



Case Study

From Crisis Management to Feminist Leadership at Oxfam America

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Synopsis: Oxfam, the international nongovernmental organization, was rocked by press revelations in 2018 of sexual misconduct in its 2011 Haiti humanitarian operations following the devastating earthquake there. The scandal, which occurred amid a crescendo of the #MeToo movement, challenged the new leader of Oxfam's American affiliate with not only managing the reputational crisis, but also with pressing the organization and the larger NGO sector to make a systems change and a cultural shift on sexual exploitation and abuse. The case raises questions about how a leader can change a long-held culture of ignoring sexual misconduct, how and why changing perceptions mattered in that change, and what leadership approaches were effective.

Keywords: Crisis management, feminist leadership, international humanitarian aid, NGO management, organizational leadership, sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment, systems thinking

“We can't transform unless we force change. We have to force change to make change happen in the disaster relief ecosystem.”

ABBY MAXMAN

PRESIDENT & CEO, OXFAM AMERICA¹

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**PULTE INSTITUTE
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Sexual Misconduct News Reports Rock Oxfam

On February 9, 2018, the president and CEO of Oxfam America (OA), Abby Maxman, peered distractedly at the winter scene out the window of her Boston home. She was digesting the magnitude of an email from her counterpart in the UK alerting her of a news story that was about to break, and sat back in her chair, considering her next step. The British press had just reported revelations of sexual misconduct by Oxfam Great Britain (OGB) staff during a 2011 humanitarian response in Haiti. Specifically, OGB was accused of covering up key parts of an investigation into a prostitution scandal in Haiti. This took place in OGB offices in Haiti during the relief operations following the 2010 earthquake, a disaster that killed thousands and decimated the island.

Maxman had expected to face challenges in this job, but this story had potentially catastrophic reputational consequences for the organization and its ability to do its work; she called it a “massive tsunami.” Though OGB was responsible for the abuses, OGB and OA were part of the same larger organization. The sexual misconduct charges also broke in the wider context of the #MeToo movement in the United States, which heightened awareness of widespread sexual harassment and assault. Both of these factors would affect Oxfam employees and external stakeholders alike and, most importantly, how OA managed its response.

The decisions before Maxman would shape the future of the organization. Should OA distance itself from OGB? Should OA take responsibility for the abuse in Haiti? How should it reassure employees that Oxfam would not tolerate such behavior? Did it make sense to share the news with US donors, many of whom would never hear about the crisis? And, most importantly, how should OA maintain the trust of its supporters, partners, donors, and above all the communities it serves?

Oxfam America

HISTORY OF OXFAM INTERNATIONAL

In 1942, a group of Quaker intellectuals, social activists, and Oxford academics formed the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief in response to the plight of refugees in Greece. After World War II, Oxfam continued its work, sending materials and financial aid to groups aiding impoverished people throughout Europe. As the situation in Europe improved, Oxfam’s focus shifted toward developing nations.

Oxfam works to end the injustice of poverty. Its activities fall into three main areas: help people build better futures for themselves, hold the powerful accountable, and save lives in disasters. The Oxfam International (OI) confederation includes multiple national affiliates, each of which operates independently but interdependently to deliver on Oxfam’s mission and vision. They are joined together under a secretariat and bound by constitutional rules but are directly overseen by and are legally accountable to their own country executives and boards of directors, not to the international organization.

EXPANSION TO THE UNITED STATES

In 1970, a group of volunteers founded OA in response to the humanitarian crisis created by the fight for independence in Bangladesh. OGB provided a loan to the group to get started. By 2018, OA had annual revenue of \$99.3 million and approximately 400 employees globally, including 200 employees in Boston, 100 in Washington, DC, and 100 individuals in the field or remote offices.

OA relied almost entirely on funding from individual donors, foundations, and corporations. In 2018, 77 percent of the organization’s expenditures went directly to poverty alleviation and relief programs—well above the standard recommended by Charity Navigator, one of the leading charity-rating organizations in the US. At least 90 percent of funds designated by individual donors for humanitarian emergencies directly supported these activities.

Abby Maxman Arrives at Oxfam America

In February 2017, OA named Abby Maxman president, replacing Raymond Offenheiser, who subsequently retired in June that year after more than 20 years in the role. It was a logical and exciting progression for Maxman. She had spent more than 25 years working in international humanitarian aid and development, most recently serving as deputy secretary general of CARE International in Geneva. Her experience included both in-country development, senior leadership, management, and administrative work with CARE, as well as prior positions with the US Peace Corps, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, and the UN World Food Programme.

