



OXFAM SOUTH AFRICA RESPONDS TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE SCANDALS IN HAITI, CHAD AND SOUTH SUDAN

14th February 2018

Oxfam South Africa is alarmed by reports that members of Oxfam staff in Haiti, Chad and South Sudan acted in a way that leaves the most appalling mark against the high values we set ourselves as the Oxfam International confederation. The reports concern several acts of sexual exploitation.

As a global confederation, Oxfam International is comprised of 20 NGOs (Affiliates) working together with partners in more than 90 countries of the world. Established in 2014 and with its headquarters in Johannesburg, Oxfam South Africa is an autonomous member and the first African affiliate of the Oxfam International confederation. Whilst Oxfam Great Britain who led the response in Haiti is one of 20 affiliates of Oxfam International, we are all called to action on this.

Our priority is to stand fully by the survivors of such reprehensible behaviour. We are firmly against exploitation and abuse of women, girls. We are committed to ensuring that such behaviour is rooted out of our Confederation. As a result, we have decided as a confederation to establish an Independent Review Board, to undertake a full and independent review of all Oxfam International's policies and practices globally. This will include all affiliates. This will be an opportunity for all of us to both understand the extent of the problems and to develop a comprehensive and deep-rooted response.

Oxfam International has a safeguarding framework meant to particularly protect people in distress who are vulnerable to abuse of power and coercion by those meant to protect and assist them.

"Ultimately, the litmus test of our commitment will be the extent to which we are willing as a confederation to be guided by the sentiments of survivors. We must reach out to them, we must hear what justice would look like for them. We must make support available for them in their journeys of healing. We must revisit the cases and bring those accountable to book," said Oxfam SA Executive Director Siphokazi Mthathi.

When the Haiti situation was reported by whistle-blowers in 2011, Oxfam Great Britain took the following actions.

- An investigation was launched as soon as the allegation came to the fore in 2011.
- Four members of staff were dismissed because of the investigation and three, including the country director, resigned before the end of the investigation. Allegations that underage girls may have been involved were not proven;
- After the investigation, a thorough review of the case was undertaken that resulted in the creation of our dedicated Safeguarding Team and a confidential

'whistleblowing' hotline as part of a package of measures to ensure that we do all we can to protect our staff, prevent sexual abuse and misconduct happening in the first place and improve how we handle any allegations.

- Oxfam put out a press statement on 5 August 2011 informing the public that we had launched the investigation and another on 5 September announcing the outcome.
- Oxfam GB Trustees, the Charity Commission and DFID, as well as other major donors of our Haiti work including the EU, WHO and UN agencies, were kept informed of the investigation and its outcome.
- The Charity Commission confirmed that Oxfam had taken appropriate action and that it therefore had “no regulatory concerns”.
- The misconduct findings related to offences including bullying, harassment, intimidation and failure to protect staff as well as sexual misconduct.

That these took place a few years ago, and despite it involving a small number of staff, is a call to greater vigilance from us today. As Oxfam SA, we are working within our Confederation to do more towards developing the strongest possible policies to prevent harassment and protect people we work with around the world and to ensure effective mechanisms for survivor support.

Oxfam International today has a binding global and dedicated Safeguarding approach, with a best practice package of measures to ensure we protect all our staff and people we work with, prevent sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse happening in the first place. In South Africa, this approach is to also apply to all the partners Oxfam SA works with. We have a Global Taskforce on Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation & Abuse that is co-chaired by our Executive Director of Oxfam, Winnie Byanyima and Oxfam SA Executive Director is a member of this Task Force.

In South Africa, Oxfam SA had been revising its own policies, to inculcate them with staff, volunteers and partners. Our anonymous Hotline will be fully-operational by the 1st of March 2018. We know the only way to change culture and make the safeguarding system work is to be open and transparent about ABUSE and to act boldly when cases arise.

“Through our Women’s Rights and Gender Justice Programme, we support women’s and gender non-conforming people’s organising to liberate themselves through fostering powerful movements that can hold governments and social institutions accountable to protect and expand their rights. We will work to rebuild our trust with our supporters who know, as we do, that the actions of a few do not represent all that Oxfam stands for”, said Oxfam South Africa Executive-Director, Siphokazi Mthathi.

"As an organization fighting for women’s rights in South Africa and around the world, we have to be the moral example we demand of others. We have a special responsibility to protect the people whom we exist to serve from exploitation and abuse. We do the work we do to contribute to ending the scourge of violence against women and girls, not further subject them to violence in the hands of our own staff" Mthathi added.

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