



# **FACTORS INFLUENCING MISCONDUCT REPORTING**

A meta-analysis

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## OXFAM CASE STUDY – JULY 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide an analysis of the critical factors that influence decision-making behaviour related to misconduct reporting, based on a human-centred design approach. Findings have been analysed across three research locations – Myanmar, Iraq and Ghana.

The intended primary audience includes the accountability, safeguarding, protection, gender justice, and technology teams from Oxfam Great Britain (Oxfam GB) and members of Oxfam country offices across the world. This document is also intended for other sector audiences interested in understanding the critical factors that influence misconduct reporting.

There are three sections to this document. The first section provides some background information on this initiative and the approach guiding this work. The second section presents an analysis of the key findings and trends identified. The final section offers some high-level considerations for moving forward.

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Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

Cover photo: Yabarago , Ghana: Ruth (36, and mother of four) fetches water from a mechanised borehole which is currently her preferred source of drinking water but it dries out in the dry season. She's happy to hear Oxfam is about to build a solar pump in her community. © Kitty Norwell/Oxfam

# 1 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

## BACKGROUND: THE 'YOUR WORD COUNTS' PROGRAMME

Oxfam GB is committed to improving accountability to the people with whom it works, and has made significant strides in programming efforts to do so in the past several years. This includes collecting, managing and responding to feedback from community members and the individuals who work directly with them. Despite such improvements, there remains a gap in understanding the barriers and other influencing factors people experience when it comes to reporting issues such as sexual exploitation, abuse and fraud.

Oxfam GB therefore initiated the 'Your Word Counts' programme, which included a year-long research process in three countries to understand the barriers and preferences related to reporting, with the long-term goal of designing community-led, context-specific feedback mechanisms. The broader vision and purpose of the programme is to deliver better feedback options for misconduct reporting, which are safe and confidential, and for Oxfam GB to strengthen its accountability to affected people on a global scale.

## THE JOURNEY: TO UNDERSTAND INFLUENCING FACTORS

Oxfam GB engaged Sonder Collective<sup>1</sup> to incorporate human-centred design principles in the research process. The collaboration began in February 2019 with an Intent Workshop, which was attended by individuals from four separate Oxfam teams (Safeguarding, Anti-corruption and Fraud, Protection, and Digital in Programme). Collectively, these teams explored the current state of the reporting system and why this work is necessary, identified the key user groups, and walked through the various pathways that an individual may or may not take to report misconduct.

The definition of misconduct for the purpose of this research was understood to be Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), corruption and other practices carried out by aid workers that breached the code of conduct. This includes I/NGO workers, partner staff, contractors and volunteers carrying out tasks on behalf of an organization.

Based on previous global experience and in-country observation, two important findings of Oxfam-related misconduct reporting were used as a starting point:

- Members of the community do not speak with Oxfam representatives about misconduct experiences.

- When members of the community do speak up, they usually talk to field staff, who often do not report these experiences appropriately or use formal systems.

To better understand the factors influencing the above, it was determined that the first step would be to map the decision-making process that occurs 'on the ground', at the community level.

The group then collectively identified the following research themes for exploration:

- **Understanding the context:** Reporting mechanisms can be designed more effectively if we gain deeper insight into norms and customs in day-to-day life, and how they may influence what community members want to report and what they do not feel is appropriate or necessary to report.
- **Building trust:** People are more likely to report if they can use existing routes or trusted lines of reporting.
- **Creating an enabling environment:** Being human-centred means creating a safe and enabling environment to really listen, before acting. The priority focus should be on real consent, confidentiality and community understanding – so people know what will happen to their data and feel that they can make an informed choice about sharing it.
- **Ensuring safety of community members:** To create effective feedback mechanisms, as well as keep community members safe, we need to first understand the specific risks associated with various types of reporting.
- **Closing the feedback loop:** To build more trust, Oxfam needs to be in communication with communities not only after matters have been 'addressed', but throughout the process when they are being managed. This also includes referrals and feedback to services beyond Oxfam.

Ultimately, the following question was agreed to guide the research: How might we increase the likelihood that people will come forward and report through multiple, integrated channels?

## RESEARCH LOCATIONS

### Kachin, Myanmar

In-country research in Kachin, Myanmar,<sup>2</sup> in July 2019, was conducted by a member of the Sonder Collective team and an Oxfam Global Safeguarding Advisor, in collaboration with the Oxfam in Myanmar team. Like all humanitarian contexts, Kachin, the northernmost state in Myanmar, is a highly complex environment and is characterized by a significant degree of instability. According to a 2018 Humanitarian Policy Group working paper, 'decades of armed conflict and violence, restricted access to humanitarian assistance and underinvestment in or disruption

to essential services have had a devastating impact on the civilian population in Kachin State'.<sup>3</sup> In June 2011, conflict in Kachin State resumed after a ceasefire that had lasted nearly 17 years.<sup>4</sup> This was primarily due to tension between government security forces and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs).<sup>5</sup> The waves of armed conflict that resulted have caused people to flee their homes and leave their old lives behind. There are currently 97,600 people in Kachin who remain displaced and are living within 136 camps and camp-like settings which are spread across the state.<sup>6</sup> Figures suggest that 76% of people who are currently displaced are women and children.<sup>7</sup> The primary providers or implementers of assistance and protection programming within Kachin are civil society organizations (CSOs).<sup>8</sup>

## Saladin and Nineveh, Iraq

The research took place in two governorates of Iraq: Saladin (صلاح الدين) and Nineveh (نينوى),<sup>9</sup> in September-October 2019. The same Oxfam Global Safeguarding Advisor as in Myanmar conducted the research, in collaboration with the Oxfam in Iraq team and the Oxfam Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Platform. In Saladin, the research took place in Tikrit and Baiji, while in Nineveh interviews were conducted in Mosul. Interviews were conducted in a variety of contextual locations, including camp settings, cities and villages.

In recent years, the population and infrastructure of Iraq have been hugely impacted by armed conflict. This includes the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, the 2013 sectarian war, and 2014–17 control of various locations within Iraq by ISIS.<sup>10</sup> Each of the locations chosen for this phase of the research project have been controlled by ISIS in recent years. Political instability and conflict have significantly impacted physical infrastructure and the lives of communities in Tikrit, Mosul and Baiji. These two factors and their impact on daily life were consistently referred to by participants throughout the research process.

Tikrit is the capital of the Saladin governorate and the birthplace of Saddam Hussein. It was captured by ISIS in 2015, some years after Saddam Hussein's capture in a nearby town. Baiji lies approximately 60km north of Tikrit. In June 2014, ISIS seized control of Baiji and its nearby oil field, the functioning of which Baiji's economy has largely depended on.<sup>11</sup> Currently, the Iraqi security forces, police and Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs) control the area.<sup>12</sup> Baiji has suffered huge damage to its infrastructure, including families' homes.

ISIS occupied Mosul for approximately two to three years, between 2014 and 2017.<sup>13</sup> During the nine-month battle to recapture the city by federal Iraqi, US coalition and Kurdish forces, there were many civilian deaths and sustained damage to infrastructure throughout the city.<sup>14</sup> Since the recapture of the city, recovery is said to be slow.<sup>15</sup> Camps outside of Mosul, originally built by the international community to support displaced families, are now home to families who are seen to be affiliated with extremist groups. Many families perceived as such have been told that they are not welcome to return home. Much of the research conducted in Mosul was carried out in such camps.

## Sawla and Tarkwa, Ghana

The final in-country research, in Sawla and Tarkwa, Ghana,<sup>16</sup> in October-November 2019, was carried out by two Oxfam Global Safeguarding Advisors, one of whom conducted the research in the previous two countries, and members of the Oxfam in Ghana country team and partner organizations.

Oxfam has been working in Ghana since 1986,<sup>17</sup> with a focus on access to water, ending poverty and hunger, and addressing injustice in the extractive sector. Oxfam is working to bridge the gap between progress made in the north and south, build sustainable agricultural livelihoods, promote equality through access to free universal quality education and health care services, and to promote accountable governance and transparency in natural resource revenue management. It is important to note that the research took place in two different locations, each with a different programmatic focus:

**Sawla, Savannah Region:** In Sawla, Oxfam piloted a programme for a school to contribute to bridging gender inequalities by increasing girls' education opportunities. The school was established in 2008 with the aim of increasing school enrolment for girls from deprived communities in the region. The school is government-sponsored and is now one of 62 in Ghana with this specific programme. Oxfam works through two partners to deliver initiatives such as promoting education and empowering girls in relation to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

**Tarkwa, Western Region:** Oxfam works in partnership with an organization which supports communities that are adversely affected by gold mining to mobilize around their concerns. They inform communities on their rights, advocacy, the law and support communities in the legal process of filing a lawsuit or claim against the gold mining companies for wrongdoing.

# METHODOLOGY

Utilizing principles of human-centred design, the research team approached conversations with approximately 200 participants with the exclusive purpose of understanding the ways in which they experience their world. Given that the best way to understand an individual's decision making is to speak with them about it directly, and with their consent, we engaged in semi-structured and non-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), which were centred around the research themes listed above. Participants were not asked directly to describe in detail personal experiences with misconduct. Instead, they were prompted to think about how they would respond in specific instances, or how they know others have responded. Once participants had shared insight into how, why or when they would respond, interviews focused on participants' own experiences, to further explore their personal motivations and ideas around reporting. Further details on the research methodology for each country can be found in the individual country research reports for Myanmar,<sup>18</sup> Iraq<sup>19</sup> and Ghana.<sup>20</sup>

Following finalization and publication of country research reports, Oxfam GB wanted to identify and analyse trends across the three countries. Discussions were held with country teams and key technical advisors to validate the findings, analyse and spot trends, and develop action plans to take forward. Recognizing that research methodology had not originally integrated gender, the meta-analysis team included gender advisory capacity to explore elements of power and links between gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). For each country, the research team carried out a manual meta-data analysis, with a semi-automatic analysis coding of the transcribed qualitative text. Using this method, recurring themes were identified from the three countries and common concepts were grouped together. Every effort was made to ensure full understanding of interviewees' testimonies and reactions, by cross-checking with other members of the research team where necessary.

## 2 KEY THEMES

This section explores the key trends and recurring themes which were identified across the three countries in the study – Myanmar, Iraq and Ghana. Some of the themes appear stronger or more of importance in one country than in others due to political, geographical and/or socio-economic factors. These components are discussed and analysed further to provide clarity and context as to why these differences might exist.

