Jose Maria Vera
Interim Executive Director, Oxfam International
The Atrium, Chaka Road
P.O. Box 40680 -00100
Nairobi, Kenya

josemaria.vera@oxfam.org

Interim Report to Accountable Now Independent Review Panel (September 2020)

Statement from the most senior decision-maker of the organisation

It is with pleasure that I submit to you today, on behalf of Oxfam International, this **interim accountability report** which provides a summary of our efforts in response to the recommendations made by the Independent Review Panel in July 2019.

In the period since submission of our last comprehensive report in May 2019, several **significant and transformative changes** have occurred within the global Oxfam confederation both as part of our long-standing commitment to transforming our organization, and as a result of the impact (on Oxfam, the INGO sector and the world) of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our new **Oxfam Global Strategic Framework (2020-2030)** was approved by the Boards in March 2020 and sets out how Oxfam, over the coming decade, will work to achieve its vision of a just and sustainable world, with a strong emphasis on fighting inequality to end poverty and injustice.

Accompanying and building on the global strategy process, we have since October 2019 undertaken a comprehensive **'Model and Presence Review'** to shape 'Oxfam 2030' as a worldwide network that is relevant, diverse, resilient and impactful – with a commitment to further increasing the number of Oxfam Affiliates in the South, exploring new Affiliate and country office business models and transforming our engagement in fragile contexts before, during and after crises. In December 2019, we welcomed **Kadın Emeğini Değerlendirme Vakfı** in Turkey as a full Oxfam Affiliate, with Oxfam Colombia having obtained Observer status in March this year.

Our **global governance reform process** continues at pace, with a final decision on the proposed future governance structure – including an International Board with independent members and a multi-stakeholder Global Assembly – expected to be taken in October 2020, for transition in FY21/22.

Stakeholder engagement and feedback mechanisms – including reporting and management of safeguarding, fraud and other complaints – have significantly strengthened over the past year through the adoption and implementation of confederation-wide standards and procedures, as set out below.

While deeply impacted by COVID-19 restrictions especially in our public fundraising **income**, we have further consolidated relationships with our key institutional donors, following the safeguarding crisis in 2018; and have been able to deliver flexible and effective **COVID-19 responses**, working closely with local partners and communities across regions. While decisions taken as part of our country, regional, affiliate and Secretariat presence review have

been and will be difficult and painful, they will allow us to better focus limited resources through increased efficiency and effectiveness.

COVID has also accelerated change in other areas, such as efforts to reduce our **environmental footprint** and to drive new and more virtual ways of working to an extent that a year ago, we may not have considered possible.

As I am nearing the end of my term as Interim Executive Director of Oxfam International, with Gabriela Bucher joining the organization as OIED in November 2020, **I remain as proud as ever of Oxfam in all its diversity and as an organization that is deeply committed to the people, communities and partners that we are privileged to be working with.** As stated in our Global Strategic Framework, we believe everyone has the right to a just and sustainable world in which they can thrive. As Oxfam, we commit to continuing our fight against inequality to end poverty and injustice – taking responsibility for our action and inaction and **willing to hold ourselves accountable** to the people we work with and work for.

Please note that while not all documents and materials referenced in this report are publicly available, most could be shared with Accountable Now on request. We are looking forward to any recommendations for further improvement that the Independent Review Panel may wish to share with us after review of this brief interim report, and to keep learning from other organisations who like us, are seeking to continuously improve.

Yours sincerely,

Jose Maria Vera

Interim Executive Director, Oxfam International
Nairobi/ Barcelona, 30 September 2020

Material changes that have occurred within the organisation since the last report

In the period since our last comprehensive confederation-wide accountability report, submitted to Accountable Now in May 2019, several significant and transformative changes have occurred within the global Oxfam confederation.

