



FACTORS INFLUENCING MISCONDUCT REPORTING IN SAWLA AND TARKWA, GHANA

OXFAM CASE STUDY – FEBRUARY 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the critical factors that influence decision-making behaviour related to misconduct reporting in Ghana, based on a human-centred approach.

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

There are four sections to this document. The first section provides some background information on this initiative and the approach guiding this work. The second section provides specific details on the research process, ethical considerations, and limitations. The third section presents a summary of the key findings and themes. The fourth and final section offers some high-level recommendations for moving forward.

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This case study is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper, please email etomkysvalteri@oxfam.org.uk.

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

Cover photo: During a focus group discussion, students create their own mechanisms for reporting misconduct in a boarding school setting. Credit: Carolina Echegaray/Oxfam GB

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 has therefore implemented the 'Your Word Counts' programme, a year-long research process in multiple 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 RESEARCH TEAM: A COLLABORATION

The research team consisted of Carolina Echegaray, Global Safeguarding Advisor, who led on the research and was supported by Lara Fakhoury, Global Safeguarding Advisor, and members of the Oxfam in Ghana country team and partner organizations, who also supported in interpreting, logistics and coordination of the focus group discussions and key informant interviews (KIIs).

THE PURPOSE: TO UNDERSTAND INFLUENCING FACTORS

Oxfam GB and Sonder Collective began with an Intent Workshop, which was attended by individuals from four separate Oxfam teams (Safeguarding, Anti-corruption and Fraud, Protection, and Information Communication Technology (ICT) 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.

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.

We 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?

THE CONTEXT: GHANA

Ghana borders Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo and has a population of about 29.6 million. It is a middle-income country and is governed under a multi-party system.¹ Oxfam has been working in Ghana since 1986,² 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 wrong doing.

THE FOCUS: COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND FIELD STAFF

The purpose of the research was to better understand the barriers and preferences relating to perceptions and experiences of misconduct reporting among community members and field staff. Field staff refers to any individual who has contact with members of the community on a regular basis, whether in a full-time, part-time, volunteer, partner staff or Oxfam capacity.

From an accountability perspective, we were also dedicated to understanding the decision making and behavioural determinants influencing programme partners, who work alongside Oxfam to deliver community-based programming. Specifically, the scope of the work focused on experiences related to safeguarding and anti-corruption, such as: sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and fraud and corruption.

2. RESEARCH SPECIFICS

THE RECRUITMENT

Oxfam in Ghana and partner staff possessed the greatest knowledge and potential for facilitating the research in a way that would effectively capture the voices of community members and field staff. They were best positioned to steer the research team, especially when it came to identifying the specific participants whose voices we hoped to hear from and understand.

The project team travelled to various sites within Sawla and Tarkwa. Research interviews took place in Oxfam's partner office and/or local facilities such as a school, clinic and community centre. Privacy for the interviewees was assured prior to interviews taking place, and efforts were made to ensure confidentiality and comfort of participants throughout the process.

It was clear during some interviews that these topics were difficult for some participants to discuss, and some were concerned about the information shared. This echoes the barriers faced in reporting misconduct. While it is important to speak to a number of participants without formal 'pre-selection', as this is vital for a fair research process, it may be beneficial in future research to consider how best to locate research interviews to help ensure that participants feel comfortable to speak openly.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The team met with individuals living in the school in Sawla and in villages across Sawla and Tarkwa in Ghana. We conducted 14 focus group discussions (four all-female, 10 mixed-sex) with community members, in village and school settings. In total, we spoke with 60 community members aged over 18, 34 community members aged under 18, and eight programme staff on an individual or two-person basis (including interpreters). Our focus was on the human experience of reporting misconduct. Each individual with whom we spoke brought their own history and context to this human experience, and we have endeavoured to shed light on how these different contexts can impact reporting and barriers to reporting.

THE METHODS

Oxfam GB engaged Sonder Collective³ to incorporate human-centred design (HCD) principles in the research process. This document outlines the findings from this phase of immersive research, which took place in

Sawla and Tarkwa, in October and November 2019. Utilizing semi-structured and unstructured interview techniques, the research team approached conversations with 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, we also engaged in focus group discussions 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.

THE ETHICS

In keeping with Oxfam's accountability policy as well as basic principles of ethical research practice, the names of specific camps, programmes and organizations have been removed and/or modified in order to ensure confidentiality for the research participants as well as for the organizations they spoke about. During the research process, participants were not asked to provide their full names, and all data collected was anonymized to protect the privacy of those involved. The quotes in this summary are mostly verbatim, and were captured through audio-recording after obtaining written and verbal consent from participants. Some quotes have been modified with the addition of occasional filler words in instances when the literal translation may be confusing to the reader. Disclosures were directly reported to Oxfam's Global Safeguarding team in Oxford via the Safeguarding Advisor. Any issues and/or concerns were then dealt with as per Oxfam GB's standard operating procedure on receiving, logging and managing safeguarding cases.