### UNDERSTANDING EXISTING THREATS AND VULNERABILITIES

The first common theme to highlight is the importance of understanding the context with its complexities and nuances, existing threats and vulnerabilities as well as the importance of upholding the ‘do no harm’ commitment and ensuring the safety of the people we work with. Oxfam is providing humanitarian assistance in two of the three countries that took part in the research; therefore, certain challenges and priorities will differ in terms of programming and delivery. However, whether in humanitarian assistance or longer-term development contexts, it is important to keep in mind that what we (Oxfam, other I/NGOs and actors) define as misconduct, and the reporting and management mechanisms we establish for it, don’t exist or happen in a vacuum. These processes are not isolated from people’s daily lives; on the contrary, they are an integral part of them. For example, limited trust in formal systems and processes in a given context affects trust in systems and process I/NGOs set up, unequal power dynamics that are at the root of gender-based violence are also the key driver in SEA, conflict fault lines that directly and indirectly impact people’s lives are also present and even exacerbated by I/NGOs’ actions and systems. In this sense, misconduct reporting cannot be looked at without considering and understanding the context and its complexities, including the inequalities and risks that we may be inadvertently exacerbating.

Everyday concerns related to programme delivery, programme quality and the management of programmatic risks were frequently mentioned in conversations with field staff and community members. In Myanmar, for example, all community members explained that the camps felt unsafe, in particular for women and girls, due to the high levels of alcohol and drug use within the camp. Trafficking was considered common, and all participants stated that camps were at times a breeding ground for opportunists to traffic children into China. One community member told the research team: *‘I hold my children very tight in fear that they will disappear.’* There was also a high number of accounts of boys and young men who feared the national army, due to forced recruitment from within the camps.

These questions of safety and security also transpired in conversations with communities in the other countries. In camps in Iraq, families perceived to be affiliated with ISIS told the research team about the prejudice and discrimination they face from the outside community, the military, and staff within the camp. Participants expressed their experience of consistent inaction by staff when any issue was raised. *'Management never listen – if they (camp staff) know the families are affiliated with ISIS, they treat them worse. They verbally abuse us.'* Female community member, FGD, Iraq

In Ghana, part of the research took place at a government-run girls' school that Oxfam supports. Schoolgirls and teachers spoke of their everyday safety concerns with regard to maintenance of the school and its grounds, including lack of physical fencing around the school boundary. The risks resulting from these issues were apparent in the KIIs, which included accounts of men from the community approaching the school and knocking on the girls' dorm windows at night. Because the girls' dorms, toilet facilities (which have no lights) and teaching blocks are all independent buildings, students have to walk between each one; they expressed fear of both snakes and men hiding in the long grass on the school site. *'In the school block we feel safe, but in the dormitory we do not feel safe. Teachers are around in the school block so we are protected. I don't feel safe anywhere else.'* Female student, Ghana

As demonstrated in Journey Map 2 every context will have unique risks and safety concerns. These can exacerbate existing barriers to reporting misconduct and cause distrust and fear of local actors. Knowing these risks, and understanding how communities interact with and feel about local actors such as the media, the government and the police, is critical knowledge – not only when designing a programme but also when deciding on the misconduct reporting structures to sit within it. This highlights the need for all risks to be explored prior to programming, so that I/NGOs are not causing further harm through programmatic engagement and are not negligent when contextual concerns arise.

## A PREFERENCE FOR COMMUNITY RESOLUTION

The usage of community resolution mechanisms is perhaps the most significant trend arising in all countries studied. The data revealed that in conversations with community members, all referred to using or hypothetically using localized solutions to address misconduct through a collective, decision-making process led by community elders or influential people within their community. This was especially the case for sexual misconduct concerns.

In addition to understanding the factors and elements contributing to a preference for community resolution, it is important to view reported usage of community resolution mechanisms through a context and gender-sensitivity lens. Progress on women's rights in the three countries, as in many others, faces challenges, including the existence of

strong harmful social norms and/or customary laws. Stakeholders working in legal support services explained that in Ghana, traditional practices such as child marriage, FGM (Female Genital Mutilation), and widowhood rights, escape local law. An employee working for Ghana's Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) emphasized the avoidance of formal reporting by referring to the popular proverb, 'you cry your own cry'.

Similar reflections were shared by community members in Iraq, where a Mukhtar (a male village/neighbourhood 'head') in a focus group said *'SEA would be handled by the tribal community not the INGO, because communities in their nature are "closed" and this (the issue) needs to stay confidential.'* Another community member in Iraq shared insight into why customary justice protocols are preferred to or seen as being safer than other reporting options. The following excerpt from researchers' notes from a KII from a female community member in Iraq:

*'She starts the answer with the police being the only option. But people are scared to report to the police, as this can lead to a scandal. Rather they are a tribal community and resort to tribal resolution, "between one tribe and the other". Or seek the court – but they will not use a hotline or a complaint box. She explains that tribal resolution means taking money/a fine from the family of the harasser and expelling the person for no less than six months. On rare occasions, the tribe will ask the perpetrator to marry the survivor. She does think this is safe for both parties. As for the survivor, once the tribe is involved, the girl will end up being forced to marry her relatives and the perpetrator's reputation will be ruined.'*

For sexual violence committed by aid workers (i.e. what we refer to as 'sexual misconduct' in this report), it is possible that it is not considered separately from other types of violence against women and girls (VAWG)/gender-based violence (GBV), which could help shed light on the preference for usage of community resolution systems.

## Factors driving community resolution

Use of community resolution mechanisms seem to be driven by four main factors: the belief that 'internal' matters are best resolved internally (i.e. without external interference or influence); power structures within the community; comparative advantages of community structures; and weaknesses of systems put in place by I/NGOs and their local partners.

Across the study locations in the three countries, there was a distinction between 'insider/outsider' or 'internal/external', and a preference for matters arising in the community to stay in the community and be resolved by it. This was explicitly the case for concerns about SEA. One female elder from the community in Ghana expressed in an FGD how *'reporting local issues to an [I/NGO] HQ is very unrealistic for us, as incidents like the ones you (the researchers) are describing are very personal. People's dignity is at stake and this is seen as an issue that is not anyone else's business, so that is why local resolution, as you call it, is better.'*

Similarly, in a male-only FGD in Iraq, a participant asked: *'Why would we call an external and international number for an issue that has occurred in a different country to the one you would call, and how can these international teams know about our community and our customs?'* In conversations with community members in Ghana, it was stated that *'local resolution is preferred because justice is found through this informal system'*.

However, for hypothetical situations where the alleged perpetrator was an international member of staff (as opposed to a national member of staff), the response changed. When presented with a scenario of sexual misconduct perpetrated by a foreign staff member, the majority of research participants fed back that community resolution did **not** apply. For example, a community member from Myanmar stated: *'For this scenario, formalized reporting like the ones you (i.e. the researcher) were describing would be used.'*

It is important to note that this question sparked many debates within focus groups across the three countries. It became very common for participants to revert back to their local language as they discussed the best course of action for this scenario, while the interpreter attempted to summarize what was being said for researchers. The passionate debates and conversations held among community members when this topic was raised suggests that this was an area that could be explored further. As one female community member from Iraq stated: *'National would fit into the tribal systems, and international wouldn't.'* Community resolution and local solutions seem to apply only to those from the same culture. However, there were some contradictory statements from the KIIs and FGDs across the three countries, so this area will need further exploration.

In addition to this preference for resolving their own matters by themselves, data from the research indicates that usage of local mechanisms is also linked to power structures within the community. This aspect is further explored in the section 'An Imbalance of Power', below, and includes elements of gendered power dynamics and of pressure to respect hierarchy and not create problems for the community.

Community structures also seemed to have significant comparative advantages when compared to reporting mechanisms set up by I/NGOs. They were reported to be faster and more responsive; they are also, by nature, localized and context-sensitive, understanding and working within the community's dynamics and hierarchies. They are the same structures that communities use to help deal with day-to-day challenges and dispute resolution, and in that sense, they are tried and tested, familiar and predictable – or at least more so than reporting mechanisms established by I/NGOs. Because they are the channel that community members use to raise issues of various types, it eliminates the need to figure out which I/NGO to report to, how to reach them and whether or not to trust them.

In Myanmar, for example, community members stated that they prefer to share concerns with someone from their family, their neighbourhood, someone they are close to and who is at the same level of 'power'.

These 'community leaders' are the first point of contact for different types of problems, ranging from medical emergencies to neighbour disputes; they are a sort of one-stop shop – again making the case for proximity, familiarity, and simplicity.

Speed was especially mentioned in Iraq, where many participants said that whichever reporting method was quickest would be the best, leading them to prefer to go to the Mukhtar. Perhaps an important element to explore is the extent to which community structures are preferred because they go beyond reporting, into the management of problems and disputes. As local structures handle these wider issues, it becomes more efficient to use the same structures for everything, including misconduct handling.

As the original methodology used for the research in the three countries did not specifically look at gender drivers and impact of factors influencing reporting, it is not possible to confirm with certainty differences or similarities between women and men's incentives for using community resolution. From information collected during the research and our understanding of the three contexts, it is likely that, given social norms pressure and the current state of I/NGO reporting mechanisms, this preference for known, simple and predictable structures is less of a choice for women and girls and more their only viable option, even if it is likely to come at a cost. This is best reflected by the following quote from a female community member in Iraq: *'SEA issues are solved by tribe, not the police, according to our community culture. Women have no freedom and we need to keep it confidential.'*

The research data also suggests that systems deployed by Oxfam and its partners have significant gaps that make them even less likely to be used. This issue is explored in more detail in the section 'Ineffectiveness of Formal Reporting Systems'. It is important to note that, despite the strong preference for community resolution, in all three research countries there are elements to suggest that changes in the status quo at the level of the community may not be unwelcome. In Ghana, participants stated that a complaint box could work if it were accessible only to the I/NGO and not community leaders; in Myanmar, participants in focus groups and KIIs referred to fear of being penalized (losing part of their stipend or ration, for example) as a deterrent to speaking to or about the camp committee; and in Iraq, women expressed not really having a choice (other than to report using community structures, if at all).

The following excerpt from a KII with a female community member in Iraq, discussing the scenario of abuse perpetrated by an I/NGO member, shows how deeply entrenched cultural norms create solidarity within communities regarding how traditional systems function:

*'At first, the community will expel the organization from the area. Especially if the tribe is strong, the entire organization will be asked to leave. Others will not be able to do this – and will ask the woman to stop going to work. Women will not be affected as much if their family supports them. If they do not, their livelihood will be affected as the family will prevent the woman from going to work. In turn, this can increase the*

*number of harassment cases, as this will be an example of lack of accountability and liability of organizations.'*

## NEGATIVE SOCIAL NORMS

The analysis also identified common themes regarding cultural attitudes towards survivors of gender-based violence; the concepts of shame, reputational damage and blame arose in nearly all conversations with field staff and community members across the three countries. When exploring hypothetical scenarios during the FGDS and KIs, both men and women explained in greater detail the consequences a female survivor would face, pertaining to their cultural customs and social norms, if they were subject to sexual violence. In some instances, the research team were given examples of how actual situations had been dealt with and how this had affected the survivor, her family and the community.

