Independent High-Level Commission  
on Sexual Misconduct, Accountability and Culture Change  
at Oxfam  

First Meeting Summary: 13-14 May 2018, Oxford, UK.

The Independent Commission thanks staff from across the Oxfam confederation and sector for their openness and support. The commission recognises the urgency of the situation and the role it should play to promote systemic change within Oxfam and across the sector.

First and foremost, the Independent Commission believes it is completely unacceptable for development and humanitarian organisations to allow the abuse of power and exploitation of their own staff and communities that they are there to serve.

The commission is here to listen to survivors, communities that Oxfam and others serve and staff, as well as leadership teams as a critical stakeholder to achieve improvements. It aims to identify concrete ways to improve the practices of Oxfam and the development/humanitarian sector. This is also a sector-wide problem and solutions need to be systemic and enduring.

The commission, in its own work practices, commits to putting people at the centre of it work (including using language that doesn’t imply that survivors are the problem); being evidence-based; being courageous and innovative in its recommendations; being transparent, reliable and trustworthy; having good governance and integrity as a commission; having shared credibility; being open to being corrected and being honest with each other.

The commission will prioritise three areas of work:

1) Culture change, which includes organisational leadership, the role the organisational structure, policies and practices plays in how people in communities that Oxfam serves, as well as staff (especially those with the least power) are treated.

2) Safeguarding policies, procedures and practices, including consistency across the confederation, how cases are handled and decisions are made; related HR and corporate management processes; safeguarding staff resources and how they are deployed for programmatic work as well as other parts of Oxfam (eg shops, regions, headquarters). Accountability systems -- both bottom up and top down, within Oxfam and external to the organization -- will be examined.

3) Supporting survivors so they are encouraged and supported to come forward through a range of channels (understanding that many use informal channels) – both for staff and from communities - and ensuring the commission’s recommendations for sector wide change are grounded in what survivors think will really make a difference.

The commission will not be undertaking investigations of individual cases (either new or re-opening cases).

The commission will be proactive in listening to communities, staff across the sector, local and international development and humanitarian organisations, women and youth leaders and organisations; challenge the sector and work towards transformational change; and work collaboratively, given the wealth of experience and knowledge that exists. It recognizes that there are many external parallel reviews currently underway, and will work to learn from these. It will also strive to provide timely input into discussions on sector-wide policy and regulatory reform.
As a matter of priority, the commission will be visiting a range of Oxfam programmes and will speak with a number of Oxfam affiliates both large and small, newer and more established. The commission wants to hear from survivors and will work with organisations that are specialised in doing this work, knowing that this requires trust and time. The commission is setting up its own website and confidential email address as soon as possible and they welcome people getting in contact directly.

The commission aims to have interim recommendations ready for October, subject to analyses of Oxfam affiliates and confederation safeguarding case management being conducted by others being available, and a final report ready by May 2019. The commission is also looking for opportunities to provide early recommendations where there are clear opportunities to do so.