



## Oxfam International Board Accountability Policies

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### **1.0 Information on Governance**

*Oxfam International will provide transparency about governance, decision making and who is responsible for accountability.*

#### **1.1 Transparency of Board members and executive staff**

Oxfam International will publish the names and responsibilities of the Board Officers and the Management Team each year in the Annual Report. Personal contact details will not be provided. All communication from the public or stakeholders will be through the Oxfam International Secretariat.

#### **1.2 Board Responsibility for Accountability Policies**

The Board is responsible for all Oxfam International's activities including its Accountability policies. It holds the Oxfam International Executive Director accountable for compliance with these. The Board may designate a Board Officer to be responsible for Accountability at the Board level.

#### **1.3 Accountability of Board Trustees to 'members' and decision making**

Oxfam International is a confederation of autonomous affiliates. The Board is made up of two representatives from each, the Chair and the Executive Director, but with each affiliate using its own method of selection for the Chair. Affiliate Boards have adopted accountability mechanisms for electing or selecting their Boards which are appropriate to their context. In the case of Oxfam International, the 'members' are the affiliates. Any affiliate can request to put an item on the Oxfam International agenda or call a special meeting of the Board.

#### **1.4 Oxfam Board decision making (See Constitution and Code of Conduct on the Oxfam International website for details on Governance)**

All affiliates are represented on the Board by their Chair and their Executive Director. Each affiliate has one vote regardless of size or history and it is up to the affiliate to decide who should exercise it in the meeting.

Board Officers including the Chair are elected by the affiliates through a secret preferential ballot. All Board members come from Affiliate Boards – except the Chair who is an independent member, and the post of Treasurer which may be independent if this post cannot be filled by an affiliate Board Chair.

Decisions are usually made by consensus. Where votes are needed, normal decisions may be decided by a 75% majority of affiliates. Constitutional changes can be blocked by any two affiliates, and this may relate to proposals which could compromise an affiliate's sovereignty (which is protected by the Constitution).

The Board meets annually. The Executive Directors meet twice a year, once as part of the Board meeting of which they are members. They are supported by operational planning implemented by a team of senior staff drawn from across the confederation, the Global

Team: a non-representative, multi-disciplinary group which makes recommendations to the Executive Directors and which provides oversight to Oxfam project groups.

### **1.5 Oxfam International Executive Director**

The Oxfam International Executive Director is employed by the Board and attends meetings in an ex-officio role. S/he does not have a vote. The Oxfam International Executive Director chairs the Executive Directors and Global Team meetings, providing a link to the Board. S/he is a peer with the Executive Directors and has no authority over affiliate staff.

### **1.6 Oxfam International Secretariat**

The Oxfam International Secretariat is led and managed by the Oxfam International Executive Director and is accountable to the Oxfam International Board.

### **1.7 Public policy making**

Oxfam International public policy is made through a broad consultative process involving all affiliates. Overall public policy is framed in the Strategic Plan after wide consultation and debate within all affiliates and with input from expert Oxfam project teams.

The Executive Directors may get involved directly in a crisis (for example during the Iraq war) and make policy decisions together through teleconferences.

On a day-to-day basis campaign policies and approaches are developed by the relevant project teams within the policy framework of Strategic and Operational plans. All policy decisions have to go through an affiliate-based sign-off procedure managed by the Director of Campaigns and Advocacy to ensure coherence and consistency with the overall policy positions. Each affiliate has a designated sign-off person which provides a system of checks and balance. Affiliates are expected to alert the Secretariat of public policy positions they take which may present a brand risk for affiliates in other countries.

Public policy conflicts are managed by the Director of Campaigns and Advocacy and can be referred to the Oxfam International Executive Director for resolution or the Board if necessary.

## **2.0 Public Information Disclosure Policy**

*Oxfam enjoys high levels of public trust and this brings a responsibility to provide high quality, timely and relevant information about its work.*

### **2.1 Stakeholders**

The Board has a policy of disclosing information which it believes is in the interests of accountability to stakeholders, beneficiaries, partners, allies, donors, supporters, institutions, media and the general public, that is, anyone materially affected by an Oxfam International or affiliate decision or action.

Oxfam International has a policy of conducting consultations with key partners and allies regularly as part of the strategic and operational planning cycles. However this does not replace stakeholder processes of affiliates nor of Oxfam project teams working with partners and allies.

### **2.2 Access to information**

Oxfam International and its affiliates publish key information online: the Strategic Plan, Annual Reports, campaign policy documents, program reports, research, evaluations, media releases and campaign actions, including feedback. Oxfam International provides information on governance, strategies and plans, financial information, performance, relationships (partners and allies) and public policy positions (via briefing papers). The level of detail available in these areas varies among affiliates in their national context.

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Oxfam International archives items after 6 months depending on their intended life span and otherwise archiving varies from affiliate to affiliate.

Information requests are handled by staff rather than automation, or are referred to a relevant affiliate as appropriate.

### **2.3 Confidential documents**

Oxfam International does not publish Board agendas or minutes. The reasons for this relate to:

- (a) discussions which may be commercial-in-confidence,
- (b) security risks, given that affiliates work in a wider range of countries where human rights of staff and partners are not guaranteed,
- (c) advocacy strategies which would be compromised if made public before they were implemented.

It follows that specific documents relating to the above will not be published for the same reasons that agendas and minutes cannot be published.