Inclusion of children in the research

In order to carry out this research, the team had to undertake additional precautionary measures to ensure the appropriate procedure was followed when interviewing children (i.e. those under 18 years of age). Before the research took place, consent forms were sent to the school for parental/guardian signature. The research team also ensured that appropriate referral agencies were accessible in the event that a child disclosed misconduct to a member of the research team. A general risk assessment was devised, highlighting the issues and extra safeguards the research team could put in place to mitigate them. A child-specific risk assessment was completed, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were created to ensure we had established appropriate rules around confidentiality (e.g. not interviewing alone, ensuring appropriate location for conversations to take place). The research team formulated child-appropriate questions in relation to the objectives of the research.

THE LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations to the research process which ought to be taken into consideration.

Location

Interviews and focus group discussions were arranged in the venues where staff such as teachers, Oxfam and partner staff worked, which meant that participants may not have felt they had a safe space to discuss the issues and may have been reluctant to speak out about negative experiences or to express any concerns. The research team ensured that in each venue private, secluded rooms or spaces were found for the conversations to take place. However, due to limited resources and suitable spaces, this was a recurring challenge.

Interpreters

Interpreters were required throughout the research interviews. While the research team chose the interpreters carefully, there are always limitations in ensuring full understanding between researcher and participant. Interpretation was conducted principally in the local Ghanaian dialect (depending on the region) and English. Some members of the research team had knowledge of both languages, but an interpreter was used in most interviews. When the meaning was unclear, the research team endeavoured to ensure a common understanding between researcher and participant.

Despite these limitations to the research process, the initiative has resulted in an increased understanding of the specific dynamics that influence the decision making and behaviour of community members and field staff when it comes to safeguarding and misconduct reporting.

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section summarizes the key findings based on what the research team heard during both individual and group conversations.

This summary should be utilized as a starting point, or a tool that can help guide subsequent efforts that are dedicated to understanding the community-level experience of misconduct reporting.

THE INFLUENCING FACTORS

In Ghana, there are a host of factors that influence an individual's ability to 'speak up'.

Throughout this summary, we use 'influencing factors' to refer to the specific variables which influence the way people make decisions when it comes to reporting, problem-solving and sharing information related to misconduct.

After analysing the data from individual and group conversations, and distilling down larger themes into patterns, it became evident that barriers to reporting can be best understood as falling into three main categories. The figure below illustrates these categories, and was used as a framework for summarizing the various influencing factors that emerged during the research.

1. Personal	2. Interactional	3. Structural
E.g. I react based on what is expected, and accept that this is the way things are.	E.g. I am afraid of losing status, privileges or access to services.	E.g. I make decisions based on my immediate environment.

Personal factors are most closely tied to how someone innately thinks and feels. They include factors that can be seen as intrinsic, or belonging naturally to an individual, and are most strongly tied to their sense of self. Personal factors can be thought of as intangible characteristics, such as a person's belief system, the values that they hold and the lived experiences that they carry with them.

Interactional factors are more identifiable, and are more visibly the result of an interaction between a person and their social network or environment. Interactional factors include the negative consequences in relation to *other* people and/or organizations that can occur as a result of speaking up.

Structural factors refer to the tangible elements or the formal systems and structures in an individual's immediate environment that shape the choices that are and are not available to them.

Decision making behaviour in any environment is dynamic, and can never be fully distilled down to its individual components. Similarly, behaviour relating to safeguarding and misconduct reporting in the Ghanaian social environment cannot be deconstructed in its entirety. For that reason, the above framework was utilized as a guide to orient thinking, with the understanding that the various influencing factors overlap and can strengthen or diminish the weight of each other.

1. PERSONAL FACTORS

These are the factors that are most closely tied to how someone innately thinks and feels.

1.1 Perceived consequences

If I report, I will have to face repercussions.

1.2 Independent fact-finding

I must obtain all the information before reporting.

1.3 Trust

I don't have trust in individuals or reporting systems.

1.4 Shame

I don't wish to bring shame upon myself or others.

1.1 Perceived consequences

If I report, I will have to face repercussions.

'If I report it then the teacher may get in trouble, and I don't want that.'
Student

Many community members spoke about the perceived consequences, i.e. of what may happen to them and the perpetrator, if they were to report concerns about misconduct. Perceptions of consequences that may or may not occur if one reports are due to a number of factors. Some of the common factors the research team came across related to social norms. Some consequences are ingrained in Ghanaian culture and society; for example, if a woman is sexually assaulted, cultural expectations about her behaviour and age are looked at first. If the woman is seen as being 'open' or an extrovert, society would agree that she was 'asking for this attention'.

Another factor raised by community members is a lack of information on 'what happens next' after reporting, and many participants expressed

that they could not be sure or simply did not know what would happen if they reported.