For communities in all three countries, the data suggests that the impact of cultural attitudes was a key topic when discussing barriers to reporting. In Myanmar, the research team were told of common proverbs such as *'bai kaung kyauk hpi'* ('keep a proper sense of decorum') and *'mainma do eindayeh shwe pei lo ma ya'* ('the modesty of women is priceless'), highlighting the extent to which a culture of silence and of survivor-blaming is deeply rooted. One woman commented that reporting someone is like *'turning one shame and making it two'*.

### A culture of survivor blaming

Focus group participants in Myanmar described the continued widespread perception in the country that sexual misconduct only happens to women who behave in a way that does not match traditional social expectations. Participants shared that sexual matters were generally not discussed at home, within the community or at school. *'For future safety reasons, society or community will stigmatize, not socialize with you... might look down on you or say you were unlucky, you deserved it.'* Project Coordinator, Myanmar.

Although this attribution of responsibility, and therefore blame, of sexual assault onto survivors was explicitly mentioned in Myanmar, it is likely the same attitudes <sup>21</sup>

It was explained by Kalra and Bhugra (2013) that, in socio-centric cultures, (cultures which focus on collectivism; where the importance lies in the relationships they hold with others in their community and ensuring interdependence) it was far more likely for family members, support networks and tribal/ethnic groups to also carry the burden of this shame and how consequences, responses and disciplinary action to sexual violence involves a wider group than just the woman who was subjected to the violence; as a result, the survivor's family and wider group will all share feelings of shame and embarrassment and further victimize the survivor and place blame for shaming the wider community (as cited in Eaton, 2019).

The notion of shame was also very pertinent in Iraq. When discussing sexual misconduct, conversations with community members centred around honour and reputation. During discussions on historic incidents of gender-based violence, research participants explained that community resolutions involved families of both parties, their tribes and the perpetrator without direct involvement of the survivor. The involvement of this wider group having a voice in resolving misconduct issues, highlights how these forms of social control in turn legitimizes the act. In conversations in KIs, women spoke of the *'shame and dishonour I would bring to my family if this was to happen to me'*. These concepts of shame, honour and reputation reinforce attitudes of survivor-blaming. Other barriers to reporting that were discussed included the fear of losing male patronage, retaliation, stigmatization or further sexual abuse, including from formal authorities.

Data from the research in Ghana also highlights a survivor-blaming culture as a strong trend in the discussions on barriers to reporting, with survivors often facing discrimination and social stigma. Police officers and criminal court judges are reportedly prone to blame women when confronted with cases of sexual violence. Shortly before the research team left for Ghana, the BBC reported the 'Sex for Grades' scandal in Ghana's universities,<sup>22</sup> which revealed how women were seen as responsible for sexual misconduct, and feared speaking out publicly due to those with status and power being protected.

In this research, staff members from the DOVVSU spoke of the deeply rooted cultural beliefs that result in resolving sexual misconduct at local level and avoiding the legal systems in place, including due to fear of retaliation towards the survivor. They explained that in Ghana, children are expected *'to be seen but not heard'*, which perpetuates this culture of silence and survivor-blaming. This was also raised in separate discussions with teachers and children, where children expressed fear of not being heard and *'getting into big trouble'*, and a teacher explained that *'students don't want to report, they don't want to come forward because they are scared of repercussions and scared of the teachers.'*

## LACK OF AWARENESS

Awareness, or lack of, emerged as a barrier to reporting across all research locations. This had two key elements linked to INGOs' operations: knowledge of the accountability and responsibility lines and awareness of what constitutes reportable misconduct/what the process for reporting is. An additional element that was noted in the research is linked to community members' awareness of their rights.

### **Lack of awareness of accountability line**

It is often challenging for community members to know which agencies hold the accountability line. Oxfam may work with a partner organization that is well established within the community and has a high degree of visibility, or in cases where it is not possible to partner, may directly

deliver support to affected communities. Support may be branded or unbranded, depending on the situation. There are many contexts where I/NGOs are unable to be visible due to protection, security or conflict sensitivity concerns. In a crisis context where the situation is in flux and needs are high, it is often too effort-intensive for people to trace services back to a particular I/NGO. This could be even more challenging when a partner organization is supported and/or funded by more than one organization.

This point was specifically made in Myanmar, where a group of field staff members explained how *'Oxfam's partner is also partner with many, many other organizations, and understanding how programme concerns or misconduct issues get reported, dealt with and managed is not clear to community members, and at times not clear to us also.'* These factors are compounded by others, such as unclear processes or prioritization of issues with the quality of services received. This highlights the need for a coordinated and streamlined approach between agencies working in the same area. In Iraq, in discussions with community members not living in camps, one woman stated: *'We don't know what to do, or who to go to.'* This quote highlights the absence of information on both actors involved and processes to be followed. This information gap can also signal a participation one; community members interviewed during the research stated they had not been engaged, or at least informed and consulted, ahead of misconduct reporting process design.

Lack of awareness is also seen in non-humanitarian contexts, such as Ghana, where Oxfam's involvement in the programme might not be evident or clear to community members, who mainly know, deal with and ultimately trust the front-facing organization, i.e. the partner. Knowing the roles and responsibilities and where the accountability line sits, is not the norm. As shown in Journey Map 1 it is often not known who funds the programme, meaning that informing programme funders of misconduct issues is not possible, even if desired.

Lack of awareness intersects with other barriers identified in the three research reports and outlined in greater detail in the following sections, such as 'hidden power', attributed to organizations because of communities' feeling of dependency and gratitude towards them; 'loss', including fear of losing services due to reporting; as well as 'gender', which includes social norms around access to knowledge, movement and interaction restrictions, access to mobile phones, and the stigma that surrounds GBV and sexual abuse.

## **Lack of awareness of reporting process**

Another key element to explore for awareness is the type of information on misconduct and misconduct reporting that has been disseminated in target communities. In the three countries, some research participants stated not having been exposed to any information on what constitutes misconduct in general, or having received only partial information. In Ghana, for example, some community members said they had been informed about financial misconduct but not SEA. Because the data

wasn't sex-disaggregated, it was not possible to explore whether this was similar for men and women.

In cases where some degree of information on misconduct seemed to be available (again noting that a gender lens had not been used in the original methodology), information on who to report a concern/complaint to, or what process would then be triggered and what the possible outcomes would be, was in general absent among community members across the three research locations. Community members shared interesting ideas about processes they would be likely to use, but many stated that they had received '*no information on reporting, the processes or policies on what to do*' if misconduct occurred.

These aspects of awareness could offer possible routes towards better understanding why individuals choose to defer to community resolution mechanisms.

## **Lack of awareness of rights**

It is also important to explore links with social norms, awareness of rights, and in-country mechanisms for dealing with abuse of rights and violence, including GBV. Community members in Ghana, who engage with Oxfam's work via a partner, stated that generally speaking '*people in this country are less aware of their human rights*'. This statement was confirmed by stakeholders working in domestic violence and survivor support, who remarked that the culture in Ghana is that children should be '*seen and not heard*'. Therefore, there is little understanding and practice on ensuring that children know their rights and also have the systems and mechanisms in place to ensure that they are heard.

## **INEFFECTIVENESS OF FORMAL REPORTING SYSTEMS**

The research team gathered significant data on concerns that had been raised by community members and field staff regarding formal feedback and complaints mechanisms. Current community-based complaints mechanisms (CBCMs) are commonly not fit for purpose for a wide number of reasons, depending on community members' specific circumstances. This section looks into formal misconduct reporting systems set up by I/NGOs – such as suggestion/complaint boxes, hotline numbers and I/NGO staff focal points – that communities are or are not using, and the factors that contribute to this.

Programmes in both humanitarian and development contexts aim to be designed and delivered to meet the specific needs of the community. However, community members explained that reporting mechanisms or channels set up as part of I/NGOs' interventions weren't always suitable for their environment and context. The research team in Iraq noted differences in the data regarding barriers to reporting between community members living in camps and those who don't; the response

also varied where the I/NGOs were implementing directly and where they were working in collaboration with national/local partners.

Regardless of these differences, community members in all contexts felt that the mechanisms that have been put in place for them were not designed in consultation with them, don't function well, and don't uphold confidentiality and as such, may lead to safety concerns.

## **Lack of trust in community-based complaints mechanisms**

Conversations in camp settings in both Myanmar and Iraq focused on CBCMs that are in place (complaint boxes, hotlines, camp management focal points), with participants saying that these are not trusted. Factors leading to this lack of trust included continuous inaction in response to concerns raised, mistrust of the organizations managing the camp, and accounts of misuse of power by camp security.

*'Everyday life in here is not good for us; we have become accustomed to seeing and hearing about terrible things and we feel helpless. [An agency] came to the camp and told us all that "any issues with misconduct or cheating from staff must be reported to camp management or through a CBCM", but we do this and we see no action, nothing happens or we cannot report, and also it is camp management themselves causing the wrongdoing... then who do we call?'* Male community member, camp setting, Iraq

In camp settings in Kachin, Myanmar, female focus group participants described the concept of 'fixed and living mechanisms' used by communities in camps. 'Fixed' mechanisms are an I/NGO's formal reporting systems, such as a complaints box or a hotline; and 'living' mechanisms are forums or meetings where community representatives from camps address concerns or issues related to day-to-day camp life with camp management, camp volunteers and/or members of staff from the partner organization. It was noted by participants that fixed mechanisms tend not to be trusted due to inaction. Women also explained that fixed mechanisms perhaps served a better function for non-immediate concerns, whereas living mechanisms are more appropriate for tackling sensitive and urgent issues. In addition to the insight this provides in identifying elements that would increase uptake and effectiveness of our systems, this binary of fixed and living mechanisms reflects the customary and statutory, formal and informal structures that are explored in the section 'A Preference for Community Resolution', above.

One community member in Iraq stated that the *'quickest way for many would be the best way'*. This suggests that speed and simplicity are important elements when reporting, and perhaps more efforts need to be considered by the sector to explore how we can better streamline the reporting process.

