

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COMMITTING TO CHANGE TO REBUILD TRUST

The Independent Commission on Sexual Misconduct, Accountability and Culture Change (IC) was established in February 2018 and was mandated by Oxfam to conduct a confederation-wide review of Oxfam’s culture; accountability; and safeguarding policies, procedures, and practices. The IC has now concluded its research among current and former staff, partners, communities and other stakeholders worldwide.

The IC found that Oxfam has prioritized its program goals over how it realizes its core values and the principle of “do no harm” with communities, partners, and staff. At the heart of the issue is how power is managed and trust earned and kept. Oxfam operations have suffered from a lack of robust, confederation-wide safeguarding and related policies and procedures. The IC found ineffective reporting mechanisms, safeguarding process failures, and accountability gaps. Beyond sexual misconduct, the IC found issues related to work environments; although a large number of surveyed staff across the confederation pointed to positive work environments, this situation was not universal. Indeed, although recognizing that many Oxfam staff operate in healthy environments, the IC also found that staff across multiple country programs struggle because they operate in toxic or unsupportive environments. The IC believes that Oxfam’s environment and processes for preventing and responding to harassment and bullying across the confederation are deficient, and that the well-being of staff requires immediate attention. The IC also found that Oxfam is a highly complex confederation with many different organizational cultures, and it is essential for the organization to realize its ambition to be “One Oxfam” in line with its “One Oxfam 2020 Vision.” Incongruent systems and governance challenges hamper Oxfam’s ability to comprehensively address the safeguarding and organizational culture challenges it faces.

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The IC also finds, however, that Oxfam has tremendous will, energy, and commitment to reform. Since February 2018, the organization has taken important steps, including but not limited to new confederation-wide prevention of sexual misconduct and child protection policies, a standard operating procedure for reporting misconduct, and an executive board agreement to resource the development of a single Oxfam-wide safeguarding network. Notably, it recently developed its first survivor support guidelines. Oxfam also recently updated its annual performance review approach, embedding it within Oxfam values, safeguarding, its code of conduct, and leadership skills.

Regarding its partners, Oxfam has developed a partner code of conduct that will accompany a standard partner contract, which outlines obligations for managing misconduct. Oxfam also has developed a new confederation-wide partnership assessment tool to identify partners' levels of capacities and support needs, and a fund to support partners in safeguarding.

Finally, in March 2018, Oxfam's boards committed to adopt feminist principles and mandated the development of a strategy and program to transform its organizational culture. The confederation has been restructured in line with its One Oxfam Vision 2020 strategy, which aims to distribute the power and management of its work between the secretariat and the affiliates.

These steps are important and to be commended; however, the IC also cautions far more work is needed to make these changes a reality across the ninety countries within which Oxfam operates. As the IC has learned through its research, the challenge lies in implementation, which is essential if Oxfam is to regain the trust of communities and staff, rectify historical injustices, and honor the organization's mission and staff.

Culture change must be at the core of Oxfam's transformation; therefore, the organization must reflect on the root causes of the issues it confronts and consider how to fight injustice within. Its recent culture survey, and the bottom-up program of dialogue and action resulting from it, is an important step in this direction. The recommendations presented in this report are designed to help Oxfam undertake the critical task of culture change, guided by transformational leadership approaches that address the nature of relationships between people; how leadership is demonstrated; and how systems are developed and implemented so Oxfam can rebuild as a safer, stronger, more ethical, and more effective organization for all.

Oxfam has taken the important step of publicly committing to change and being transparent in its work as a means to examine the way it must reform to address sexual misconduct. Oxfam is making progress in developing One Oxfam safeguarding policies and tools. Staff remain passionate about and loyal to Oxfam values, and have stated that they want to see Oxfam change and grow. The task at hand, however, should not be underestimated. Oxfam is facing

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some hard truths about its internal power dynamics and must be courageous as it continues to undertake internal reform. It must work hard and at pace to implement change throughout the confederation, as well as systematically collaborate with partners and communities to safeguard the communities they serve. Maintaining transparency throughout this journey is imperative to rebuild trust.

The IC believes that Oxfam can transform itself into an organization that is more accountable to and better protects the people it serves. With commitment and a keen focus on implementation, Oxfam has the potential to become a voice of leadership in wider sector reform.

Although the IC's remit was to review Oxfam exclusively, it recognizes that sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse are found throughout the aid sector; they are symptoms of wider power abuses that exist in all public and private spheres. Community research by the aid sector and the IC shows that seventeen years on from the 2002 sex-for-food scandal, the sector has a long way to go in realizing its commitment to zero tolerance of sexual misconduct and abuse. To that end, the IC hopes this report can foster both reflection and action more widely across the aid sector.