The final common factor that emerged was the lack of control the person disclosing feels they have after reporting a concern, which then leads to a great deal of uncertainty. Once the information has been disclosed, participants stated that they would no longer feel able to make decisions on outcomes that were within their control and would guarantee their safety.

Women in the community also perceived that losing their livelihood was a possible consequence of reporting; another was that they would be seen as ‘troublemakers in the community’.

Participants shared other concerns about consequences such as failure to maintain confidentiality, who would see the concern, who would manage the concern and who would be ‘punished’ as a result of reporting.

These examples indicate why some community members hesitate to report, particularly when no assurances have been given or information provided on how concerns will be handled.

1.2 Independent fact-finding

I must obtain all the information before reporting.

‘First I must investigate before reporting, to obtain evidential material., this I must do’ Community member

Nearly all participants stated that before reporting any concern relating to SEA, a level of investigation to verify facts would be essential. This was expressed in all the interviews, and it is interesting to note that when speaking with a range of participants with different responsibilities along the chain of communication of reporting, all felt that investigating and clarifying the facts before escalating the concern – no matter how serious – was imperative. For example, students, prefects (senior students with key responsibilities, one of which is to report any issues and/or concerns), teachers, senior management and members of the parent-teacher association (PTA) all expressed the same need to establish the truth before reporting. This was also the case for community members, community leaders and partner staff when the research team visited the extractives project. The reasons given as to why an independent investigation would be necessary before reporting varied depending on participants’ position within their community and/or institution. Participants with high status or those in senior positions of responsibility stated that it was their duty to ensure concerns are reported correctly, with one participant saying:

‘Involving others can mess everything up, and as a leader I am accountable for what I report to higher authorities.’ Community Member

Participants with medium to low responsibilities or status also expressed the need to fact-find before escalating a concern. As one community member said, 'Everything is based on evidence', and some suggested that there is a belief in Ghanaian society that people fabricate things, which makes it even more important to verify truths before reporting.

Other participants spoke of verifying facts before reporting being particularly important in the event that the alleged perpetrator was their peer at work or within the community. Participants added that if you work alongside the alleged perpetrator or know them, it is a matter of respect and dignity that the facts are verified and checked first, and only when this has been done can one report to an official channel.

Anti-corruption reporting was seen by participants as a high-risk act for one's self and family; as corruption is so prevalent and normalized in Ghanaian society,⁴ many participants explained that it would not be safe to investigate or fact-gather on this issue due to the threat to life and not knowing who is behind the corruption concern. For these allegations (the hypothetical scenarios given to participants during focus groups and interviews were of bribery and extortion), participants said that the appropriate action would be to report through any official channel.

1.3 Trust

I don't have trust in individuals or reporting systems.

'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.' Community volunteer

Throughout the research in both locations, it was evident that there were varying levels of mistrust among community members with regards to safety and confidentiality when it comes to reporting incidents of misconduct. Community members' responses indicated mistrust of individuals and therefore of reporting mechanisms themselves. Given the lack of clear reporting mechanisms, most of the discussions were about exploring possible individuals that one could report to, which highlighted that there were concerns about who to go to. While the majority of participants referred to the role of community leaders in dealing with such issues, several felt that this would be personality dependent, and that not all community leaders are approachable and willing to listen. Previous negative experiences of raising concerns with community leaders, or of their perceived competency to deal with such issues, would therefore be an influencing factor for some community members, and may act as a barrier to reporting.

There were also concerns about malice, with one participant explaining that the person you report to could prevent your complaint from reaching anyone else. When exploring the idea of a community complaints box, several participants suggested that while this could be a useful mechanism, it would be important that access to the box was restricted to NGOs and not given to community leaders.

For many of the students at school, there was a general sense of mistrust when it comes to talking about SEA. Students explored various channels of reporting but often returned to the issue of trust, including trusting the person/people confided in and trusting that the perpetrator would not find out who had reported him/her. Participants expressed concern and fear that their experience would be shared with others once they had reported it to an individual, or that their anonymity would be compromised when using certain reporting channels or if they named the perpetrator. The level of mistrust is so high that one participant believed that the only realistic option was to move away from the area after an incident has been reported.

The lack of trust among participants is ultimately linked to the absence of clear reporting mechanisms. Ambiguity about reporting channels and processes contributes to a lack confidence with regards to what to do with concerns about misconduct. Participants were unsure about what Oxfam or its partners would do if misconduct was reported to them, and were uncertain as to whether organizations would deal with such issues effectively, fairly or in a collaborative manner.

'A superior over both you, the NGO, and us [community member raising complaint] should handle that case... a third party, like the Chief.' Youth group member

Concerns about how organizations would handle misconduct were linked to the belief that organizations may not share information with the reporter/community member and may protect the perpetrator (i.e. their staff member).

1.4 Shame

I don't wish to bring shame upon myself or others.