In non-camp settings, community members shared similar disapproval of the reporting mechanisms in place, though in some cases for very

different reasons. Data shows that a large number of community members were not aware of how to report, with questions around the lack of transparency regarding aid workers and which organization they worked for in their village/town, as well as disapproval of and/or distrust in the complaints box mechanism. Many people said that they did not have access to the internet in their homes, had experienced inaction following previous reporting, and when calling a hotline did not understand the person who answered.

## **Systems that are not fit for purpose**

Though vastly different from a context perspective, similar points around the safety and accessibility of systems were shared by girls from the boarding school in Ghana. Data from these discussions revealed that there weren't many safe or easily accessible reporting channels for the girls to use. All girls demonstrated a strong level of understanding as to the different types of misconduct, and all knew who to report to and how – i.e. to students acting as 'focal points', teachers, the headmistress, partner staff or by placing concern/s in the complaints box. None of them owned personal phones or had access to the internet, which ruled out raising concerns in this way. When asked whether anyone external had come to speak with them, for example a child social worker or nurse, they all replied 'No', although a few stated that in the past this used to happen, and they did not know why it had stopped.

When the research team explored the reporting options the girls had mentioned, it became evident that some channels were in fact not trusted, such as speaking to 'focal points', and that 'jumping the reporting line' was not accepted. A girl shared that she had once tried to report a concern to a teacher, but was told to go back to her 'focal point' and use the system correctly. There were several other challenges with access to reporting, which the research team explored further. For example, the complaints box was placed next to the teachers' room and directly opposite the headmistress' office. When asked about the process of opening the box, the girls gave different answers or said they did not know but gave suggestions as to what they thought happened. This evidence suggests that the girls were not informed of or involved in the creation of these channels and as a result, most channels were not trusted or considered as a reporting option.

As mentioned in the 'Lack of Awareness' section above, community members in both Myanmar and Ghana (contexts where Oxfam works with partners) were not fully aware or in some cases had never heard of Oxfam – and therefore could not report to Oxfam directly if there was a concern with a partner organization. Many participants explained that it is counterintuitive to report to a staff member who works for the organization you are raising a concern about. Even though alternative channels for reporting do exist and Oxfam would expect communities to be able to report to it directly if community members did not feel comfortable or safe reporting to the partner, community members were unaware of this option because they don't receive much information about who Oxfam is and the available reporting channels.

For SEA cases in particular, if we take into account the huge risks facing women and girls due to social norms, shame and stigma, and fear of losing their livelihood and even their life, it becomes easier to understand how lack of awareness and other barriers to reporting are compounded for women. It also helps explain why I/NGOs' reporting mechanisms may be ill-suited to their needs, and thus seldom used. As described by a field staff member in Myanmar, *'they don't even know it is Oxfam, they only know the partner – why would they report to you?'*

### **Effect of community context on use of CBCMs**

On several occasions, community members shared how their personal identity or background and associated power dynamics affect reporting through the formal systems set up by I/NGOs. Some of their comments have been included in this section to allow for wider discussion on these issues, particularly when establishing reporting mechanisms and/or CBCMs.

Some participants from all three countries thought religion or ethnicity could be important factors when deciding whether or not to use formal systems to report a concern. Communities in Iraq explained the subtle differences between communities and how that can affect access to reporting channels, or views on whether or not to report. As described by a female community member, *'we are a tribal community, conservative, religious and Sunni in Shirkat. But one tribe differs from the other. Some will not allow their daughters to attend school after sixth grade, but some do. Some do not allow women outside of the home, but some do. The majority, 55%, go out, 35% are not allowed, then the rest are in between.'*

This highlights the importance of understanding the context and working with communities to design and create reporting mechanisms that are sensitive to the culture, threats, and vulnerabilities as well as safe to use and accessible. Conflict dynamics and ethnic and religious fault lines can be replicated or exacerbated through reporting processes. Issues of discrimination, stigmatization, and distrust due to a history of violence affect trust in reporting systems. As such, who is in control of the formal systems (i.e. who answers the phone, who is available for face-to-face conversations, who reads complaints in the complaints box) are all factors which affect whether or not the systems are considered safe and accessible.

### **Building trust by 'getting the little things right'**

An interesting finding from the research in Iraq suggests that there is, at least in camp settings, a culture of 'assessing' I/NGOs based on their responsiveness to minor issues, and then deciding whether or not they can be trusted for more serious reporting.

*'If the quality of your work as an NGO is good, then we trust you for more sensitive issues.'* Female community member in a focus group, Iraq

Community members commented that if an I/NGO responds to programmatic feedback in a timely, confidential, respectful and reliable

manner then the organization is more likely to be trusted to manage sensitive issues such as misconduct. Some participants living in camps stated that even though Oxfam is not managing the camp, community members turn to Oxfam based on past experience, because *'they deal with matters quickly and confidentially'*. Similar feedback was shared during the research in Ghana, where a community volunteer said: *'If I come to you and tell you something that is worrying me, bothering me, and you don't give me a listening ear, next time it happens I will not feel comfortable coming to you.'*

In addition to timely and quality response to other complaints, staff attitudes were also considered among factors increasing trust in the system. In both Myanmar and Iraq, some participants raised concerns around the behaviour and attitudes of some I/NGO staff. Negative attitudes and abusive behaviour were seen as discouraging community members from reporting formally, due to fear of retaliation and further threatening behaviour. Where face-to-face conversations are preferred for reporting, the system will struggle to be effective if staff are considered to be poorly behaved.

I/NGOs will need to listen to feedback received, change activities based on input from the community, ensure staff are held accountable to organizational values in all aspects of their work and behaviours and close the feedback loop. This accountability process is vital for quality assurance as well as building trust by demonstrating that the process works, which is a prerequisite for the organization to be trusted to handle misconduct issues.

## AN IMBALANCE OF POWER

Power was at the heart of many factors influencing misconduct reporting across the three countries. Understanding who has power and who doesn't, how they exercise it and how this power manifests itself was the undercurrent that explained, at least in part, the use of certain reporting systems and not others. In this section, we will look at the power that I/NGOs hold and power structures within communities, focusing specifically on women and girls, and children in general.

### I/NGOs' power

The power aid workers hold, in both humanitarian and development settings, is a well-known factor underlying abuse and exploitation, and as such is essential to explore. This section does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of factors influencing and influenced by unequal power relations; rather it focuses on the three tenets of power the research identified: respect, gratitude and loss.

Together, these can be presented on a continuum that augments the power that I/NGOs and their representatives hold, starting from, *'this organization is here to help us, we respect it and don't believe it will harm us intentionally'*, to *'we are so grateful for the services we receive, even if*

*there is something wrong'*, and finally to *'We are afraid we will lose essential services if we report.'* As with other factors, there is a very strong gender aspect to these. For women especially, gratitude could be tied to a feeling of resignation, with acceptance of SEA when weighed against risk of the family losing essential services; and fear of loss going beyond loss of services/livelihoods for themselves and their families, to loss of freedom and even loss of life.

*'The organization would never harm us.'* Female community member, Ghana

At the beginning of discussions, when presented with hypothetical scenarios by the researcher, community members usually expressed disbelief or complete rejection of the notion that I/NGO staff could cause them harm. The topic was taboo in all three countries, so much so that the research team had to spend time creating an environment where participants could begin to contemplate this and explore potential reporting actions or inactions. In some cases, the research team were informed by the interpreter that the community member/s in question did not agree such scenarios ever occurred, and therefore had decided not to take part in the conversation. It is clear from the research team's notes that when they tried to begin the conversation about misconduct where the I/NGO representatives are the alleged perpetrators, a series of 'tuts', headshakes and muttered comments would ensue, highlighting how sensitive this topic is.

Similarly, schoolgirls in Ghana expressed nothing but trust and respect for the partner organization and teaching staff alike. In KIIs, girls unanimously told the research team that the partner organization would 'never do anything bad and [would] always be special' because it was helping them. Girls also expressed their admiration for the school staff, and said that they had huge amounts of respect for them. When presented with the hypothetical scenarios, girls were reluctant to suggest channels they would use to report the alleged perpetrator. Their body language and facial expressions indicated that for some scenarios they might not speak out, even though they had been informed at school of how to do so.

In Myanmar, when speaking to groups of young people living in camps, all agreed that the partner organization always acted in a positive manner. When the research team reiterated that these were hypothetical scenarios, several men in the group said 'cheating by NGO staff would never happen'. This respect can lead to tolerance for misconduct. In Ghana, for example, community members hold Oxfam and its partner organization in such high regard that some stated being willing to forgive abuse. This was expressed by a male community member as follows: '[Partner organization] staff are human beings. They are not God, so we would forgive them if they did bad things; they are only human.'

Gratitude and fear of loss were often described as two sides of the same coin. In Iraq and Myanmar in particular, fear of losing access to services was a key deterrent to reporting formally. In Iraq during a KII, a volunteer for Oxfam who was from the community they work in, stated that

‘agencies are so respected and we are so dependent on them that it would be very unlikely that community members would want to put their aid at risk by reporting’. This concern was echoed by nine other women in separate one-to-one KIs; however, they also described the risks of formal reporting as including potential loss of livelihood, becoming housebound, being forced to marry, being silenced, or in extreme cases being banished from the community or even killed.

In Myanmar, where the research team spoke to community members living in a camp setting, FGD participants raised the concern of appearing ungrateful if they were to report misconduct, or potentially risking their own or others’ future prospects of receiving more support.

‘Culturally and traditionally, Kachin people are very thankful that NGOs and local organizations are helping them, so relationships are very friendly and we must try to keep it this way.’ Female community member, Myanmar.

The power dynamics inherent in gratitude and fear of loss were referred to by a male field staff member from the local community, when he explained that ‘some staff may take advantage of this friendly nature of community members’.

Community members’ gratitude (or social expectations to appear grateful) towards I/NGOs as a reason for not reporting was also seen in a camp setting in Iraq. In conversations, many gave the same explanations for why they might not report, i.e. that they might not receive aid and could be formally or informally punished as a result of speaking out.

‘Maybe ... the community member will worry that they will not get any more support and will be afraid of what could happen.’ Male volunteer/community member, Iraq

It is difficult to confirm whether this fear of loss is related to community members’ lack of knowledge of their rights and misconduct management processes and consequences, or to their lack of trust that they would not bear any negative repercussions as a result of reporting. It is probably a combination of the two, and can certainly be addressed, at least in part, by increasing communication on misconduct reporting processes and closing the feedback loop.

## **Community power structures**

Power structures within communities are visible and invisible. They take the shape of formal and informal hierarchies – which are at times inadvertently reinforced by I/NGOs through our work with these authority holders (for example working with camp management authorities, collaborating with male community leaders for targeting aid selection criteria) – and of social norms, a set of rules to be followed that define ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviour.

