

Oxfam International Board Accountability Policies

1.0 Information on Governance

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

1.1 Transparency of Board members and executive staff

OI 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 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 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 OI, the 'members' are the affiliates. Any affiliate can request to put an item on the OI agenda or call a special meeting of the Board.

1.4 Oxfam Board decision making (See Constitution and Code of Conduct on the OI 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 – there are no independent Trustees. The Chair may be the Chair of an Affiliate or may be an additional person from an affiliate.

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 Coordination Team: a non-representative, multi-disciplinary group which makes recommendations to the EDs and which provides oversight to OI project groups.

1.5 OI Executive Director (ED)

The OI ED is employed by the Board and attends meetings in an ex-officio role. S/he does not have a vote. The OI ED chairs the Executive Directors and Global Coordination 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 OI Secretariat

The OI Secretariat is led and managed by the OI ED and is accountable to the OI Board.

1.7 Public policy making

OI 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 OI 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 OI ED 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 OI or affiliate decision or action.

OI has a policy of conducting a Consultative Forum of key partners and allies every three years. Two of these Forums have been used to shape the OI Strategic Plan. However this does not replace stakeholder processes of affiliates nor of OI project teams working with partners and allies.

2.2 Access to information

Oxfam International and its affiliates publish vast amounts of information on line: the Strategic Plan, Annual Reports, campaign policy documents, program reports, research, evaluations, media releases and campaign actions, including feedback. OI 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.

OI 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

OI 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 OI Annual Report is published each year and gives an overview of key activities and challenges for the past calendar year. It publishes OI'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 OI Annual Report is intended to complement but not replace those of affiliates.

2.5 Languages

OI'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 OI and its affiliates subscribe.

3.1 Making a complaint

The OI website will provide information to stakeholders on how to make a complaint either about OI activities or affiliate activities. These will be referred appropriately (as happens now) to the relevant affiliate or dealt with by OI staff, and the OI ED 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. OI will endeavour 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 (e.g. 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 OI.

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

3.3 Complaints about OI activities

Where there is a complaint about the joint activities of OI (e.g. an OI campaign, a programme, or advertising, etc), the relevant OI manager will investigate and, if the complaint is well founded, endeavour to provide redress (e.g. 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 OI ED, or if s/he is implicated the OI Chair of the Board.

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

3.4 Complaints about OI Secretariat

Where there is an unresolved complaint about the OI 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 OI 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; OI 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 ED.

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 endeavour to deal with disclosures as sensitively and quickly as possible. An appropriate person nominated by the OI ED, 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 OI ED 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 OI 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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