'I would be an outcast from my community.' Community member

Discussions with stakeholders, partner staff and community members/leaders revealed that a culture of victim-blaming continues to exist in Ghana. Survivors of gender-based violence continue to experience stigmatization and do not report violence due to fears of reputational loss or dishonour for their families, or retaliation, and because of a lack of awareness about their rights. There was a strong sense among participants that reporting sexual assault would not necessarily result in a fair outcome or support for the survivor, suggesting that while legislation may exist, it is not necessarily enforced. One participant expressed this as follows:

'The laws that are in Ghana – they are all dirty. Unless you have a case, they will then polish it very nicely and then show it you, that yes, we have this law.' Partner staff/volunteer

Additionally, the culture of victim-blaming means that when an allegation is made, it will then 'follow' whoever reports it. As there is limited support

for survivors, community members are concerned about everyone finding out and the consequences of living with everyone knowing and treating the survivor disrespectfully, rather than focusing on seeking justice. This could explain why, when the research team met with the Social Welfare Officer, she explained that she currently doesn't receive reports of misconduct formally due to 'fear of what may happen, and culture'.

A recent report by World Vision describes how stigma has no age restriction, and children and adults can both be affected by shame. Adults are prone to self-imposed stigmatization and also (from the community) shame, whereas children will experience being stigmatized by other pupils and/or peers, teachers and the community.⁵

2. INTERACTIONAL FACTORS

These are the factors which are more visibly the result of an interaction between a person and their social network or environment.

2.1 Hierarchy

It is important to go up the reporting line and not skip the line.

2.2 Hidden power

The organization would never harm us.

2.3 Uncertainty

I am unsure what will happen when I report.

2.1 Hierarchy

It is important to go up the reporting line and not skip the line.

'It is an act of respect; you cannot just bypass your community leaders.'
Community member

In both research locations, interviews with participants, particularly community members, revealed that hierarchy is an important and necessary factor to consider when exploring possible reporting mechanisms. While community members were not necessarily aware of existing reporting channels, there was consensus among most participants that hierarchy must be respected and that it would not be acceptable to escalate or report an issue without following the appropriate reporting line. Furthermore, the reporting line that was described often began with informing community leaders.

'In our part of the world, we talk to elders first in every situation; it is only when they cannot help, we then go to others.' Community member

Through interviews with the local Chief and Queen Mother⁶ in the Savannah Region, it was clear that although their roles have different functions, both were seen as community representatives who have experience in dealing with social issues at the community level. In Sawla,

for example, the Chief explained that he regularly deals with issues such as children out of school, intimate partner violence (IPV), debt, or acts of violence committed by community members. Similarly, the Queen Mother described how her role involves speaking to young women and girls about sexual exploitation, child marriage and pregnancy, as well as about reproductive health.

Participants gave a variety of reasons to explain the importance of reporting to community leaders first; some of these related to social and cultural norms, and were about ensuring respect and following traditional practices. Taking issues or problems to community leaders including the Council of Elders, Chief or Queen Mother was seen as 'normal' practice, and therefore it would be unusual not to follow this course of action when reporting an act of misconduct by an NGO staff member. This view was shared by both community members and community leaders, and was considered to be a way of ensuring that the latter were aware of what was happening in their community.

'(It is) important to inform community leaders because the person [survivor/reporter] is in the community.' Community leader

When participants were asked if they would escalate a report about misconduct directly to the partner organization or to Oxfam, some shared that they would be willing to do so, but that this would only be necessary if the community leader could not resolve the issue first. For others, this was perceived negatively; they felt it could result in the community leader raising this with the community member directly and advising them that it was not correct and should not be done again in the future. One participant went further to emphasize the importance of respecting social norms, by illustrating how these norms act as a way of governing the behaviour of communities:

'If you fight against established social norms you will find yourself at the other end of the law here.' Partner staff

The importance of hierarchy with regards to reporting mechanisms is not only about respecting traditional and social norms; it was also described as a practical and convenient way of operating.

'Talking to a group leader is more convenient than calling a person in a higher position, because even if you call someone in a higher position, they will ask you if you told your immediate level... because you have to start from somewhere, before you get to the higher position.' Community member

Community leaders lead community groups that were established with the support of the partner organization, and are therefore seen as the first point of contact between community members and the partner staff. According to one group of community leaders, if a community member reported a case of misconduct by the partner staff member directly to the partner, the organization would contact the community leaders in any case.

'It can't happen like that. [partner organisation] would call them [community leaders] anyway.' Community leader

Whether the partner organization would in fact contact the community leaders if an incident of misconduct was reported to them is not clear and needs further exploration; however, this highlights that there is a certain level of expectation among community leaders that they would be involved in the process.

2.2 Hidden power

The organization would never harm us.