At the top of these hierarchies are usually elders or formal and informal community leaders, who are almost always men. In camp settings where

camp committees are set up as part of humanitarian responses, women's participation may be promoted, although the extent to which this on its own leads to them gaining power can be limited. I/NGOs work with the (usually male) authority figures for coordination of humanitarian and development activities, including aid selection criteria, thus conferring them with even more power. It is important to keep this risk in mind, as this power differential that we may be accidentally perpetuating may do harm in the longer term.

Respect for hierarchy was most clearly referred to as a factor influencing reporting in Ghana. Various community members explained how, culturally, respecting hierarchy and elders is always considered before reporting, due to cultural practices and the relationship one may have with influential people in the community. The effect was summed up by a female community member as follows: *'I would go up the hierarchal chain to report, not skip. If the person I was reporting about was the person I had to tell, I would prefer to stay quiet.'*

As explored in the section 'A Preference for Community Resolution', the expectation and pressure to respect social norms and community hierarchies intertwine with other factors to disincentivize individuals from reporting through I/NGO channels, especially in SEA cases, and to favour their own structures.

## **Women and girls' lack of power**

Gender power dynamics that perpetrate marginalization of, and violence against, women and girls were clear throughout the research locations in the three countries.

The data found that women and girls are subject to the same shame and stigma as a result of gender-based violence whether it is perpetrated by aid workers or by a member of their own community. Understanding these factors and planning interventions that aim to change them is essential to developing comprehensive measures for ending SEA. This is also true for other barriers that women face in reporting GBV or intimate partner violence. Indeed, data from the research and notes from meetings with professionals working in or with local GBV service provision in all three countries suggests that additional social, economic, and geographical factors also constitute barriers to reporting and accessing support services, and will need to be taken into account by Oxfam and I/NGOs in developing their misconduct management systems for increased uptake and effectiveness.

As described above in the section on I/NGOs' power, research data suggests that women and girls have much to fear from reporting sexual misconduct. In Iraq, for example, the research clearly identifies women's fear of losing their life as a result of reporting SEA. Similar norms around blaming survivors are common in other contexts and were also reported in the research in Myanmar. Another feared consequence specifically voiced by women in Iraq and Myanmar was loss of livelihood. This is connected with loss of job, and therefore income for the household, but is also explicitly related to a loss of freedom. Women explained that if they

reported a SEA incident, they would be likely to be pulled out of work and thus become housebound. This threat has proven an effective way of silencing women.

Women and girls' subordinate position also emerges through various other factors considered in the three countries. For example, for women and girls to be able to use phone hotlines to report, they would need to have access to a phone, to be able to make a call safely, and to have phone credit – all of which can prove challenging and act as a barrier to reporting. In addition, the data in Myanmar and Ghana shows that it is not socially acceptable to call a stranger and submit a complaint; if we also consider that it is taboo to talk about SEA or VAWG more generally, the difficulty in breaching social norms and going against what is accepted and expected is doubled for women.

Elements around resignation and normalization that were raised in Ghana and Iraq are also interesting to explore. When violence is something women and girls deal with on a daily basis; it may be that they see it as a fact of life, a perception that can be further reinforced when there are few consequences for perpetrators. In the same way as women often don't expect this violence to stop within their communities, they may often not expect that reporting sexual misconduct would have any positive impact for them – or at least not compared to the likely negative impact on their reputation, health, livelihood, freedom of movement and even physical safety. Evidence from conversations with communities in camps suggests that there is an increased risk of SEA in camp settings and this becomes part of every-day life; participants explained that inadequate safety for community members within camps and high levels of sexual harassment from camp management or I/NGO staff as well as from camp community members contributes to a gradual normalization of insecurity and an increased risk of GBV. This makes reporting of misconduct less likely, particularly if there is mistrust in the systems or if sexual violence is so widespread with such limited accountability that community members see no reason to report it.

Looking at sexual misconduct within the wider scope of GBV, including VAWG helps us better understand barriers to reporting, especially elements of shame, fear for personal safety, visible and invisible power, and fear of loss of aid/services, livelihood, freedom or even life. Despite all of the above, some women still manage to report. For example, in Iraq, when the research team met with GBV survivor service providers, all confirmed that the majority of reports they had received in the previous six months had been made directly by women survivors. The research didn't specifically look into factors influencing women to report, though it is highly likely there is a reporting incentive tied to receipt of essential survivor services. Nevertheless, it is clear that women use formal systems when they are safe, accessible to them and seen to be effective. Learning from GBV service providers may offer critical insights in terms of building reporting systems that work for women.

## Children's lack of power

In addition to the 'women and girls' lack of power' section above, the research also explored how children, both girls and boys, can be marginalized. The need to ensure that a number of channels for reporting are made accessible for children becomes apparent in programmes where only a select number of staff have contact with children. In these cases, there is no guarantee that a concern will be escalated as, potentially, the misconduct would be reported to those involved in the incident. This concern was raised in both Ghana and Iraq, the only two countries where children were interviewed.

In Ghana, the idea that children are expected to be 'seen and not heard' clearly emerged. In the boarding school setting the girls' have very limited opportunity to exercise any power; they are expected to show respect for teachers and elders alike, and not to disrupt the established order. Even though the school has put mechanisms in place for the girls to report, there is a difference between knowing your rights and being able to act.

Similarly, when speaking to other children in Iraq, nearly all the children the research team spoke to demonstrated that they understood and had been informed of what Safeguarding and misconduct meant and on most occasions the children were able to explain to the researchers how and where you can report however, in reality many of the reporting channels the children had described were only available or open when an adult was present (either for access to the building or to certain area where the reporting channels are kept) and it was evident that none of the children had been consulted before implementing these reporting mechanisms to ensure they were fit for purpose.

It is evident that children also face particular barriers to and fears of reporting due to social stigma. In a historic case of child abuse that was shared with the research team, the reporting journey that followed demonstrated who is most trusted when it comes to reporting. The child survivor had disclosed the abuse to her friends and one of the friends had informed her grandmother, who also happened to be a member of the parent-teacher association (PTA). The case was then escalated and addressed. In this instance, there is evidence to suggest that children prefer to report to members within their community and actively avoided the use of any formal reporting channel, whether that be best practice of formally referring the case to a social worker or via an I/NGO channel. This highlights the perceived risks around confidentiality and mistrust of formal reporting channels.

For reporting mechanisms to reach the most vulnerable members of a community and to be contextualized, it is vital to ensure that children can participate and are consulted in programme design as well as throughout the programme cycle. It is their human right, it promotes good health and wellbeing, supports children's development and empowers them. Local authorities, where available, should also be involved so that appropriate referrals can be made.<sup>23</sup>

# LIMITED TRUST IN THE PROCESS

Although closely linked to other reporting factors, exploring the notion of ‘trust’ also revealed reservations around confidentiality and the speed at which a misconduct allegation would be handled by the ‘other side’ (i.e. the formal systems) compared to traditional solutions. Some community members don’t want to report formally because they are concerned that matters won’t remain confidential. Therefore, in some instances they share the issue with family members, who raise and escalate it on their behalf, possibly jeopardizing confidentiality and the safety of the survivor and the alleged perpetrator. Throughout the conversations in all three countries it emerged that there is little trust that anonymous really means anonymous.

While each country differs slightly with regard to factors that influence trust, depending on their context, the data shows similarities between the three. For example, many participants expressed that trust is based on seeing action in response to feedback or on how the organization has handled concerns in the past. This was mentioned in Iraq, where community members decided who was trustworthy and who was not, based on past action or inaction.

Not knowing the full reporting process was also an issue for research participants; for example, in Myanmar, women stated that they would not use the complaints box in the camp to report, because they didn’t know who would be reading and opening the box. Similarly, in Ghana, some children feared using the complaints box because they didn’t know who the complaints would be read by, or didn’t trust that their concern would be dealt with safely and privately.

Interestingly, in Iraq, an added element was a culture of a lack of trust.

*‘Trust is based on responding to IDPs’ (internally displaced persons) concerns fast but in general no one is trusted.’* Female community member, Iraq

For women, the question of trust and reporting is made even more challenging due to strict social norms. Accounts from women in all countries contain very similar stories on the measures family members may take to protect women from ramifications as a result of reporting, witnessing or experiencing misconduct, especially of a sexual nature.

*‘She will not inform her family, because they will prevent her from “everything” (explains that they would do this out of fear for her safety); she will also not go to the police, because they “will make the problem bigger than it is”.’* Researcher’s notes from a KII in Iraq

In addition, there was little to no trust in the formal justice system or law enforcement to obtain justice, and only a handful of participants suggested they would follow these reporting routes.

# DIFFERENCES IN REPORTING SEA AND CORRUPTION

This research set out to explore barriers to reporting misconduct of either a financial or a sexual nature. Unsurprisingly, given prevailing gender social norms, the data shows that in general there was less fear in reporting corruption issues than reporting SEA concerns. This was true for both female and male individuals. Participants across the three countries all claimed that the latter was personal and private in nature, and as such shame, social pressure, norms and stigma all played a part in preventing reporting. For reporting corruption concerns, the key barrier in all three countries was that these issues were seen as common, everyday problems experienced by people at all levels of society, so reporting was viewed as pointless.

In both Iraq and Ghana, people highlighted the cultural value of trying to ensure that information was true, prior to reporting. In both countries, the importance of this was emphasized for cases of SEA in particular. For example, according to a male community member in Iraq: *'I must ensure all information is fact before reporting.'* Similar comments were made in Ghana, where a male community member explained: *'First I must investigate before reporting, to obtain evidential material.'* The need to verify facts prior to reporting was deemed essential due to a feeling of accountability and responsibility as well as a level of respect, particularly where the perpetrator is known to the potential reporter. As in all cases of sexual violence (i.e. whether perpetrated by community members or aid workers) this is tied to factors such as honour and shame, survivor-blaming and the seriousness of potential consequences. The issue of rumours and gossip and the potential for fabricated reports was pertinent in both countries. Interestingly, in Ghana, it was specifically reported that it was too dangerous to verify facts on corruption, due to fear for one's life.

Another element that notably differed for reporting SEA versus corruption concerns related to the type of reporting channel preferred. Across the three countries, face-to-face reporting was preferred for sexual assault reporting. This was also given as an additional explanation for the preference for community resolution over formal reporting for SEA, especially in Myanmar and Iraq. Here a great majority of participants agreed with the statement that face-to-face interaction was preferable to any other channel for reporting allegations of SEA, due to the sensitivity of the issue and the dangerous situation reporting can put community members in.