HAITI AND TROPICAL STORM JEANNE

Maxman knew the kinds of bad behavior that occurred in humanitarian and development contexts, having had firsthand experience in Rwanda and Haiti, among other areas. As a young professional, she had been promoted quickly, rising to become the country director for CARE in Haiti in 2004. She took on this role just weeks prior to Tropical Storm Jeanne, a disaster that caused the largest humanitarian crisis to hit Haiti in more than 40 years and left more than 3,000 Haitians dead and 250,000 more homeless.²

Haitians were so desperate for relief help that Maxman had no choice but to accept reinforcements. She allowed the UN peacekeeping mission to come in to support the organization with food distribution. Normally, her NGO would not allow relief workers to be accompanied by armed security or military personnel. Due to the circumstances, Maxman, in consultation with headquarters and partners, made an exception to standard protocol and allowed the UN Peacekeepers into the NGO-managed compound. As Maxman explained, "As an NGO and a standard protocol of civil society organizations, we don't use arms. NGOs have ascribed to that. But in this case, we allowed them to

come into our compound with the aim of helping to safely control the desperate crowds who were storming the compound to enable us to get emergency food out safely to the people in need."

Regrettably, shortly after the UN Peacekeepers came in to help, Maxman learned that the peacekeepers brought young Haitian women prostitutes into the compound. She immediately threw them out. But the head of the peacekeeping mission was threatening and menacing to Maxman. Following this incident, Maxman sought change regarding sexual exploitation and abuse not only at her NGO but also across the sector.

ADDRESSING EXPLOITATION AND PREVENTING ABUSE

From 2004 to 2011, Maxman worked with humanitarian aid colleagues in the sector to press the case for change and, finally, the UN adopted rules around Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). Despite that landmark moment, it was an ongoing struggle for the topic to get the attention it deserved. As Maxman explained, "A PSEA discussion was always the last thing on the agenda at every meeting. We'd often run out of time before we'd get to it, and we struggled to get resources dedicated to it." As Maxman continued to be promoted professionally, she continued to make strides in her organization for stronger PSEA and related policies.

When Maxman arrived at Oxfam in 2017, she made PSEA a priority for that organization, too. Early in her tenure, when preparing to represent the organization on a PSEA panel at a global event, she asked for Oxfam's PSEA policy. What she received was a mix of protocols and programs from across the organization, which to her was an indication of a gap that needed attention. Following discussions with staff and findings in a Great Place to Work survey, Maxman also solicited external support to examine past complaints and assess the workplace culture to help inform plans and priorities around PSEA in the workplace.

She pushed to create a unified, Oxfam-wide PSEA set of policies and common standard operating procedures, and was asked to co-chair a Safeguarding Task Force for the confederation. She recognized that the same risks that she had managed and the stronger policies that her former NGO had worked to put in place were not yet in place at Oxfam. She saw this as a potential serious risk to her new organization. She wanted the team to know that if they brought to her concerns around sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse, she would take action. While no major issues arose, 10 percent of the workforce proactively reached out to share their concerns about the workplace culture and the need and potential for change. Maxman took a series of actions to make concrete changes to the culture in response to the issues that had been identified, including implementing an 18-month Gender Action Learning project and hiring a vice president of people, culture and HR and a senior safeguarding advisor with direct reporting lines to her.

Maxman simultaneously worked to address gender justice in Oxfam's operations. In December 2017, she met with a working group that was responsible for advancing gender justice across Oxfam and had run Gender Action Learning programs in Cambodia and other geographies. She was concerned when she found that the learning method was used on partners, but not applied to OA. "I recognized an opportunity to help us walk the walk as a gender justice organization, and examine more deeply the issues of power relations that had links with the organizational culture and PSEA work. I believe that whatever we ask of others, we need to ask of ourselves. If we require something of our partners, we need to require it of ourselves."

The Sexual Abuse Crisis in Haiti and #MeToo Backdrop

On February 9, 2018, the British press reported revelations of sexual misconduct by OGB staff during the 2011 humanitarian response in Haiti. The aid arrived after a 7.0-magnitude earthquake hit the island on

January 12, 2010. An estimated 220,000 to 300,000 people died and approximately 300,000 were injured. Almost 4,000 schools were destroyed. The world took notice: From 2010 to 2020, international agencies allocated \$13.34 billion for rescue, recovery, and rebuilding efforts in Haiti.