Following an 'outside in', locally rooted and inclusive global strategy process, a new **Oxfam Global Strategic Framework (2020-2030)** was approved by the OI Boards in March 2020 and is expected to be externally launched later this year. The Framework sets out how Oxfam, over the coming decade, will work to achieve its vision of a just and sustainable world with a strong emphasis on fighting inequality to end poverty and injustice. Expanding Oxfam's values of empowerment, accountability and inclusiveness to include also equality, solidarity and courage, we will apply a multi-dimensional approach to inequality and a feminist lens to all our analysis, action and interaction. In our partnerships, we will prioritise engagement with youth, feminist and social justice activists and movements in working towards just economies; gender justice; climate justice and accountable governance. An **Oxfam Global Horizon Plan** will define and prioritise, initially for a 2-year period, more specific objectives, outcomes and interventions to help us implement the Framework in a way that is responsible and meaningful in a context of uncertain futures.

Accompanying and building on the global strategy process, we have since October 2019 undertaken a comprehensive **'Model and Presence Review'** to shape 'Oxfam 2030' as a worldwide network that is relevant, diverse, resilient and impactful. As part of this review and in view of the financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis, we have taken the difficult and painful decision to gradually phase out direct presence in 18 countries across regions; and will, as part of our commitment to developing a more diversified network, seek to further increase the number of Oxfam Affiliates in the South, explore new Affiliate and country presence business models and transform our engagement in fragile contexts before, during and after crises. Review of our regional presence, Affiliate presence and of the OI Secretariat is ongoing with further proposals to be presented to the OI boards in the coming months. Closely related to this effort, the establishment in FY21/22 of an integrated Business Support Unit, coordinated by OI and working closely with key Affiliates and Regional Platforms, will make our support to country and regional programs more effective into the future.

Affiliates. We are proud to have welcomed Kadın Emeğini Değerlendirme Vakfı (KEDV), the Foundation for the Support of Women's Work in Turkey, as a full Oxfam Affiliate in December 2019. In Colombia, the transformation of our current country presence continues with Oxfam Colombia having achieved Observer status in March 2020. As part of our commitment to becoming a more diverse and more globally balanced network, we hope to establish new Affiliates in Kenya, Senegal, Indonesia, the Philippines and the Pacific (as a regional Affiliate) in the course of the coming years. Sadly, due to the financial impact of COVID-19 – especially in countries where Oxfam generates significant trading and other public fundraising income – several Affiliates (such as Oxfam Great Britain and Oxfam Australia) had to restructure their organization, resulting in significant job losses but leading to leaner, more effective and more resilient structures.

Governance. Since submission of our last comprehensive report, 7 new (or interim) Executive Directors have joined national Affiliates and the OI Executive Board; while 8 Affiliates have appointed new Chairpersons or decided to delegate participation in the OI Board of Supervisors to another of their Board members. At the time of writing, the Executive Board is composed of 62% women and 38% men; and the Board of Supervisors of 45% women and 55% men. As our Chair, Dr Henrietta Campbell, had to resign from her position in March 2020 for health reasons, OI Vice Chair Ricardo Acuña (who is also Chair of Oxfam Canada) has temporarily assumed the responsibilities of the Chair.

Importantly, the global **governance reform** that we initiated in 2017 and which has been led by a Working Group composed of members of the Board of Supervisors, Executive Board and OI Management Team, is now proposed to enable transition to a new and simpler global governance structure as of April 2021. While a final vote on a proposed new constitution was deferred in March 2020 as a result of the decision to hold our global board meetings virtually instead of in person, this is now scheduled for October 2020. If approved, a new and smaller International Board (composed of both independent members, including a new Chairperson, and members from Affiliates) would be appointed by March 2021; when the date for a first global multi-stakeholder Assembly would also be expected to be confirmed by our current Board of Supervisors.

