing and related safeguarding policies. The meeting concluded with a discussion of the composition of the board, focusing on skills and diversity needed to make the board most effective for the coming future.

Dennis Goldner

Board Chair, June 2020