'Not [partner organization name], never [partner organization name].'
Community member

It has been suggested that 'many people choose to work with development organizations because there is usually an exchange of money, resources and power'.⁷ Throughout all the focus group discussions and interviews, the participants conveyed disbelief when discussing hypothetical misconduct perpetrated by organizations. This in turn revealed the hidden and invisible power that organizations can hold, and how that can impact and influence conversations around misconduct for communities.

Participants from the community expressed a high level of disbelief about the idea of misconduct in particular by Oxfam and/or the partner organization. The level of respect and admiration for an organization might lead to greater acceptance of SEA as, when approached with hypothetical scenarios of misconduct, many participants spoke of forgiveness towards the organization and the alleged perpetrator. One community member, who initially was reluctant even to imagine a possibility where they could be exploited by an organization, later stated:

'[Partner organisation name] staff are human beings. They are not God so we would forgive them if they did bad things; they are only human.'

Another factor contributing to an organization's hidden power is the community's level of dependency on the support they receive; when discussing misconduct with participants, many expressed similar views to this community leader, who stated that:

'If the organization did something wrong, like misconduct, any alternative options in seeking support would exploit and harm us even more, so the organization is the best of the bad range of options for us.'

The sense of mistrust for individuals and reporting mechanisms was shared by many respondents throughout the research, and further highlights the power dynamics that exist between community members and NGO staff, community leaders and state institutions.

2.3 Uncertainty

This fear of not knowing what would happen – to themselves as reporters and/or survivors and to the perpetrator – was raised by students and community members. Students expressed fears about what would happen to their teacher if they reported him/her, and said that it was generally perceived as too dangerous for students to report, fearing retaliation from teachers and parents. Fear of being disbelieved was also a strong factor influencing decisions on reporting.

This concern about uncertainty was expressed predominantly by students, which is interesting to note, as in Ghanaian culture older members of society expect utmost respect and hold a lot of power over young people. Young people refer to elders that aren't related to them as 'auntie' or 'uncle' as a sign of this respect. A student explained:

'If and when we report, I am sure that there would be no explanation given to us on what will happen to the person that reported, or what will happen to the accused, and not having this knowledge or information makes us feel really scared about saying anything.'

This uncertainty about reporting processes and lack of assurances for young people, as expressed by the students, signals a significant barrier in reporting concerns.

3. STRUCTURAL FACTORS

These are the tangible elements or the formal systems and structures in an individual's immediate environment that shape the choices that are and are not available to them.

3.1 No perceived action

No action will be taken if I report.

3.2 Awareness

No information is shared with us. We don't know how to report and whether any mechanisms exist for doing so.

3.3 Community resolution

It should be dealt with at the local level.

3.4 Access

There is no reporting channel we are able or willing to access.

3.1 No perceived action

No action will be taken if I report

'If such punishment could be a serious punishment, then every teacher [wouldn't] do so.' Youth group member

There was a strong sense among participants in both locations of perceived inaction with regards to misconduct in the form of SEA, which may further explain the feelings of mistrust participants shared around reporting misconduct. Participants expressed frustration with the legal system and law enforcement, particularly when discussing SEA, and with the lack of support services available to survivors of violence. When discussing SEA in the context of misconduct by NGOs, participants took this discussion further, highlighting wider challenges with addressing SEA more generally in society in Ghana, particularly with regards to sexual assault, and highlighting concerns about police corruption when reporting to authorities. Despite efforts to strengthen services for survivors of gender-based violence, such as through the creation of the Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), a specialized unit within the Ghana police force responsible for dealing with cases of violence and abuse against women and children, the lack of attention to sexual assault and domestic violence cases within the criminal justice system was reported to still be a concern.

The programmatic focus on education in the Savannah Region meant that participants largely focused their attention on the Ghana Education Service (GES), a body within the Ministry of Education responsible for providing and overseeing quality education, enforcing the teachers' code of conduct, which has provisions for safeguarding, in addition to recruiting and assigning teachers to schools throughout the country. The GES was therefore referred to as one of the main formal channels for reporting misconduct of teachers when speaking with students, community members and leaders, youth groups, government officials (including the Social Welfare Officer), teachers and programme staff. While the GES was acknowledged as being central to managing misconduct, several references were made to its inability to adequately follow up misconduct cases, for example:

'Well, the way we wanted them to handle this case, they didn't... but they did their best.' Youth group member

There was consensus among many participants that while some teachers who were found to have committed misconduct, particularly SEA-related misconduct, were imprisoned, they were often just transferred to another school. This view was also shared by stakeholders working in the violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector.

3.2 Awareness

No information is shared with us. We don't know how to report and whether any mechanisms exist for doing so.

'No one has told me anything or told me that if I have such an issue I should go through that channel or through this person. The only thing I know is that the people that come to us in our community give us training. I don't have anyone's number to call or any contact in head office in case of something like that.' Community member

Participants' awareness level about misconduct, and reporting mechanisms in particular, can be explored in two stages – beginning with staff members working with Oxfam's partner organizations and then with community members receiving support through projects managed by Oxfam's partners.