In what Maxman called a "massive, front-page scandal story," the British press reported that former staff in Haiti paid for sex while on a humanitarian mission following the earthquake. (The operation where the abuse took place was entirely run by OGB. OA had separate smaller offices in Haiti.) OGB shared with the public and other regulatory bodies that misconduct had occurred, that they had completed an investigation in 2011 after a whistleblower revealed the wrongdoing, and that they had dismissed a number of staff. However, the country director was allowed to resign. Many inside and outside of Oxfam felt that not firing him was the wrong decision. The scandal was front-page news not only in the UK but also in Europe for weeks. The mainstream media in the United States also covered it, although not to the same extent.

The UK Charity Commission, the government regulator of charities, found in its own investigation, published in June 2019, that the situation in Haiti was not an isolated incident for Oxfam. According to the commission's CEO, Helen Stephenson, "Our inquiry demonstrates that, over a period of years, Oxfam's internal culture tolerated poor behavior and at times lost sight of the values it stands for."

"No charity is so large, nor is its mission so important that it can afford to put its own reputation ahead of the dignity and wellbeing of those it exists to protect."

TINA STOWELL

THE RT HON BARONESS STOWELL OF
BEESTON MBE, CHARITY COMMISSION
CHAIR

OGB's crisis was not happening in isolation. The fall of 2017 marked the crescendo of the #MeToo movement in the United States. Though Tarana Burke, a sexual harassment survivor and activist, originally launched the movement in 2006 on MySpace, it turned into a tidal wave following the initiation of sexual harassment and assault allegations against movie mogul Harvey Weinstein in 2017.

The #MeToo movement gave a voice to women who did not think they could share what happened to them. Every day, more women, including many famous actresses and entertainers, spoke out and shared their stories of harassment and abuse. The floodgates opened and a revolution began. Corporations and organizations that had never been called out publicly for harassment now found themselves facing serious reports of abuse.

But it wasn't just about actresses and women in the corporate world. The movement brought to light the widespread nature of sexual abuse. According to the World Health Organization's 2017 study, just over one third of all women had experienced physical and/or sexual violence, and nearly one third of women had had been in a relationship that included physical and/or sexual domestic violence.³

Sexual Abuse and Humanitarian Work

Abuse in emergency work, unfortunately, was not a rarity. According to Maxman, she had encountered a number of senior managers in humanitarian work who demonstrated a "machismo and a cowboy culture." This was especially challenging for a young woman in a leadership role.

She recounted, "As a country director in Haiti and Ethiopia, I learned that often decisions around resources were made over beers in after-hours bars. Earlier in my career, there was a gender and age gap that I had to navigate. I was in my 30s and 40s and a working mother, while the other country directors were often older and nearly always expatriate men. I was committed to acting ethically, but sometimes it felt like I was swimming upstream. There were few women in leadership roles, and the system seemed to reward and recognize success by how big their budget was, not necessarily on quality, principles, values, or how they did the work or treated their partners, counterparts, and teams."

There were challenges inherent in the system and, at times, an unhealthy dynamic of competition across NGOs. Once, Maxman was working on a competitive bid for a \$100 million US Agency for International Development (USAID) project, but after witnessing how one NGO manager in another organization in the bidding team was treating local partners, she flouted the big-budget ethos and walked away from the bid. Recalling the event, Maxman said, "There was no

partnership; it was a colonialist approach, and for me it was unacceptable. I'd rather walk away and lose the bid than be part of a team that treated local partners poorly. I was fortunate that my organization's headquarters supported my decision."

Following the revelations about Oxfam in early 2018, other humanitarian organizations also looked internally. A review of workplace culture at Save the Children⁴ found that one in four employees of the organization had experienced harassment over the previous three years. According to the report, the staff's most common complaint was that members felt ignored; many also felt humiliation and shame. While Save the Children did find "a small number of incidents of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention" in the previous three years, they found no evidence of sexual coercion. However, Sir Justin Forsyth, the organization's CEO, left the organization in 2015 following allegations of misconduct.⁵

Another relief organization, Doctors Without Borders, also conducted an internal review on sexual harassment. Subsequently, the organization announced that it had dealt with 24 cases of sexual harassment or abuse among 40,000 staff in 2017 and dismissed 19 people following this investigation.⁶

Ashley Tsongas, OA's chief of staff, explained that the abuse was not something new but rather a case of evolving expectations, and that OA was squarely in the center of this change. She observed, "Women have been harassed and abused in the workplace since the beginning of time. It was well known and discussed among NGOs. But, all of a sudden, there was a public conversation in the context of #MeToo. Once you change the color of the background, things start to appear differently and the conversations change, both internally and externally."



