



## **Oxfam Management Response to the Independent Commission interim report**

*16 January 2019*

### **Background**

Oxfam established the [Independent Commission](#) on Sexual Misconduct, Accountability and Culture Change in February of 2018, following the serious allegations of misconduct in Haiti in 2011. The Commission's remit is to conduct a confederation-wide review of Oxfam's culture, accountability and safeguarding policies, procedures and practice.

### **Introduction**

Oxfam International's Executive Board welcomes the Interim Report of the Independent Commission on Sexual Misconduct, Accountability and Culture Change. While the Interim Report makes for challenging reading for everyone within the Oxfam Confederation, this level of detailed scrutiny is exactly what is required at a crucial moment in our history. Indeed, in setting up the Commission, we invited its members to identify areas of weakness and report back to us in the most exacting way against the highest of standards. Only by holding up a mirror to ourselves can we address these challenges and ensure that our vital work takes place in a culture of mutual respect and empowerment, where everyone feels safe and respected. Oxfam has committed to be guided by whatever recommendations the Commission makes, and we look forward to the Commission's Final Report which we expect to receive in mid-2019.

We recognize the seriousness of the criticisms within this Interim Report, including from some of our own staff. We hear that in prioritizing what we deliver for the world's poorest people, more attention needs to be paid to how we do it, in particular to the effect of power imbalances within our organization. It is painfully clear that Oxfam is not immune from the risk of incidents of bullying, abuse, harassment or incidents of poor culture. We should not be surprised by this; nor should we shy away from it. We are an organization that understands the interaction between gender, power and justice, with over 10,000 staff and many volunteers operating across every corner of the globe. To those who have experienced such unacceptable behavior: we are sorry. We are committed to taking action; and as a priority, we will follow-up on any individual cases passed to us by the Commission.

It is also important to recognize the contribution and bravery of our people in collaborating with this process and for using the reporting mechanisms we have in place around the world. People have experienced occasions of misconduct and had the trust in this process to speak out about it. We hear them and have a responsibility to challenge ourselves to address these issues with candidness and openness, reflecting the courage and openness of those who have spoken to the Commission.

We are committed to taking action, and we encourage anyone within Oxfam, or working with us, to report any concerns or instances of misconduct or abuse. It is also clear that, while we put policies in place, we need to move swiftly to apply them more consistently in practice. The instances the Commission has found of misconduct and unacceptable behavior are an urgent reminder of the need to continue to make progress.

Oxfam has a bold vision and ambition for achieving gender justice and women's rights. We should not and will not lower our vision of a just world where all women and men are able to enjoy their rights, but rather continue to improve and redouble our efforts and commitment to this end. It is right that we are held to the highest standards. In the areas of gender justice and power imbalances, we



set the most challenging of targets and the Independent Commission has rightly judged us against those standards. We have been fighting for the rights of those in poverty for decades, and we need to do more to walk the talk and learn from the concerns and experiences of our staff, partners and communities we work with.

We are pleased that the IC reports hearing 'great appreciation' of Oxfam's work from our partners and the communities we serve. We are acutely aware of our duty to the more than 22 million people we reach every year through our work supporting their fight to escape poverty, fight inequality and survive humanitarian emergencies, and to our partners, supporters and of course our staff.

In its interim findings, the Commission recognizes Oxfam's genuine commitment to learn lessons from the past and to reform. It cites real progress and the positive steps we have taken, from approving new common safeguarding policies to making improvements to our case management, recruitment and training. We publish today our latest [update on the progress](#) we have made implementing our 10 Point Plan. This builds on improvements that have been made over the past years.

Key progress so far on the Ten-Point Plan includes:

- Country Safeguarding Focal Points in all program countries, all to be fully trained by March 2019; new expert Safeguarding Advisors and HR staff in many affiliate headquarters, as additions to existing teams.
- Fifteen additional new roles are in place across Oxfam, including: safeguarding advisors, gender advisors, Human Resources, humanitarian support staff and a role developing a rolling program of safeguarding training for all country-based staff.
- New 'Safer Recruitment' guidance and support materials are in use, ensuring that interview questions and job advertisements and descriptions properly reflect Oxfam's values and safeguarding commitments, along with pre-employment staff screening and a central system for providing references.
- A new Partnership Approach and Assessment Tool to support our partners to improve their own safeguarding policies and practices and help them become safer organizations for their staff and people they serve is being rolled out.
- A new Safe Programming guide to help ensure Oxfam's humanitarian responses minimize the likelihood of safeguarding incidents happening is being implemented.
- Standard, stronger Oxfam-wide policies and practices: Standard Operating Procedure for Reporting Misconduct including to authorities and donors, confederation wide policies on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and on Child Protection, among others are complete.