The level of awareness about misconduct and reporting mechanisms varied between and within the two partner organizations involved. This difference in knowledge was highlighted to the research team before visiting both locations, and was attributed to the limited progress that the Oxfam country office had made with regards to training partners on safeguarding and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). Only one of the two partners had been trained on safeguarding and PSEA, and were therefore able to demonstrate deeper knowledge of safeguarding policies and reporting mechanisms. The other partner had not yet had this training, and therefore had a more limited understanding of how to report misconduct to Oxfam; however, its staff were aware that they could report such misconduct within their own organization. From speaking to both partner organizations it was clear that although staff had some information about reporting internally, they did not necessarily have a clearly outlined reporting mechanism or investigation process. Therefore it was not guaranteed when or if Oxfam would be formally informed about a case of misconduct once an allegation was reported/received, or how such cases would be handled more generally.

The absence of clear reporting mechanisms among partner organizations is reflected in the limited awareness of community members about reporting misconduct. While the majority of community members (including students/alumni, school staff, PTA members, youth group members and community leaders) demonstrated awareness about the types of misconduct that NGO staff could commit, very few were aware of any reporting mechanisms and had not been told *how* to report such cases or *who* to report to. Furthermore, when speaking to some community members, it was clear that bribery and corruption were the main types of misconduct that they had been spoken to about, and not SEA.

'They [partner organization] told us that they don't entertain bribes and that if such a thing happens there must be a report, but whom to report that issue to, that is the problem. They didn't tell us.' Community member

'Someone introduced me into the [partner organisation) group. I don't know anything about [partner organisation], I don't know where their offices are, so when something like that happens, I don't even know where to start reporting. I don't know anything.' Community member

In the school, this issue was further complicated by the fact that Oxfam and its partners are responsible for only some project components/activities within the school, and that the overall running and managing of the school is the responsibility of the government. Misconduct committed by teachers or other school staff would therefore fall outside of Oxfam and the partner's scope, and would be investigated by the GES instead.

The introduction of an anonymous 'Sex Box' in the school was designed to provide students with a safe way to seek guidance about sexuality and sexual reproductive health. Comments or questions about such issues could be put into the box and would then be read out by the Headmistress to all students during assembly, along with guidance so that the affected student as well as others would have the relevant information. The box was therefore highlighted as a possible way of reporting the misconduct of teachers, even if this was not necessarily its objective. Given that reporting misconduct was not the main purpose of the box, it was clear from speaking with both students and school staff that there was no clear process or guidance about who should open the box, how it should be opened, or how cases would be handled if it were found to contain reports of misconduct by staff.

While there was more awareness among participants involved in the education project about reporting teacher misconduct, there was significantly less awareness about how to report misconduct by Oxfam or partner staff, despite the interaction of partner staff with community members throughout this project. Furthermore, it was unclear if the box would be used to report such allegations and what would happen if such cases were reported through this channel. This finding is also relevant to the programme in the Western Region, where community members lacked any awareness about formal reporting mechanisms if Oxfam or its partner were committing misconduct in the communities. When asked to whom they would report such cases and how, the majority of participants listed various options including youth groups, community leaders, local actors such as the Chief or assembly members, partner staff at the local level, and sometimes the authorities.

Participants were unlikely to raise such reports to the partner organization at the national level (in Accra) and rarely considered reporting to Oxfam at the national/international level unless they were not satisfied with how issues were handled at the local level. While social norms around respect and hierarchy were influencing factors (see personal/interactional factors above), it was clear that this was also largely due to a lack of awareness about formal reporting mechanisms and information about investigation processes. Participants often explained the need to investigate such allegations themselves before reporting, to ensure that they have listened to both sides of the story. However, this preference is based on the assumption that community members have access to the staff member alleged to have committed the act of misconduct, which may not always be the case. When this issue was discussed further, some participants indicated that they would be more likely to report through formal channels directly if they had a clear understanding of the process and knew how organizations would handle such cases:

'If only [partner organisation name] and Oxfam will take it up, then there is no need [for the community to investigate] ... that means they can invite both parties [victim-survivor and staff member].' Community leader

Added to the lack of awareness about reporting mechanisms is the lack of awareness about support services that exist in Ghana. Given that this

research study is concerned with sexual misconduct, it was necessary to understand if participants were aware of support services should they report misconduct and be in need of such services. There was some discrepancy between the information shared with the research team by stakeholders working on VAWG issues at the national level, and the information that community members and partner staff have. Community members did not seem to be aware of services for survivors of gender-based violence and strongly believed that if such services were available, they were certainly not free and were therefore not accessible to them. For several female community members, this was seen as significant factor influencing reporting; they believed that there was no point in doing so, as they would not get the necessary support.

3.3 Community resolution

It should be dealt with at the local level.