Committing to Change to become a voice for wider sector reform.

The IC believes that a commitment to change for Oxfam means to:

- 1) Admit publicly to errors the organization has made in the past
- 2) To propose a way forward
- 3) To systematically implement new and improved policies and procedures, ensuring they are there to stay.

RECOMMENDATIONS OVERVIEW

A. Reinvent the system

Oxfam requires a complete overhaul of its confederation-wide safeguarding system to combat and respond to sexual and other forms of misconduct at every level—with staff, partners, and in communities; this overhaul is underway but requires further investments. Oxfam must also show that there are real and visible consequences for acts of misconduct for anyone operating under its brand.

Recommendations include the following: Reform the board of supervisors to drive greater accountability; create the role of a chief ethics officer to oversee the implementation of a single, confederation-wide safeguarding system; implement a standards-based maturity model; build survivor leadership, including the appointment of a lead survivor expert to ensure a survivor-centered approach; operationalize Oxfam's zero tolerance policy; provide a program of support to Oxfam's partners, thus ensuring they have the capabilities to carry out the safeguarding roles expected of them; and mainstream safeguarding into all of Oxfam's work.

B. Support survivors to recover and rebuild their lives

Sexual exploitation and abuse can inflict long-term or even permanent damage. Survivors have a right to the support they need to recover and rebuild their lives.

Recommendations include the following: Ensure access to specialized and survivor-centered support services; use a survivor-centered approach to pursue justice; and make reparations to help survivors rebuild their lives on their own terms.

C. Co-create community reporting systems

Oxfam urgently needs to comply with pre-existing commitments to affected populations regarding accountability. It must take action to ensure that program participants have access to safe and responsive complaint mechanisms that reflect their needs and preferences.

Recommendations include the following: Be accountable to *all* affected populations by establishing multiple channels for reporting sexual exploitation and abuse that align with community preferences; conduct annual reviews of safeguarding systems with partners and the communities Oxfam serves; and bolster the annual reviews with external reviews.

D. Create a supportive environment

Oxfam must create a supportive environment in which staff can challenge the organization to improve. Successful safeguarding requires a focus on an ethical, safe, and healthy environment for both staff and program participants.

Recommendations include the following: Establish an internal ombuds system to provide staff with an independent, neutral, informal, and confidential place to air concerns and seek advice; invest in surveys to continuously monitor staff satisfaction; foster and support staff dialogues around culture, power dynamics, inequalities, and discrimination; invest in programs to address these issues and transform the organization's culture; tackle staff work-life balance concerns meaningfully; and review contractual approaches to staff hires.

E. Make it personal

Oxfam must take aggressive steps to realize its organizational values in all areas of its work. All staff must be held accountable for realizing its values, and the code of conduct must be truly understood and embraced by all staff, partners, and the communities in which Oxfam works.

Recommendations include the following: Implement a leadership development model that supports Oxfam's values and required competencies, while also strengthening and diversifying its leadership team. Action should include undertaking a management cadre refresh process. This process could be implemented over time in cycles, whereby the organization groups together and advertises for competition those managerial posts for which the incumbents' contracts are concluding or open

posts are anticipated; uses performance management processes to deal more decisively with poor managers, including linking performance more clearly to expected behaviors; strengthens the organization's leadership training programs; and takes practical steps to operationalize the code of conduct.

F. Model transparency

Oxfam leadership can show that it is living up to the organizational values only by demonstrating complete transparency, whenever it is safe to do so.

Recommendations include the following: Continue public reporting of safeguarding cases, taking care to do so in line with survivor-centered principles; undergo an audit to assess its compliance with the expanded Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability; publish its policies so all in the sector can access them; track and share progress on gender justice commitments; and engage in a continued and public independent review of the organization's progress in safeguarding and culture change.

G. Work together within the sector to realize systemic change

The development and humanitarian sectors still face significant challenges in some of the most fundamental areas of safeguarding, such as prevention, reporting, and response. Even if Oxfam undertakes important reforms to its safeguarding approach, these efforts will have limited impact if Oxfam and its peers do not have an enabling environment to support reform.

Recommendations include the following: Encourage all aid organizations to join the Inter-Agency Scheme for the Disclosure of Safeguarding-related Misconduct in Recruitment Process within the Humanitarian and Development Sector (Misconduct Disclosure Scheme); promptly establish interagency reporting systems that comply with Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidance; incorporate humanitarian safeguarding tools into development settings; incorporate safeguarding into the localization agenda; and address the ways in which donors assume further safeguarding costs.