The majority of research participants stated that reporting corruption concerns via a formal channel would be the ideal approach (if they knew what the hotline number or formal reporting channel was, and if the channel was actually effective). Depending on the severity of the corruption allegation, they would also consider reporting face to face. This finding fits with Oxfam's broader understanding of feedback mechanisms and the importance of face-to-face interactions as an

effective mechanism for giving feedback on the programme more generally.<sup>24</sup> This emphasizes the need for local interaction at the community level and proximity of Oxfam or partner agencies to the people receiving support.

# 3 KEY CONSIDERATIONS

This human-centred design research has demonstrated that there is a very intricate web of factors that define the barriers people face to reporting misconduct. These relate to incentives to reporting, fears around repercussions, social norms and power hierarchies. The barriers differ between settings (such as camp and non-camp), between different groups of people (such as women, men and children), and depending on the nature of the concern (e.g. whether it is a SEA or corruption issue). Several of these factors are linked to the quality of the reporting mechanisms that have been set up, which are within our direct sphere of influence and control; other factors, particularly the personal and interactional barriers, are less so.

In this section, we will articulate lines of enquiry to guide thinking on next steps. These are not new or ground-breaking ideas; indeed, their strength and power lie in the fact that they are simple, effective and rooted in the principles and core values of humanitarian and development work.

## HOW CAN WE ENSURE INCLUSIVENESS?

Inclusiveness bridges programme quality, participation, and accountability, and determines who's voice counts. Marginalization and exclusion of certain groups will always be a risk that needs to be explored and addressed. To do this well, community participation in co-designing any reporting systems is key to ensure they are based on user needs and preferences. Ensuring that members of marginalized populations have a say in the design process will increase the likelihood of these systems being accessible to their primary users who often have trouble accessing them especially women and girls, children, gender non-conforming people, members of marginalized ethnic and religious groups, people with disabilities and other more vulnerable community members.

The starting point in our bid to ensure inclusiveness would be a context, conflict and gender analysis to provide an in-depth analysis of power dynamics. Findings would help in identifying drivers of change and bring to the forefront the different needs and aspirations of women, girls, men, boys, and gender non-conforming people from the communities in which we work. In addition to being key for programme activity design, this information would be used together with direct participation of community members for the design of context and user-specific reporting systems. The research on misconduct reporting barriers and data we have from our work on feedback systems confirms that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. Instead, we need to work together with women, girls, men, boys, and gender non-conforming people from communities we support

to build systems that work for them and takes into account their constraints and aspirations.

In addition to co-design, I/NGOs should work to ensure communities co-own reporting channels where possible. This would involve leading or at least equally participating in designing and managing reporting systems. If systems can be community-led and work within existing community structures and resolutions, they are more likely to be accepted as a safe, trusted way to report. Creating spaces for conversations, listening to people and enabling communities, partners and country teams to innovate and contextualize systems and processes, will make them more relevant and valuable to the people we support.

Furthermore, misconduct investigation structures currently in place do not enable a coordinated or collaborative response with the community. Data from the research demonstrates a usage of community resolution mechanisms, so it is important for I/NGOs to understand these structures and how they operate and explore how to work with them for misconduct management. At the same time, it is critical to recognize that these customary mechanisms often reinforce damaging patriarchal and hierarchical structures and can increase harm and risk, especially for women and girls (see 'How can we support empowerment of the people we work with?', below).

Finally, ensuring inclusiveness needs to go hand in hand with a commitment to flexibility and adaptation. Analyses conducted and systems set up should be periodically reviewed, together with community members, to test their validity and effectiveness, and adjusted so they continue to be relevant and useful.

## HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR ACCOUNTABILITY TO COMMUNITIES?

For I/NGOs to be held to account and enable decisions to be influenced by those receiving aid, there needs to be a trusted system in place alongside a strong accountability culture. Starting from the basics, systems should be simple, easy to access and coordinated with other I/NGOs working in the area. Community members have a right to know what to expect from us and how to hold us to account. Continuing to make space for conversations to close the feedback loop, acting on received feedback, and promoting participation and ownership will build trust in us and reporting systems we set up.

We need to foster a culture of accountability with our staff, partners and allies, ensuring they share our values and have resources and systems to uphold this commitment. Alongside this, the sector should go beyond compliance, and look at safety, trust and satisfaction of community members as key indicators. These measurements need to be utilized as

indicators of success and risk in overall programming to ensure organizational commitment to improving reporting mechanisms.

It is important to note that this goes beyond misconduct reporting and applies to feedback systems in general. Findings from the research have shown that if we can get the small things right, people will trust us with the larger issues. Although organizations often artificially segregate feedback mechanisms and misconduct reporting, to those receiving aid they are the same thing: a way to talk to us about an issue that is causing problems. Therefore, ensuring that our feedback systems are trusted is central to improving misconduct reporting.

## HOW CAN WE SUPPORT EMPOWERMENT OF THE PEOPLE WE WORK WITH?

Understanding where power lies and how it is exercised and working to shift it, is essential for our programme work; it is not any different for safeguarding and anti-corruption. If we are to systematically and sustainably address misconduct, supporting shifting powers on two tracks is needed: increasing community members' power in their work with I/NGOs and promoting women, girls and marginalized groups' power within their own communities. We could consider working along a continuum, starting with misconduct management and moving to transformative programming. Within misconduct management, I/NGOs can support community members to gain power by increasing their awareness of, access to and ideally control over misconduct reporting mechanisms. This fits with the ideas above, and would work to reduce feelings of resignation, where people do not believe anything will change regardless of whether they act or not.

Ultimately, reporting systems need to work for people rather than for I/NGOs, with the primary reason for establishing reporting mechanisms being to protect people from misconduct. Success should be measured not by simply having a system, but by community members' positive experience of using the system in practice. This would mean that people know what misconduct is, know they can report it without having to pay a price, and know that they will benefit from reporting a problem. If there is a perception that there is nothing or very little to gain, there is no incentive to report.

We have identified in above sections the importance of closing the feedback loop to build trust; however, it can go further in its practice, to hand over control. I/NGOs currently hold power for misconduct management and resolution. What if we shared this power with people submitting complaints, with survivors? What if our decisions took their views, needs, and aspirations into account?

# HOW CAN WE HOLISTICALLY DRIVE LONG-TERM CHANGE?

The research raises questions on the survivor-centred approach and how it can be embedded within local cultures and contexts. Where a survivor indicates a preference for a community resolution approach which reinforces damaging patriarchal and hierarchical structures, should Oxfam or donors accept it? In the long term, a key avenue to address this conflicting approach is to bring the conversation on violence into the public sphere to transform social norms and practices. Until gender-based violence is rejected by and within communities we work in, SEA reporting will remain a significant challenge.

Looking at sexual misconduct within the wider scope of GBV, including VAWG helps us better understand barriers to reporting. Critically, links between acceptance and non-reporting of SEA and GBV make it clear that a misconduct management approach on its own will be insufficient. Instead, it should go hand in hand with gender-transformative programmes that work with communities to transform social norms and contribute to ending GBV. Without this, a family's honour will continue to depend on women and girls' 'purity', shame will continue to be the burden of the survivor not the perpetrator, and abuse will continue to be a price that women pay for their livelihood and safety.

Moving to transformative programming, I/NGO's work could drive long-term sustainable change to promote gender equality, resilience, and peace. A deep analysis and understanding of power would be at the heart of this transformative agenda, including the power I/NGOs have in communities we support. Building on conflict and gender analyses, this could start by working with women and members of marginalized groups, using various entry points, to support power shifts within communities. Using a safe programming and gender and conflict sensitive approach, it is also important to assess risks this may expose them to and develop mitigation measures to protect them from retaliation. A potential entry point would be via community protection and management of incidents and slowly build up to longer-term programming and interventions to end GBV and transform harmful social norms, together with active citizenship and transformative leadership interventions where women and members of marginalized groups become agents of change and demand accountability.

# CONCLUSION

The human-centred design research that took place in Myanmar, Iraq and Ghana has provided a new perspective to explore misconduct reporting. It is hoped that this work can help move the sector beyond focusing on structural barriers that are within our control towards a more localized approach that also seeks to tackle barriers through a transformational agenda. Currently, mechanisms for reporting are often disconnected from the community's realities and needs, which is why they do not work.

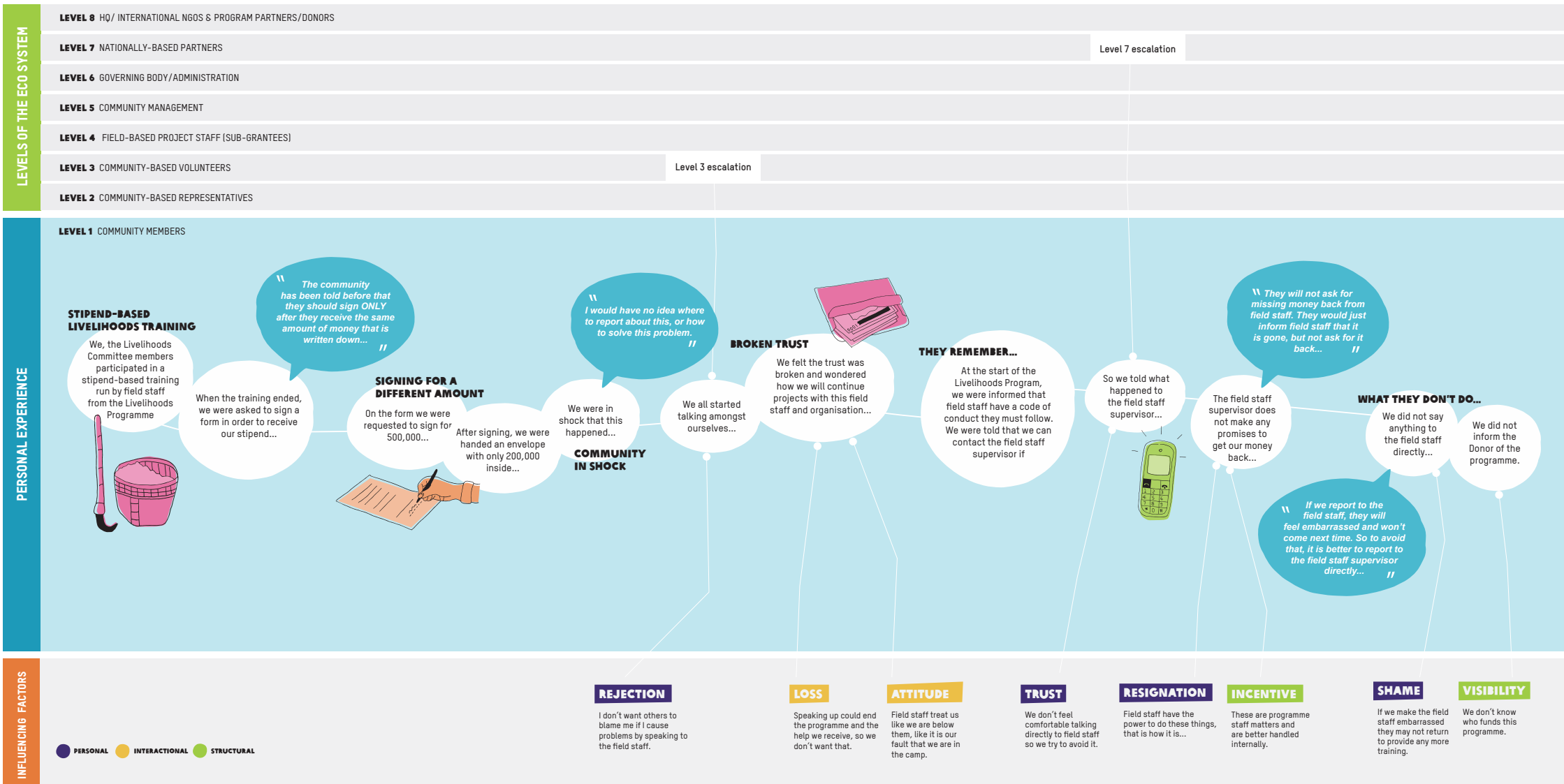
Barriers will always exist, preventing people from feeling able to report. Working to reduce or remove these barriers by shifting cultural norms is complex and takes time. The sector needs to incorporate both a longer-term transformational vision for change as well as short-term operational shifts that can be made relatively quickly. By embedding accountability, inclusiveness, and empowerment into a system that is safe, transparent and responsive, organizations such as Oxfam can further build trust and reduce barriers to reporting.