Finding Her Leadership Style

Maxman recognized that what had made her effective before Oxfam was now a critical strength. She said, “I’d learned how to lean in and adapt without losing my core. I don’t expect people to meet me where I am. I try to meet people where they are. It’s about being tough-minded and kindhearted.”

Maxman was a new executive director at Oxfam and had only been in the job eight months when the Haiti misconduct news broke. Prior to the crisis, she had felt like a “junior senator” among veteran CEOs in the international NGO community. This situation, and the fact that every organization could cite abuse, leveled the playing field. And though she and her Oxfam peers had struggles and stress, the crisis helped rebalance and equalize power dynamics and strengthened their collaboration. “We knew,” Maxman explained, “we were going to go down together. I often remind myself and others that we are only as strong as our weakest link. We now had an opportunity to make real systemic change.”

The crisis tested Maxman in an unprecedented way. Not only was she still new to the organization, she was also recovering from a debilitating flu. OA was in a state of shock as it came to terms with the gravity of the situation. Oxfam’s reputation was at stake and they feared letting down the people and communities it served and partners around the world. The crisis also had huge potential implications for donors and supporters as well as staff morale.

Immediately, Maxman established a Crisis Communications Response Team. The goal was to ensure that OA shared consistent information and messages with staff and key external stakeholders to rebuild their trust. The Crisis Comms Team was composed of 20 senior leaders who worked long days, seven days a week, for about five weeks before the pace finally slowed. Maxman recalled, “I was overwhelmed but took it one day at a time. Keep people informed,

communicate, communicate, communicate; ask for grace and forgiveness; and remind people of the importance of compassion, humility, and self-care.”

She wrote to major donors just five days after the news broke: “As a leader accountable for safeguarding our staff, partners and beneficiaries, as a woman, as a mother, and as a human being, I am appalled and dismayed at the revelations.” She added, “Globally and at Oxfam America, we continue to have zero tolerance for abuse of people in any form. We stand firmly against the exploitation and abuse of women and girls.” And she pledged, “We will work tirelessly to rebuild your trust.”

Maxman was also explicit with the Board of Directors and Leadership Council, an OA advisory body, as to the frequency of the information they would receive. She asked that they bring back to the Crisis Comms Team what they were hearing as well.

Members of the Board and the Leadership Council were concerned, but said they understood it was not an issue isolated to Oxfam. They also made clear their expectations that OA was to take serious measures to address and mitigate harms. The Board, which was chaired by a woman, was proactive not only in setting those expectations but also in lending a hand as Maxman and her Crisis Comms Team managed through the crisis.

CHOICES, OPTIONS

As the OA team reviewed the material it had gathered in the “war room,” it became clear that the team had major decisions to make, including how much information to share with the public. Alissa Rooney, director of media and public relations, reviewed the media requests and incoming questions and saw that the public had differing levels of knowledge about the crisis. Rooney and others wanted to be out front, sharing information that the public might not know. In spite of the risk that they would be informing many stakeholders for the first time or taking responsibility for issues OA had not been directly involved in, the team felt OA should own up to what OGB did and control the narrative in the news.

OA had to weigh the risks of informing people who didn't know about crisis and the chance of angering people who were waiting for a response. (After the fact, a survey revealed that among charity givers, only 20 percent who knew of Oxfam knew of the crisis.)

While the deliberations were intense on how to manage and respond, OA decided early on to be proactive and communicate as openly as possible to all stakeholders—major donors, small donors, supporters, foundations, celebrities, and “Sisters on the Planet,” OA's nationwide group of volunteer women advocates. OA wanted to answer their questions and uphold its commitment to transparency. Maxman pushed OA to demonstrate that it was setting a new standard for behavior.

As Rooney explained, “Within the Crisis Comms Team, we felt that we reached this tipping point. In the era of #MeToo, people wanted transparency. We did some soul searching about who we wanted to be. If we wanted to shift power dynamics and our mode of operations, transparency was an important part of that. Abby, especially, felt if we wanted to survive and make lasting change, we needed to take risks [and] be proactive about our communication, humble and transparent.”

There were possible important consequences to transparency. Oxfam America relied almost entirely on private foundation and individual donors—it never accepted US government funding and only allowed other members of the Oxfam confederation to take US government disaster funding in the case of dire emergencies. Full transparency with donors would put revenue at risk.