'Report it to the person you can approach, we start from there and then move up.' Community member

'Provided [partner organisation] can solve it, there is no need [to report it to Oxfam].' Community member

Preference for reporting at the local level is closely tied to the issue of hierarchy and cultural practices, and is partly to do with how communities are structured and how community work is done through informal rather than formal channels. Many community groups or networks are established at the local level and are linked to district and regional networks. As an informal chain of communication already exists, it is seen as natural to follow the same process to report acts of misconduct committed by NGOs.

'I would like to talk to the leaders of the youth group first. The youth groups are connected to the district network. When there is a problem, there is a channel, a convenor who gives the information from the youth network to the district network. So the right person to tell is the convenor... If they can't handle the issue, it would go to the regional network.' Youth group member/school alumni

Another reason for reporting at the local level is linked to participants' awareness of reporting channels more generally, and the fact that they do not necessarily have access to information about who to report to. The low level of awareness among community members in particular, and the fact that many community members do not have access to mobile phones or email and have varying degrees of literacy, may mean that it is more practical for them to physically visit the partner organization's office at the local level instead of trying to contact the partner's national office.

'Since the NGO has an office in Tarkwa, I will start my complaint from Tarkwa.' Community member

Furthermore, the physical proximity of NGO offices to community members was certainly an influencing factor, with few participants knowing if partner organizations had offices outside of the local area or if Oxfam even had an office in Ghana.

'Oxfam is far.' Community leader

Oxfam's perceived distance from the communities can be understood both geographically and symbolically. The main office in Accra is seen as being physically far away, and therefore community members would not consider contacting this office when they could go to the partner's local office and report directly there. Moreover, while some community members were aware that Oxfam was partnering with the local partners, this was not clear to all participants. The majority of community members and leaders interact directly with the local partners and do not have direct engagement with Oxfam or its staff members. This was particularly true in the Western Region, where community members spoke highly of their relationship with the local partner and the support it provides to them. For many of these participants, Oxfam is quite removed from their daily lives.

Reporting beyond the local level would therefore require alternative reporting channels, since the majority of community members have limited access to Oxfam or its partners' offices outside of their community. This proved problematic for many community members, as it was not seen as culturally appropriate to contact an unknown staff member, particularly a senior staff member, by telephone (which is seen as an informal way of communicating) in order to discuss a sensitive issue relating to misconduct.

3.4 Access

There is no reporting channel we are able or willing to access.

'Reporting by children is not ideal, because children have nowhere to report that is really safe for them.' School alumni/community member

It became evident during the course of the interviews that for underage members of the community (those under 18 years, in Oxfam's policies and guidelines on the classification of a child), reporting misconduct is a challenging concept. Firstly, it is difficult for children to use the reporting systems that are in place, even those which are supposedly 'child friendly', and also to act in a confidential manner, e.g. without asking permission from teachers/adults or putting themselves at great risk. Many of the children don't have phones or internet access to be able to report independently. Furthermore, informing children in Ghana of their rights can be difficult due to social acceptance that adults have greater authority over children (as discussed above, hierarchy is very respected in Ghanaian society). In a meeting with various stakeholders who work for organizations looking to tackle misconduct, one member from an organization that works on child abuse cases said, 'In Ghana, children are not seen as sexual beings' and added that 'parents do not talk to their children about sexual reproductive health and as a result, if children

experience these issues, they worry about being estranged from their family and community.’

The need to create child-friendly, community-based reporting mechanisms is a much-discussed topic within the sector, and despite studies, research, articles and discussions on this issue there is still little information or understanding of what best practice in terms of specific reporting mechanisms for children is. An interagency study on the matter states: ‘Information that does exist is fragmented between different programme disciplines within an agency and over different areas of accountability, including child protection, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), child participation, and between relief and development contexts.’⁸

Students who spoke to the research team explained how they felt uncomfortable accessing the sex box that has been placed in the school (initially to address concerns regarding reproductive health, but now also for students to disclose any concerns they may have). The box is placed next to the staff room, and as students are not allowed mobile phones at school and have no access to computers without teacher supervision, it is extremely challenging for them to report in a manner that is safe and feels right for them.

4. MOVING FORWARD

Based on this research, below are a list of considerations and potential areas for further exploration.

4.1 PERSONAL FACTORS

Prioritize awareness/sensitization of communities on sexual exploitation and abuse.

While corruption was largely understood to be a form of misconduct that community members felt comfortable reporting, this was less likely with incidents of SEA for a number of reasons, including the stigma attached to being a survivor of sexual violence, a culture of victim-blaming, and because SEA is largely seen as something that is personal, or not worth reporting due to the perceived inaction of authorities. For all these reasons, community members may not report SEA by NGOs. It is therefore necessary for Oxfam and partners to prioritize the sensitization of communities around SEA so that they are aware of what it is, how it can be reported and how it will be investigated.

4.2 INTERACTIONAL FACTORS

Ensure reporting mechanisms take existing community practices around localized reporting mechanisms into consideration and build on these.