# ANNEX 1: JOURNEY MAPS

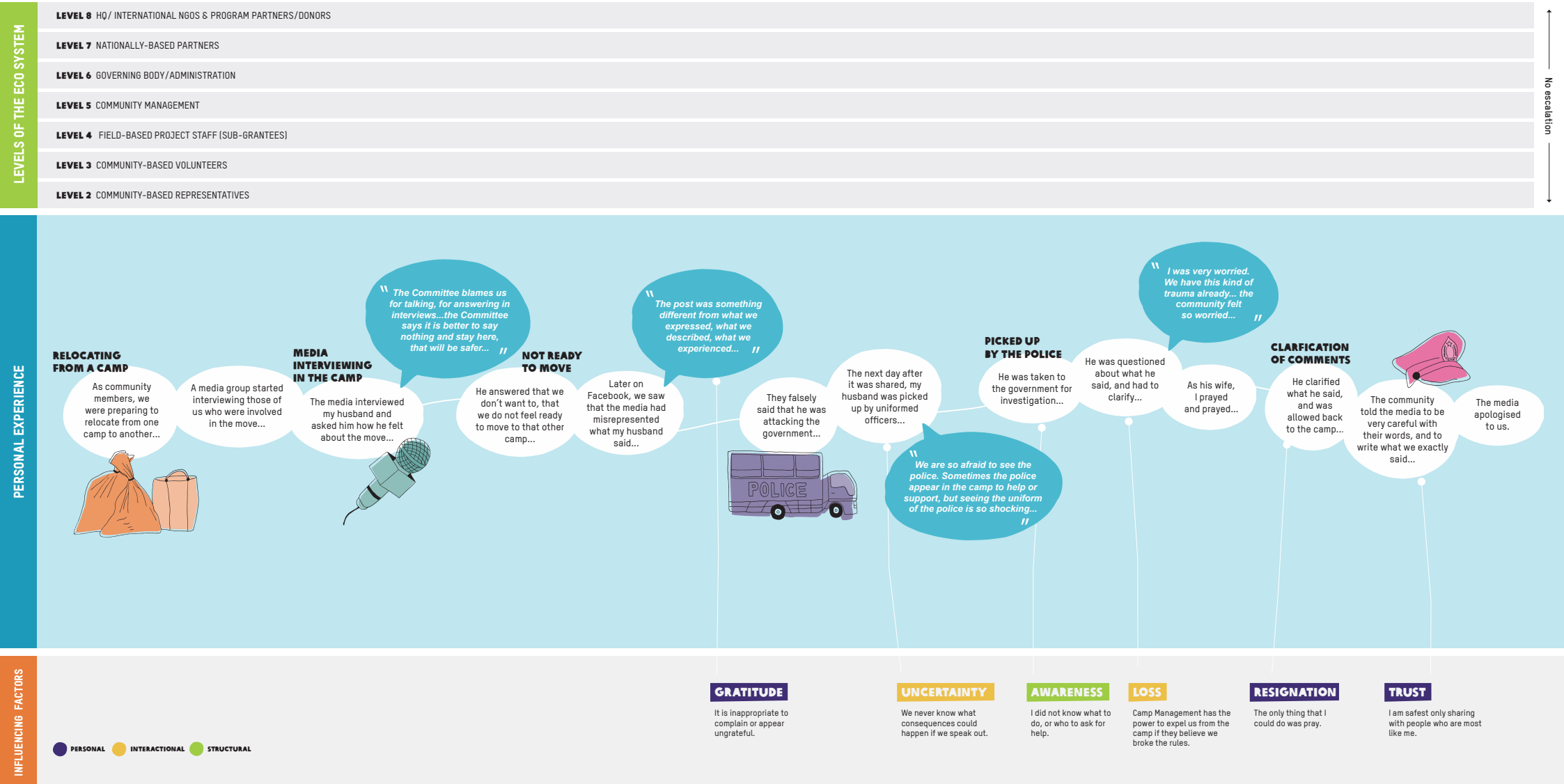
These Journey Maps are a visual representation of some of the stories, experiences, and expressed emotions that were voluntarily shared with the research team. Each visual represents a compilation of interpreted and analysed research data, as the narratives shared throughout the course of the study have been woven together to depict collective experience and detail. Sonder Collective<sup>25</sup> created these maps with visual design services provided by AndGood.<sup>26</sup>

These maps depict three reporting journeys for example incidents. Journey Map 1 describes an example of how stipend-related fraud can happen among field staff who are responsible for paying community members. Journey Map 2 highlights the potential challenges of speaking up in a politically charged environment and Journey Map 3 depicts a story of an ambiguous relationship between a staff member and a volunteer. The levels of the ecosystem demonstrate the escalation level at which these events may have been reported to. The influencing factors relate to the reporting barriers identified during the research analysis which are detailed in the individual country research reports.

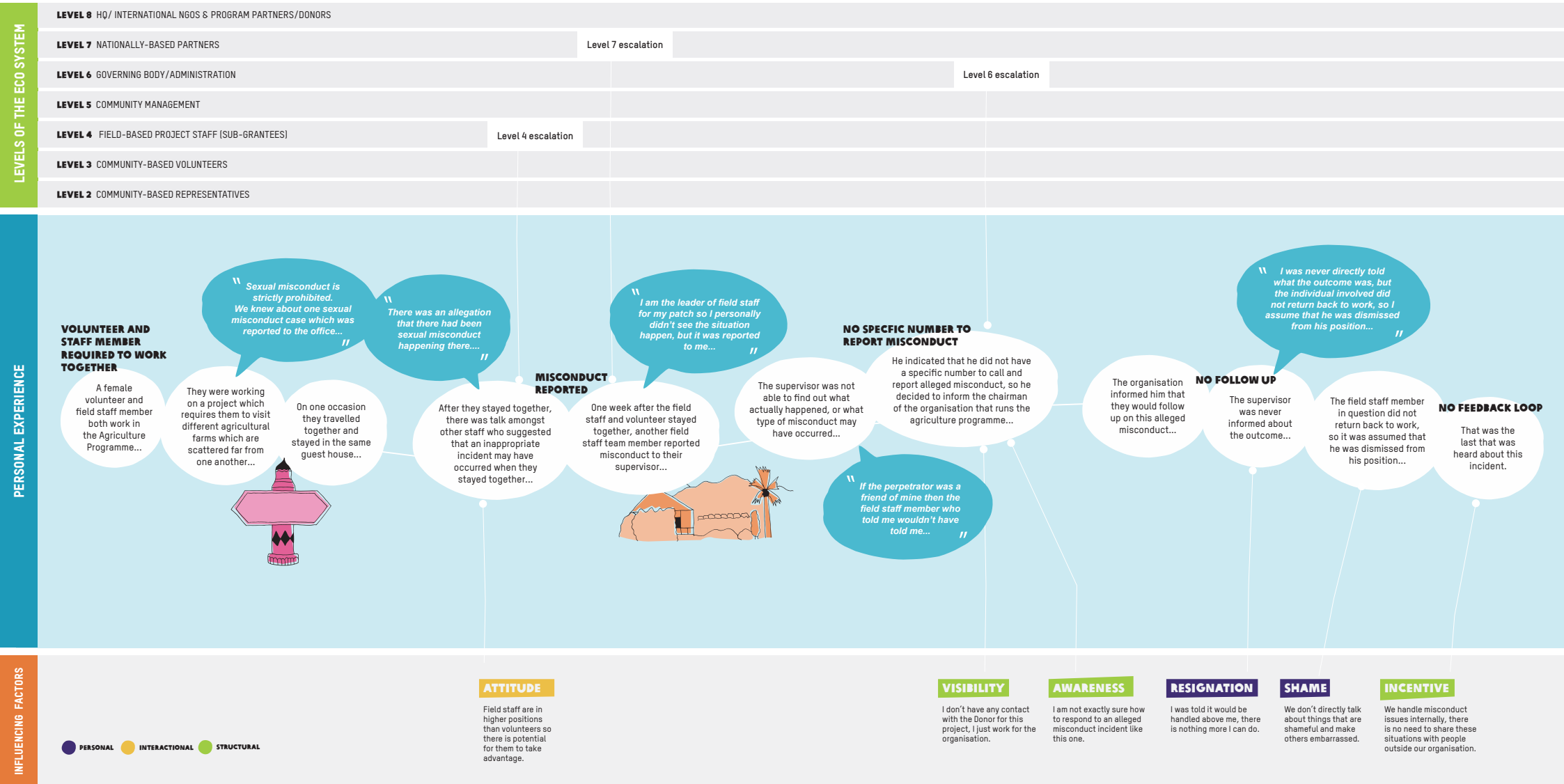
# JOURNEY MAP 1



# JOURNEY MAP 2



# JOURNEY MAP 3



## ANNEX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDES

### **Semi- structured: Interview guide – Adults**

#### Focus Group Discussion Plan:

##### Introduction

- Introduce everyone, explain why we are here – to discuss barriers to reporting misconduct.
- Explain how this information will be used.
- Go through consent forms and ask to sign.
- Explain confidentiality and that this is voluntary – if anyone wants to share something that is more private, we can have this conversation afterwards.