Introducing Safeguarding at Oxfam International

In the humanitarian aid sector, initiatives around prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse had existed for several years, but significant action had been slow. With the Oxfam crisis, Maxman not only took on the

role of co-chair of Oxfam International's safeguarding task force, but she also co-chaired the CEO task force on safeguarding at InterAction, the alliance of US international NGOs. From both roles, Maxman was in a critical position to act on the issue.

“We can't transform unless we force change,” Maxman said at the time. “We have to force change to make change happen. It's a whole ecosystem that needs to evolve. We must be willing to break some things down. As NGOs, we have a responsibility and an obligation to push the boundaries and challenge deeply embedded norms, behaviors, and organizational culture.”

She saw the opportunity to press for sector-wide change in her safeguarding role at InterAction. The CEO task force she co-chaired starting in late 2017 introduced a PSEA policy statement at the group's meeting in early 2018, but only 12 CEOs of humanitarian organizations signed on. It took nearly a year before more than 120 became signatories.⁷

The crisis at Oxfam revealed not only the absence of a coherent set of policies across the OI confederation, but also a lack of data, inconsistencies of practice, and general inattention to PSEA issues. Maxman's leadership at the international level enabled her to press for change there, too. She strengthened the bench by hiring Jennifer Emond in September 2018 as Oxfam America's senior advisor of safeguarding. Emond, a seasoned humanitarian worker in the area of protecting communities from sexual exploitation and abuse, reported directly to Maxman but advised and helped both OA and OI on improving policy, case work, and training.

IMPLEMENTING NEW SAFEGUARDING RULES

The approach of the Oxfam Safeguarding Task Force was as meaningful as the work that the team did. In the past, Oxfam—like other humanitarian organizations—had taken a top-down approach to addressing sexual exploitation. Now, Oxfam asked all aid workers and employees to sign a code of conduct (see Annex 1) and participate in mandatory training.

Emond and her team introduced a more holistic and participative approach to training. The new training for Oxfam staff covered power dynamics and consequences for relief operations if abuse occurred. Emond also expanded the number of people it educated in a community. Oxfam stated clearly that aid recipients were entitled to benefits without having to provide sex. In many cultures, trading sexual favors for aid was not only completely acceptable, it was also legal. Oxfam and its peers operated in societies where girls, especially those most marginalized, married as early as 12 years old. Thus, attitude change among recipients and even relief workers was uphill.

Emond admitted, “Members of the communities we serve sometimes complain and say we are controlling their actions. We have to explain that we are trying to change the power dynamics. We can support sex workers’ rights, but we won’t allow people to get taken advantage of in a situation that isn’t based on equal footing.”

Oxfam also put in place standard reporting, case management, and operating procedures (see Annex 2 for Oxfam policies). This made it much easier to balance risk with immediacy. One key issue was ensuring that Oxfam conducted background checks on relief workers in order to prevent rehiring of sexual misconduct perpetrators.

As Emond explained, “Now that all our affiliates are talking, we have a network of organizations and more information about possible risk.”

The organization also recognized, however, that it had to thread the needle between managing costs and pressing for safeguarding. As Maxman explained, Oxfam was wrestling with humanitarian aid incentives that were sometimes out of line. She said, “Donors say they want fast results, immediate response, and low administrative overhead, which pushes people to cut corners. If you put safeguarding as an administrative cost, it’s a mistake. It isn’t an extra; it’s a core operational cost. This is a leadership issue, too. If leadership doesn’t make it a priority, it won’t be one.”

OA believed that its safeguarding efforts would lead to an increase in reporting, allowing the organization to address the incidents. Maxman explained, “We want to see numbers going up. We want to create a safe and enabling environment for people to report. It is positive when we see people are reporting. We can work on these things more effectively if we are all clear on the implications.”

Change and Impact

The Haiti crisis pushed OA to not only continue but also accelerate the work that Maxman had started around sexual harassment and abuse in its programs. Maxman and her team sought to understand how they use power within OA and how they might create more equitable ways to interact internally.

Specifically, Maxman chose to ground the management and culture of OA in feminist principles. Feminist leadership describes leaders who are aware of individuals’ power and privilege. Feminist leaders pay as much attention to how they make decisions as they do to the decisions themselves.

An organization that uses feminist leadership pays attention to the internal distribution of power, not simply to roles and responsibilities. Feminist leadership is an approach that touches everything, including how an organization runs team meetings, ensures that people have a voice in decisions that affect them, and operates so that people feel empowered and in control of their own destinies.