As Ghana has established a national legal reporting mechanism and support units such as the DOVVSU (Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit) and the GES (Ghana Education Service), it would be useful for Oxfam to take these into account in efforts to strengthen the country's current legal systems to support survivors of all ages.

Additionally, cultural norms, such as reporting concerns to a community leader within the village and the Chief deciding the outcome, are respected and popular routes for the community to depend on in such circumstances (in some interviews participants expressed preference for this over the national legal system, claiming they never receive justice from the latter). Oxfam should therefore work to better understand these preferences and avoid 'reinventing the wheel'.

4.3 STRUCTURAL FACTORS

Develop reporting mechanisms that are safe and confidential in collaboration with community members and partner staff.

Reporting mechanisms should be designed in collaboration with community members (girls, boys, women and men) and should include multiple ways of reporting to ensure that all community members have access to reporting channels. It is vital that Oxfam ensures that the

mechanisms which are in place are accessible for everyone, including children, and that we identify and implement methodical, technical and practical components to support us in achieving this.

Sensitize community members and partner staff about reporting mechanisms

Once reporting mechanisms have been developed, it is important to raise awareness of them among all community members, emphasizing that it is acceptable and appropriate to contact the relevant staff or organization directly. For example, if a hotline is created or a phone number circulated for a Safeguarding Focal Point SGFP in Oxfam or a partner organization, it is important to emphasize that this person is available to receive such reports. Many community members did not think it was respectful to call someone they don't know to report an allegation of misconduct; however, if they understood that this person's role is to receive such calls, they would be more likely to consider it acceptable.

Focal point staff at Oxfam are encouraged to visit field sites often in order to ensure awareness but also to be a visible contact point for the community so trust is strengthened.

Conduct service mapping of gender-based violence/child protection services

It is necessary to establish what kind of gender-based violence and child protection support services are offered in each location (including health, legal support, shelter and security, and psychosocial support), with clear referral pathways so that partner staff and community members have access to up-to-date information about where and how to seek support for survivors.

Provide training for partners

It is imperative that Oxfam trains its partners on safeguarding policies and procedures, but also holds sessions for all staff on power in all its forms (hidden, visible, invisible), which is applicable in other areas within the organization such as recruitment, interaction with the community when visiting the sites, and expectations of national and international staff. Holding similar conversations with the community will contribute to greater transparency and accountability.

CONCLUSION

Findings from the research confirm that while Oxfam staff and partner staff (to some extent) have knowledge about safeguarding and misconduct more broadly, this information has not reached communities where Oxfam and partners are working.

When discussing misconduct in terms of both SEA and corruption, an interesting theme emerged through conversations with participants whereby it appeared that participants were more likely to report corruption than SEA. There were a variety of reasons for this, including the perception that corruption is more likely than SEA to be addressed by authorities and lead to arrest of the perpetrator. Furthermore, SEA was often described as a personal matter, which made participants feel that they must investigate such allegations themselves to ensure that they have the correct information before reporting. By contrast, investigating allegations of corruption was seen as risky, and participants felt it would therefore be better to immediately report it rather than to try to investigate it themselves. The problem of corruption as a widespread issue in Ghana was raised by the majority of participants throughout the research and could explain this finding; it may mean there have been more efforts to sensitize society about corruption, while SEA has received less attention.

In light of the recent 'Sex for Grades' scandal in Ghana,⁹ there is a need to further sensitize communities about the abuse of power and SEA, particularly in relation to institutions such as NGOs, where we know – and have demonstrated within this report – that inherent power imbalances exist.

NOTES

¹ The World Bank in Ghana website. Overview. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ghana/overview#1>

² Oxfam website. 'Oxfam in Ghana'. <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/what-we-do/countries-we-work-in/ghana>

³ Sonder Collective. <https://www.sonderdesign.org>

⁴ Transparency International. *Overview of corruption and anti-corruption in Ghana*. (2018). <https://www.u4.no/publications/overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption-in-ghana-2018-update.pdf>

⁵ World Vision. (2016). *No Shame in Justice*. https://assets.worldvision.org.uk/files/7214/5806/4579/Stigma_Summary_Report.pdf

⁶ The Queen Mother in Ghana is a highly influential community member with authority. Queen Mothers have a say in electing the next chief, provide counsel to the chief and his elders and keep informed on social conditions within the community.

⁷ Anne M. Spear. (2018). *Leadership and Power in International Development. Navigating the Intersections of Gender, Culture, Context and Sustainability*. P.140. Emerald Publishing

⁸ Educo (Member of the ChildFund Alliance), Plan International, Save the Children UK, War Child UK and World Vision International. (2015). *Interagency Study on Child-Friendly Feedback and Complaint Mechanisms within NGO programmes*. <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Child%20friendly%20feedback%20mechanisms%20report.pdf>

⁹ BBC News. *Sex for Grades*. (2019). <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-49993588>

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