THE OXFAM SEX SCANDAL

“A lie has no Leg, but a Scandal has Wings”
–Thomas Fuller

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Summary

The Oxfam case study covers the organization’s reaction to sexual allegations of aid workers with aid recipients after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti under the leadership of Roland van Hauwermeiren, Oxfam’s former head of operations in Haiti. The leadership did not take the concerning findings of the former head of Safeguards into account and instead of confronting this problem, it tried to cover it up. This was not until February 2018 when more whistleblowers spoke up that the case got the attention of the media and action was taken.
Facts

2011
- Six Oxfam staff in Haiti leave
- Including Roland van Hauwermerien
  - Helen Evans reports allegations of sexual assault and abuse
  - Requests safeguarding support and resources

2012
- Overseas allegations surface and Oxfam conducts survey
  - Evans asks to present findings to Leadership Team

2014

2015
- Evans emails then-executive Director Penny Lawrence
- Reports Oxfam to the Charity Commission

2017
- Charity Commission contacts Oxfam
February 9
- Penny Lawrence resigns
- Charity Commission launches inquiry
- European Commission threatens funding

February 12
- The Times Report
- Poll commissioned by The Third Sector
- Minnie Driver and Desmond Tutu denounce Oxfam

February 14
- Oxfam launches action plan
- Oxfam agrees to stop bidding for government funding

February 16
- Oxfam publishes redacted 2011 inquiring

February 19
- Mark Goldring's statement

February 20
- Mark Goldring appears before members of parliament
- Oxfam loses 7,094 regular donors
- Save the Children statement
February 22
Haiti announces suspension of Oxfam work

March 17
Oxfam is accused of keeping aid worker in Haiti after reported claims of sexual harassment

May 16
Mark Goldring announces resignation at the end of the year

June 14
Haiti announces it is withdrawing Oxfam's right to operate
Compliance

- Whistleblower policy

- Screening and referencing practices
Individual Responsibility

- Justifying actions and inactions
- Responsibility of the Whistleblowers and Witnesses
- Actions of the individual must adhere to the organization’s mission.
Organizational Responsibility

• Implemented whistleblower policy

• Duty of care, loyalty and obedience

• 10-Point Plan

1. An Independent High-Level Commission on Sexual Misconduct, Accountability and Culture Change

2. Reiterated commitment to collaborate with all relevant authorities

3. Re-examine past cases and encourage other witnesses or survivors to come forward

4. Increase our investment in safeguarding

5. Strengthen internal processes

6. Re-enforce a culture of zero tolerance towards harassment, abuse or exploitation

7. Work with our peers across the sector to tackle physical, sexual and emotional abuse

8. Active engagement with partners and allies, especially women’s rights organizations

9. Listen to the public

10. Recommit and strengthen our focus on gender justice externally
Systemic Responsibility

- Culture of Impunity

- Uphold the honesty and integrity within the humanitarian sector
Stakeholders Analysis

• Clients
  Can create insecurity among the clients receiving aid

• Donors
  Mistrust and withdrawal from the donations – 7,094 donors lost (Feb 2018)

• Field aid workers
  Must undergo more extensive vetting and training

• Leadership
  Must be held accountable and directly compliant with duties of trust, loyalty and care.
Alternative Solutions

- Proper screening and referencing of the candidates
- Staff care and training
Questions

Do you think that Oxfam would be in the same situation if the whistleblower had exposed the scandal right away?

How can you ensure that the vulnerable communities you serve are not being abused or taken advantage of by aid workers, businessmen, peacekeepers, missionaries, and journalists?

What kind of measure could be in place to ensure accountability at the executive level beyond enforcing of the whistleblower policy?
Would this scandal have been avoidable if the whistleblower policy had been included in the organization’s bylaws?

Could Oxfam have acted sooner, and what can be done to warn the next employers that these men were potential predators?

Do you think that the Oxfam scandal would have gone global without the #metoo campaign?
• https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/?fbclid=IwAR3dNz8vZga_sjL3oUEWg7dZVEfqyJ_vw58JFFKF WaCEU6sm_2-naFhXEvM
• Cecile Andrzewski’s book Zero Impunity