Embracing feminist leadership principles also brought the organization back in line with OA’s values. Rooney explained, “We have said that we are an organization that, among other things, works to promote and advance the rights of women and girls. It isn’t just about how we program. Our turn towards feminist leadership was a direct result of the crisis. It took public scrutiny to have the domino effect of leaders [engaging in] self-reflection and scrutiny.”

Box 1. Oxfam America: Feminist Principles

Power Sharing

We recognize power and privilege within the organization, challenge unbalanced power dynamics, and actively facilitate the space for people from the global south, particularly women and people from diverse gender identities championing gender equality, to lead.

The Personal is Political

We recognize that challenging patriarchy, white supremacy, racism, neo-liberalism, and colonialism in their various expressions of power abuse, exclusion, and oppression begins with questioning and changing ourselves. We are all inherently part of these larger systems and our beliefs, actions, attitudes, and behaviors can either strengthen injustice or advance equality. Individual, institutional, and social transformation are interconnected. We acknowledge that there are no private issues.

Feminism is Local-Global Movement

We understand feminism(s) as a resistance movement that opposes patriarchy throughout the world and its different forms. We recognize diversity of feminist actors and the importance of not undermining/duplicating/overlooking their work through our actions and policies. We embrace the approach of localization, and recognize our responsibility as an international actor that advocates for ending gender inequality.

Nothing About Us Without Us

We hold ourselves accountable for making sure we do not instrumentalize—use and coopt for our own purposes—women’s or LGBTQ+ rights issues. Above all, we ensure our allies and the women and gender diverse people impacted by the programs and campaigns we support participate fully and directly in decisions regarding them, and that we campaign for and with space where they speak for themselves.

Engaging With Men and Masculinities

Feminism is for everyone. We work to address gender norms and structures, as well as address male privilege and toxic masculinity. While women and people from diverse gender identities remain most deeply and profoundly impacted by patriarchy, it can also be harmful to men.

There is No Economic, Social, And Environmental Justice Without Gender Justice

Eliminating all forms of exclusion and oppression requires us to acknowledge that social and economic progression are interlinked. This means re-thinking our collective wellbeing in terms of positive rights: full participation, full emancipation, and complete recognition of others.

Diversity And Inclusion—Gender Mainstreaming and Intersectional Analysis

We celebrate and encourage diversity, and challenge all forms of discrimination internally as well as within communities we are working with. We recognize that there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle and emphasize the equality of all people, where being different does not equate to being less than. We believe in the richness that people from different backgrounds bring to our organization.

Safety

We believe in the right to safe environments for all people working in and with Oxfam. This translates to a safety both physically and emotionally—in both tangible and virtual spaces—where sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, bullying, mobbing, and any other form of power abuse are not tolerated in any way. Additionally, individuals should feel safe in reporting any incidences of abuse of power, knowing that their concerns will be met

with the utmost respect and importance and will be dealt with promptly.

Care and Solidarity

We promote a space free of hierarchy and patriarchal norms, a pledge to recognize the authority each one of us holds while respecting differences. We recognize that importance of personal wellbeing and practice self-care is a political act of upholding respect for human rights and the rights of others, as well as for the efficiency and sustainability of our work and our person. We commit to taking care, respecting, supporting, and lifting each other in solidarity.

Development as Freedom

We embrace our freedom and the freedom of those around us to articulate opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation, censorship, or sanction. We value autonomy as a form of agency to act independently, as well as the ability to make our own choices recognizing the responsibility that comes with it.

Elimination of All Forms of Gender-Based Violence

We recognize gender-based violence as one of the most widespread and prevalent violations of human rights worldwide. We are committed to strengthening our partnerships with feminist and women’s rights organizations, youth and men, to transform social norms that reproduce and normalize violence; hold duty bearers accountable to meet international standards; develop, implement, and evaluate laws and policies to address gender-based violence; and support survivors in their journey to recovery.

In addition to the potential negative public reaction to Oxfam’s sexual misconduct crisis, Oxfam staff constituted a significant constituency that was deeply affected by the scandal and expressed disillusionment with the organization. This was an internal challenge for management, and one that had to be addressed most directly by Oxfam’s leader, given that leadership shapes corporate culture.

In response, Maxman took a feminist leadership approach to all she did. She created forums where people could confidentially voice their opinions about operations. And when she made difficult decisions, she was careful to demonstrate how she consulted and

considered diverse views and inputs in the decision, helped people have a voice, and valued those voices.

With respect to how Maxman handled the crisis internally at Oxfam America, it is useful to know that in 2018 women constituted a majority at every level of the organization, but notably at the more senior managerial levels, where the percentage of women in management roles ranged between 63 percent and 80 percent.