##### Discussion Guide:

1. When we say misconduct by an NGO, what do you understand by this?
2. If you had witnessed or heard something about this, what would you do?
3. What reporting channels would you use? Why/Why not?
4. Who would you trust or feel safe to tell in this community/school setting? Who would you trust to tell and why?
5. Use Venn Diagram and/or Ranking activity

#### Key Informant Interview Plan:

##### Introduction

- Introduce everyone, explain why we are here – to discuss barriers to reporting misconduct.
- Explain how this information will be used.
- Explain confidentiality and that this is voluntary.

##### Interview Guide:

1. Explaining what we mean by misconduct/types of misconduct
2. What are the various reporting mechanisms that they are aware of? What would they use? Ask them to rank the types of reporting mechanisms in terms of preference and explain why. (add visual cards)
3. Use scenarios/hypotheticals (x4)
  - Trust
  - Influencing factors

##### Extra Questions:

1. What do you understand about different types of misconduct that NGOs could cause?
2. Who is experiencing these incidents? Who is less likely (or not) experiencing these incidents?
3. Where do you feel comfortable/safe? Where do you feel least safe?
4. Sometimes talking about certain issues can be dangerous for certain people.

- Who are the people that this can be difficult/dangerous for? (gender, age, disability, women, children etc)
  - What do you think makes it dangerous for these groups of people?
5. How do you learn about incidents? Can you tell me about the types of incidents you have heard about (not specific to you, but things you've heard - and without mentioning names).

#### Participatory Methods:

##### Ranking:

- Ask what reporting methods they are aware of/currently use/or could use: (hotline number, website, email, NGO/School representative, parent/teacher committee, community member/leader (chief etc).
- Ask them to rank these from 1 (least likely to use) to 5 (most likely to use).
- Ask why they would rank this way

##### Venn Diagram Activity and/or community mapping

##### Story – SEA:

1. Imagine if a friend tells you that she is pregnant by an INGO worker/school staff member. What would you do?
2. Imagine you heard rumours that someone you know has been sexually assaulted by an INGO/school staff member. What would you do?

##### Story – Corruption/Fraud

1. You hear from trusted people in your community that certain resources being distributed by INGOs are only going to select people, it is suspected that the staff distributing and the community members are related or from similar tribe/ethnic group but no one is sure as they are unfamiliar to you. What would you do? Why?
2. You receive NFI support from an INGO- however when you are asked to sign for the goods you notice that the list has a lot more items than you are receiving; What do you do? Why?

#### **Semi- structured: Interview guide – Children and young people**

Introduction: Introduce ourselves, explain where we work etc (use consent sheet with introduction)

Explain that we are here to talk about *misconduct/bad behaviour* that might take place in their setting and to understand how you feel when you are at school/youth group/safe space. We want to make sure that XXX is a safe and comfortable place for you to learn and develop, so we want to talk a little about this.

1. General – tell us about you and daily routine in general – what is a general day here for you? Tell us about from when you are getting ready all the way to when you reach school and then back again. How long have been you here, do you have sisters here, what do you want to do when you finish here etc? (if school context)

2. We would like to talk to you about things that make students here feel safe and unsafe at school
  - How do girls feel about coming to school here?
  - Are there places in the school that girls feel safe in? Are there places that they don't feel safe? Can you tell us a little more about this?

### Questions

We are going to discuss a short story and ask some questions about this.

### Story 1:

Leah and Angela are 14 years old and are in the same class. They go to a school that is for girls. One day, Angela tells Leah that her teacher asked her to stay behind because he wanted to ask her some questions about her homework. Afterwards he tried to hug her. Angela told Leah that she didn't like to hug the teacher in this way and that this made her feel uncomfortable.

- What do you think about the teacher's behaviour to Angela?
- What do you think Leah could tell Angela to do?
- Who do you think Angela could talk to about this that is a grown up?

Angela wasn't sure which grown up she could talk to about this because she was scared. Leah told her that she heard that there was a person working in the school who students can talk to about things like this if they want. Leah told Angela and the next day, they went and spoke to this staff member. She told them it's good that they came to speak to her and to tell her about this.

- What do you think about this way of reporting? Are there ways in this school of reporting these things?

### Story 2:

Janet and Amina are friends at school together. One day after school, Amina gets a message on her phone from a staff member at school. She is surprised that a staff member is messaging her and trying to chat with her so she tells Janet this. They both think this is a bit strange. The staff member in the message tells Amina not to tell anyone about these messages. Amina and Janet aren't sure what to do.

- What do you think they could do? Who do you think they could tell about this?
- Ranking – at this stage you could ask students to rank the best reporting channel method

### Focus Group Discussion:

1. If you wanted to design a system in the school so that students/staff could report things like the ones we spoke about in the stories, how could we do this? Let's brainstorm ideas together? What channel would you prefer to use?
2. Divide into pairs/groups and ask them if they were going to design a brand-new system of reporting when bad behaviour happens what it would look like and how would it work and 'present' back.
3. Divide into pairs and share the different stories. Ask them to spend 10 minutes or so working on the chain of communication

on how the person in story would report on stories and 'present' back to us.

When talking to parents/teachers:

Introduction: Introduce ourselves, explain where we work etc (use consent sheet with introduction)

Explain we are here to talk about misconduct/bad behaviour that might take place at the school and to understand how you feel when you are at school. We want to make sure that school is a safe and comfortable place for you to learn and develop, so we want to talk a little about this.

Questions:

1. General – tell us about the role of the association? How is structured? What issues do you deal with? If someone was to raise an issue with you, how would you address it? (Give an example) What are the things that you think would work and would not work?

Stories:

1. Student tells her friends that her teacher told her he would give her an A if she had sex with him.
2. A teacher witnesses a member of staff at school trying to kiss one of the students.

What do you think they could do? Where/how could they report this? Why or why not report?

# NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sonder Collective. <https://www.sonderdesign.org/>

<sup>2</sup> M. Semler. (2019). *Factors Influencing Misconduct Reporting in Kachin, Myanmar*. Oxfam. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/factors-influencing-misconduct-reporting-in-kachin-myanmar-620893>

<sup>3</sup> Overseas Development Institute (2018). Protecting civilians in the Kachin borderlands, Myanmar: Key threats and local responses. Humanitarian Policy Working Group. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12566.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> United Nations and Partners Myanmar Country Team (2017). Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018: Myanmar. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2018%20Myanmar%20Humanitarian%20Needs%20Overview.pdf>; Trócaire and Oxfam (2017) Life on Hold: Experiences of women displaced by conflict in Kachin State, Myanmar. <https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/life-on-hold-trocaire-oxfam2017.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> The Asia Foundation (2017). Myanmar: The State of Conflict and Violence. <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/MyanmarTStateofConflictandViolence.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> OCHA. Myanmar IDP Sites in Kachin State. [https://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Affected\\_Map\\_IDP\\_Kachin\\_OCHA\\_Jun2019\\_A0.pdf](https://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Affected_Map_IDP_Kachin_OCHA_Jun2019_A0.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Overseas Development Institute (2018). Op cit.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> C. Echegaray. (2020). *Factors Influencing Misconduct Reporting in Saladin and Nineveh, Iraq*. Oxfam. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/factors-influencing-misconduct-reporting-in-saladin-and-nineveh-iraq-620929>

<sup>10</sup> ISIS means the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The group is also referred to as IS, ISIL and Daesh. Please see this article for further clarification on naming the group: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east27994277>

<sup>11</sup> Cash Consortium for Iraq (CCI) (2019). The Impact of Cash Transfers on Local Markets in Iraq: Lessons from Baiji and Rawa, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/impact-cash-transfers-local-economies-iraq-lessons-baiji-and-rawa>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> John Bryant for the Humanitarian Policy Group and ODI (2019). The humanitarian response in Iraq: Support beyond international assistance in Mosul, available at: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resourcedocuments/12782.pdf>; BBC (2014, June 10) 'Militants seize Iraq's second city of Mosul', available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27778112>

<sup>14</sup> John Bryant for the Humanitarian Policy Group and ODI (2019). Op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., page 5

<sup>16</sup> C. Echegaray and L. Fakhoury. (2020). *Factors Influencing Misconduct Reporting in Sawla and Tarkwa, Ghana*. Oxfam. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/factors-influencing-misconduct-reporting-in-sawla-and-tarkwa-ghana-620946>

<sup>17</sup> Oxfam website. 'Oxfam in Ghana'. <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/what-we-do/countries-we-work-in/ghana>

<sup>18</sup> M. Semler. (2019). *Factors Influencing Misconduct Reporting in Kachin, Myanmar*. Oxfam. Op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> C. Echegaray. (2020). *Factors Influencing Misconduct Reporting in Saladin and Nineveh, Iraq*. Oxfam. Op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> C. Echegaray and L. Fakhoury. (2020). *Factors Influencing Misconduct Reporting in Sawla and Tarkwa, Ghana*. Op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Eaton, J. (2019). "Logically, I know I'm not to blame but I still feel to blame': Exploring and Measuring Victim Blaming and Self-Blame of Women who have been subjected to Sexual Violence". [http://library.college.police.uk/docs/theses/Eaton2019\\_women\\_sexual\\_violence.pdf](http://library.college.police.uk/docs/theses/Eaton2019_women_sexual_violence.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> BBC News. (2019). "Two Ghanaian lecturers suspended after BBC Africa Eye 'Sex For Grades' film". <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-49993>

<sup>23</sup> Save the Children Child Safe Programming Guidelines. <https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/SAVE%20THE%20CHILDR EN%20Child%20Safe%20Programming%20Guidelines.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> A. Gaboune. (2019). *Responsive Listening through Improved Feedback Mechanisms: End of Project Evaluation*. Oxfam. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/responsive-listening-through-improved-feedback-mechanisms-end-of-project-evalua-620869>

<sup>25</sup> Sonder Collective. <https://www.sonderdesign.org/>

<sup>26</sup> And Good. <https://www.andgood.co/>

## OXFAM

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