### **2.4 Annual Report**

The Oxfam Annual Report is published each year and gives an overview of key activities and challenges for the past calendar year. It publishes Oxfam International's audited accounts and the consolidated figures for the affiliates by region, country and Aim. The consolidated figures are not based on Statutory Accounts, as affiliates have different financial years, but on the best information available. The Oxfam Annual Report is intended to complement but not replace those of affiliates.

### **2.5 Languages**

Oxfam International's public website has three official languages: English, French and Spanish. All key documents will be published in these languages, most policy reports, media releases, campaign actions, research, etc. However not all documents will be translated for reasons of cost or lack of demand in particular countries.

## **3.0 Complaints**

*Oxfam believes that any stakeholder has the right to raise a complaint, have that complaint addressed and receive a response for mistakes, wrongful actions or breaches of the codes to which Oxfam International and its affiliates subscribe.*

### **3.1 Making a complaint**

The Oxfam International website will provide information to stakeholders on how to make a complaint either about Oxfam International activities or affiliate activities. These will be referred appropriately (as happens now) to the relevant affiliate or dealt with by Oxfam International staff, and the Oxfam International Executive Director if necessary. Every effort will be made to address and resolve the complaint at affiliate level. All complaints will be logged.

All complaints should be addressed to the Executive Director in writing by email or mail. Oxfam International will endeavor to assess and respond to complaints in writing as quickly as possible (preferably within 2 weeks). Complainants will be kept informed of delays to investigation of an issue (eg due to unavailability of relevant staff, etc), or where it has been referred to an affiliate. This process is not open to affiliates or their staff and does not replace an affiliate's own processes.

### **3.2 Complaints about affiliates' activities**

In the first instance complaints about an affiliate's activities will be referred to the affiliate and no further action will be taken by Oxfam International.

If the complainant comes back to Oxfam International with a complaint that is well-founded but not satisfactorily addressed by the affiliate, it will be discussed with the affiliate Executive Director, in line with the process for managing brand risk in the Code of Conduct, and using that process, may be escalated to the Oxfam International Board if not solved at Executive Director level.

### **3.3 Complaints about Oxfam activities**

Where there is a complaint about the joint activities of Oxfam (eg an Oxfam campaign, a program, or advertising, etc), the relevant Oxfam International manager will investigate and, if the complaint is well founded, endeavor to provide redress (eg a retraction, or recompense, etc), or where this is not possible or appropriate, provide a formal written apology. If a complaint involves the manager it will be dealt with by the Oxfam International Executive Director, or, if s/he is implicated, the Oxfam International Chair of the Board.

If the complainant is still not satisfied, the complaint may be referred in the first instance to the Oxfam International Management Team for a response through the Oxfam International Executive Director, and beyond that to the Board. Frivolous or vexatious complaints will not be investigated.

### **3.4 Complaints about Oxfam International Secretariat**

Where there is an unresolved complaint about the Oxfam International Secretariat, the Chair will nominate up to three affiliate Executive Directors to deal with the issue so as to offer the complainant a separate process from the Secretariat to seek redress. If this is not resolvable, the issue will be dealt with by the Board.

## **4.0 Whistleblower policy**

*Oxfam International encourages Board members, managers, staff, interns and volunteers to report evidence-based instances of malpractice of Oxfam International or its affiliates to their manager, the Executive Director, or if necessary the Chair of the Board or another Board Officer. This may be done in confidence and without fear of reprisal; Oxfam International will protect whistleblowers from victimization and dismissal.*

*If the matter relates to an affiliate, the issue will be directed to the appropriate manager or affiliate Executive Director.*

### **4.1 Raising a concern**

Any member of staff, intern or volunteer who has evidence of an instance or instances that the actions of someone working for Oxfam International could lead to, or has knowingly resulted in:

- A criminal offence;
- A failure to comply with any legal obligations;
- A breach of ethical standards subscribed to by Oxfam International;
- A miscarriage of justice;
- Damage to the environment;
- Danger to the health and safety of any individual, or
- The deliberate concealment of information, which may lead to any of the matters listed above, should raise the matter with their immediate manager or that manager's manager if the former is implicated in the issue. This may be done verbally or in writing and should include full details and supporting evidence.

### **4.2 Assuring confidentiality**

Under this policy, Oxfam International guarantees full confidentiality. If it is not possible to resolve the concern without revealing the complainant's identity, the manager will discuss the implications with the complainant and a decision to proceed (or not) with the investigation will be made.

In order to avoid hindering an investigation into malpractice and to prevent frivolous or malicious complaints, anonymous disclosures will be discouraged.

#### ***4.3 Investigation of allegation***

Oxfam International will endeavor to deal with disclosures as sensitively and quickly as possible. An appropriate person nominated by the Oxfam International Executive Director, or where necessary the Chair, will investigate the allegation within two weeks of the disclosure having been made. The complainant may be asked for further information during the course of the investigation.

#### ***4.4 Outcome of investigation***

On completion, appropriate action will be taken to resolve the issue, which may result in disciplinary action (including dismissal or referral to relevant authorities). The complainant(s) raising the issue will be informed of the outcome of the investigation as soon as is practicable. If they are not satisfied with the response, the matter will be referred to the Oxfam International Executive Director or if that person is involved in the case, to the Chair.

#### ***4.5 Protections***

Oxfam International will take appropriate disciplinary action (including dismissal) in accordance with Disciplinary Procedure against any Oxfam International staff member:

- Found to be victimizing another staff member, intern or volunteer for using this procedure, or deterring them from reporting genuine concerns under it; or
- Making a disclosure maliciously that is known to be untrue, or without reasonable grounds for believing that the information supplied was accurate.

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