“I see feminist leadership as a contemporary approach that looks at what leadership practices bring out the best in your people and ensure you are living up to the values and principles you espouse,” Maxman said.

Table 1. Oxfam America Staffing, 2018

Level	Female	Male	Total	Percent Female
Senior Leadership Team (executives only)	4	2	6	67%
Directors (only)	19	11	30	63%
Senior Manager (only)	4	1	5	80%
Manager (only)	40	32	72	56%
Individual contributor (only)	184	129	313	59%
All Managers (SLT, Directors, Managers)	69	46	115	59%
All Staff	251	175	426	59%

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How did context shape the Oxfam crisis and Oxfam’s range of options to respond?
- How should Maxman address the revelations about OGB and sexual abuse in Haiti? What changes should she implement at OA?
- Should OA switch to a feminist leadership model? What would that mean?

Notes

¹ All quotations are taken from interviews conducted by the lead author, unless otherwise noted.

² <https://www.aol.com/article/2015/09/23/today-in-history-remembering-hurricane-jeanne/21239632/>

³ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

⁴ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6254649/One-four-staff-Save-Children-suffered-discrimination.html>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/19/chairman-quits-scandal-hit-save-the-children>

⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-oxfam-msf/doctors-without-borders-fired-19-people-for-sexual-abuse-last-year-idUSKCN1FY2QC>

⁷ InterAction CEO Pledge on Preventing Sexual Abuse, Exploitation, and Harassment



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Annex 1

Oxfam Code of Conduct

Oxfam's Joint Code of Conduct

As one 'Oxfam*' we are a strategic network of organizations working together internationally to find lasting solutions to poverty and injustice. We share a common vision, common philosophies and, to a large extent, common working practices. We all have the same brand values, the same passion and commitment. We have joined forces as an international confederation because we believe we will achieve greater impact by working together in collaboration with others.

Together we are working towards a world in which people can live with dignity, have their basic needs met and their basic rights respected, and have the ability to control their own lives.

As we work to achieve our ambition and vision of 'a just world without poverty' we should always remain true to our core mission, aims and values. This Code of Conduct will help you live by them by providing guidance in the face of ethical dilemmas you may experience. It shows you what to do when a situation is complex by providing standards and values for you to follow and how to protect against situations that may damage you or Oxfam. It also seeks to ensure that employees avoid using possible unequal power relationships for their own benefit.

The rules and guidelines contained in this Code of Conduct, together with your employing affiliate's policies and procedures and the terms and conditions of your employment (as outlined in your employment contract or your collective agreement if applicable), provides a framework within which all Oxfam employees, regardless of location, undertake to discharge their duties and to regulate their conduct. They also support Oxfam in our role in implementing, monitoring and enforcing these standards.

The Code does not exempt anyone and in accordance with relevant employing affiliate's policies and procedures, any breach may result in disciplinary action (including dismissal in some instances), and in some cases, could lead to criminal prosecution.

In accepting your appointment, you undertake to discharge your duties and to regulate your conduct in accordance with the requirements of this Code, thereby contributing to Oxfam's quality of performance and reputation. The code describes what Oxfam expects from its employees and what the employees can expect from Oxfam.

Whilst recognising that local laws and cultures differ considerably from one country to another, Oxfam is an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) and therefore the Code of

Conduct is developed from International and UN standards.

This Code is subject to relevant international human rights law, wherever the employee is employed and shall be read in a manner that is compliant with that law.

*Oxfam** means any Oxfam Affiliate and/or Oxfam International throughout the world.

Code of Conduct: Standards and Values

As an Oxfam employee, I will:

1. Uphold the integrity and reputation of Oxfam by ensuring that my professional and personal conduct is demonstrably consistent with Oxfam's values and standards.

I will seek to maintain and enhance public confidence in Oxfam by being accountable for the professional and personal actions I take and ensuring that I manage the power that comes with my Oxfam position with appropriate restraint.

Whilst observing the requirements of the Code of Conduct, I will also be sensitive to, and respectful of, local customs and culture, even if the norms and values in that cultural context differ from the Code of Conduct. I will if necessary seek (and will receive) support and advice from Oxfam.

I will not work under the influence of alcohol or use, or be in possession of, illegal substances on Oxfam premises, vehicles or accommodation.

2. Treat all people with respect and dignity and challenge any form of harassment, discrimination, intimidation, exploitation or abuse.