The increased reporting of misconduct cases we have witnessed in recent months is an encouraging sign – we want people to be confident that Oxfam will always act in their best interest.

The Commission rightly states that much more needs to be done, and that the concrete actions already taken on policy and practice must be accompanied by a broader commitment to address and develop our working culture. We will continue to work with staff on this and appreciate the dedication and determination of hundreds of our colleagues who have participated in shaping and driving change to date. We note and welcome the four areas of emerging recommendations set out in the Interim Report and will engage further with the Commission on the detail as these recommendations are finalized.



As the Commission explains, it has talked to a number of staff in ten of the 90 countries in which we operate. Many interviewees were self-selecting, and we are grateful to these colleagues for their contribution in coming forward. More than anyone, our own staff understand the challenge that power imbalances can create and we must be honest with ourselves in identifying them. Oxfam's dedicated staff are our greatest asset, and we will act on the Commission's observation that staff can play a greater role as 'change agents' as we strengthen our safeguarding practices and our culture. In late 2018 Oxfam staff designed an internal Culture Survey which more than 3000 colleagues around the world have completed. We look forward to receiving the results of this survey and to everyone at Oxfam working together to act on the findings.

Oxfam recognized some time ago that we need to address where power sits and how it is deployed within the Oxfam Confederation. The 2020 change process, which is ongoing, fundamentally changed the way Oxfam delivers programs and has further changed the role of Oxfam affiliates, Oxfam International and country programs. This and previous changes have had significant impacts on staff over several years and has shifted the power between affiliates and countries. A key objective of our 2020 vision is to ensure that power is shared equitably, redistributing it to our Southern affiliates and country programs which are at the front line of our work.

In addition, during the 2020 process Oxfam commenced a fundamental review of our governance structures and accountability mechanisms, and we will bring the Commission's emerging recommendations on governance into this process. We are making improvements and simplifying our business model and will continue to do so as we develop our new organizational strategy. Oxfam acknowledges that this will be a journey taking some time and sustained effort, but we have begun moving and are committed for the long run.

### **Emerging Recommendations**

We welcome the Interim Report's publication and will consider its conclusions in depth. We are determined to address the challenges raised in each of the report's four areas of recommendations. The latest ten-point plan [update](#) sets out many examples of actions we are taking that are relevant to the recommendations.

Examples include:

1. *Model Oxfam's values, good behavior, and commitment to safeguarding policies.*
  - Oxfam will continue to build on efforts to strengthen recruitment, induction and performance management processes and monitor their implementation. This includes continuing to support the development and implementation of sector-wide initiatives to limit the rehiring of offenders such as the Inter-agency Misconduct Reporting Scheme.
  - We will ensure that all managers, in Oxfam International and in affiliates, have at least one performance objective on Oxfam collaboration that is appraised through 360° feedback and discussed with managers.



2. *Empower and enable staff, communities, and partners to act through stronger systems when they see sexual misconduct*
  - Oxfam will finalize the design of a Global Safeguarding Network in February 2019, which will include a single safeguarding case management system and suite of one-Oxfam safeguarding policies and standard operating procedures. As part of this work, we will seek feedback and lessons learned from a variety of stakeholders to ensure that our tools and systems are fit for purpose and improved over time.
  - Oxfam is committed to working more closely with the sector to support the development and/or strengthening of community-based complaints and feedback mechanisms. This has been highlighted by Oxfam's participation in and endorsement of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee PSEA/SH's work on advancing Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) at country-level.
3. *Create space for staff to challenge bullying and negative power dynamics and create positive ones for better accountability.*
  - The Independent Commission's Interim Report is a valuable source of information about where we are as an organization. We will use this as well as the outcomes of our culture survey, to which over 3000 staff responded, to enrich our strategy into the future, and enable facilitated dialogue across the organization. The recommendations will also inform the ongoing governance and model reform.
4. *Invest in personal and team reflections on how to improve Oxfam's culture and behavior for personal and collective accountability.*
  - Oxfam is committed to continuing the ongoing regular discussions and reflection among teams and offices around the Oxfam Code of Conduct, safeguarding and how staff can live our values.
  - Leadership is committed to model good behavior and to adopt feminist leadership principles that support positive change in Oxfam and its work. Oxfam affiliates and countries have had team discussions, and developed initiatives and programs to improve our culture, and these will continue.

ENDS