Oxfam staff hold a privileged position of power and trust in relation to our partners and the communities that we come from and serve. When carrying out Oxfam's mission I understand that it is important not to abuse my own position of power/unequal power relationships in any way.

Recognising my role in Oxfam's mission to challenge injustice and poverty, I will respect all peoples' rights, including children's rights, and I will contribute to a working environment characterised by mutual respect, integrity, dignity and non-discrimination.

I will ensure that my relationships and behaviour are not exploitative, abusive or corrupt in any way, and I will not engage in any form of sexual abuse or exploitation of any persons of any age.

In line with international standards I will not have sexual relations with children (defined as under 18 years old) or with beneficiaries (in exchange for assistance or any other reason) recognising the inherent unequal power dynamics involved, and that such behaviours can undermine the integrity and credibility of Oxfam's work;

I will also not exchange money, offers of employment, employment, goods or services for sex or sexual favours, nor any other forms of humiliating,

degrading or exploitative behaviour, understanding that these standards exist to challenge sexually exploitative and abusive behaviour.

I will use my best endeavours to report any such behaviours or malpractice in the workplace by others to my line management or through recognised confidential reporting systems.

3. Perform my duties and conduct my private life in a manner that avoids possible conflicts of interest with the work of Oxfam.

I will declare any financial, personal, family (or close intimate relationship) interest in matters of official business which may impact on the work of Oxfam (e.g. contract for goods/services, employment or promotion within Oxfam, partner organizations, beneficiary groups).

I will advise Oxfam of any intention to seek a nomination as a prospective candidate or another official role for any political party or public office to clarify whether any conflict, or perceived conflicts, with my duties with Oxfam may arise.

Even when the giving and acceptance of gifts is normal cultural practice I will reject monetary gifts or inappropriate gifts from governments, beneficiaries, donors, suppliers and other persons, which have been offered to me as a result of my employment with Oxfam. Where the giving and acceptance of gifts is normal cultural practice, I will ensure that such gifts are within the limits of reasonable judgements and in accordance with procurement policies and I will report gifts to the line management and where appropriate hand them onto Oxfam.

I will assure that assistance by Oxfam is not provided in return of any service or favour from others.

I will act against any form of corruption and not offer, promise, give or accept any bribes.

4. Be responsible for the use of information, equipment, money and resources to which I have access by reason of my employment with Oxfam.

I will use my discretion when handling sensitive or confidential information.

I will seek authorization before communicating externally in Oxfam's name and will avoid any unintended detrimental repercussions for me or Oxfam.

I will appropriately account for all Oxfam money and property, (e.g. vehicles, office equipment, Oxfam-provided accommodation, computers including the use of internet, email and intranet).

5. Protect the health, safety, security and welfare of all Oxfam employees, volunteers and contractors.

I will undertake and act on appropriate risk assessments.

I will comply with local security management guidelines and be pro-active in informing management of any necessary changes to such guidelines.

I will behave in such a way as to avoid any unnecessary risk to the safety, health and welfare of myself and others, including partner organizations and beneficiaries.

6. Promote human rights, protect the environment and oppose criminal or unethical activities.

I will ensure that my conduct is consistent with the human rights framework to which Oxfam subscribes.

I will use my best endeavours to protect the natural environment and work in a sustainable way.

I will contribute to preventing all forms of criminal or unethical activities.

I will inform Oxfam of any relevant criminal convictions or charges I have had prior to my employment in which Oxfam may have a legitimate interest.

I will also notify Oxfam if I face any criminal charges during my employment that may impede my ability to perform the duties of my position subject to national legislation.

I will adhere to following policies and procedures (see list below) that support the above Standards:

- Child Protection Policy*
- Dealing with Problems at Work Policy*
- Gender Equality Policy*
- Security Policy and Local Security Guidelines*
- Acceptable Use Policy (incorporating Email Policy & Internet Policy)*
- Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy*
- Information Security Policy*
- Expenses Policy & Financial Procedures*
- Health and Safety Policies including Risk Assessment*
- Travel Policy*
- Disclosure of Malpractice in the Workplace Policy*
- Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy*
- Anti-Fraud and Theft Policy*
- Sexual Diversity and Gender Identity Rights Policy*

In accepting my appointment, I undertake to discharge my duties and to regulate my conduct in accordance with the requirements of this Code thereby contributing to Oxfam's quality of performance and reputation.

Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Annex 2

Oxfam's PSEAH, Sexual Harassment Prevention, Whistleblower Protection, and Complaint Reporting Policies

See: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/what-we-do/about/safeguarding>