Management. Our Oxfam International Management Team (OIMT) continues to evolve and is expected to transform significantly as a result of the current OI Secretariat Review. Our former OI Executive Director (OIED), Winnie Byanyima, left Oxfam International in November 2019 after having been appointed Director of UNAIDS. A new Executive Director, Gabriela Bucher (who has previously served as Chief Operating Officer for Plan International) will join the organization in November this year, bringing to an end José Maria Vera's term as interim OIED that he had assumed in October 2019 after having previously served in Spain as ED of Oxfam Intermón – a role to which OI's long-term Program Director, Franc Cortada Hindersin, was appointed earlier this year. Our Head of Safeguarding, Global Director for People, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Finance Officer and Chief Information Officer have also moved on since our last report. All these roles have been filled either through new substantive appointments (e.g. for the CFO) or on an interim basis with experienced Oxfam staff from across the organisation (e.g. for the Program Director and COO roles). Our senior leadership team has been further strengthened through the appointment of a Gender Justice Director (in Nairobi), Associate Director for Confederation Development (in Johannesburg) and an OI Culture Lead (also in Nairobi). We expect our current restructure to result in a leaner Secretariat and OI Executive Team, with the opportunity for the incoming OIED to lead on the substantive recruitment of several key posts in the months to come.

Income. **Unrestricted Income** has continued to decline in the period covered by this interim report, with the six largest Oxfam Affiliates losing approx. 8% (EUR 18m) of their unrestricted income in FY19/20 compared to the previous financial year. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis of face-to-face acquisition has further increased the challenge with the number of new regular givers expected to reduce significantly and projections on trading income still uncertain. As a result, we do not expect to recover on public fundraising income in the short term.

In the **institutional funding** space, income has outperformed expectations over the last year as we have restored relationships with our institutional donors. Oxfam has been awarded several large-scale and long-term grants, and significantly increased institutional funding to support our influencing goals. Oxfam Great Britain continues to work closely with the UK Charity Commission and (following the merger between the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office regarding its voluntary withdrawal agreement. We have also been successful in securing and re-purposing funding for our multifaceted COVID-19 response and continue engagement with our donors to support ongoing work in this area.

Update on Improvement Analysis Recommendations made by the Review Panel

Responsible Stewardship for the Environment

The Independent Review Panel noted that our last report explained Oxfam's work lobbying for policy changes and supporting communities in their resilience against climate change; but provided little information about how environmental impacts of Oxfam's day-to-day work and programmes are assessed and mitigated. Considering this 'very light treatment' of our own environmental impact, you recommended that Oxfam provide more information on any targets in terms of reducing air travel or CO2 emissions; any measures in place Oxfam's offices, such as recycling, using energy efficient appliances, vegetarian/local catering for events; and/ or any policies to guide these approaches.

In Oxfam's new Global Strategic Framework, **'Climate Justice'** is one of the areas in which Oxfam will work with others to demand and contribute to transformative system change. In addition to setting up a Climate Change Initiative to drive our external work in this area, we have established an internal 'Global Green Team' to collect and promote examples of good practice in protecting the climate from Affiliates, country and regional programmes across the confederation.

Examples of our **external climate justice advocacy** include e.g. WithOneSeed, the first Gold Standard verified carbon forestry program in Timor Leste that is working with subsistence farming communities to replant their forests, creating a carbon store to build local economies and delivering practical education and training in agroforestry and permaculture. In Burkina Faso and Niger, Oxfam has launched JESAC (Jeunesse Sahélienne pour l'Action Climatique) as a project aimed at building the leadership of women and youth in climate action, creating opportunities through their involvement in agroforestry and land regeneration activities and supporting youth in developing climate campaigns, awareness-raising and advocacy at various levels.

Within Oxfam, important initiatives have also been taken. For example, **Oxfam Intermón** and **Oxfam Great Britain** are working to become carbon neutral by 2030 and 2045, respectively. As part of their effort to reduce environmental footprint, **Oxfam Australia** has analysed CO2 emissions for the FY18/19; and **Oxfam Novib** has started reviewing its use of paper, waste, consumption of electricity and water and airmiles. Last but not least, **Oxfam Solidarité** (in Belgium) was certified as an "Entreprise Ecodynamique" in February 2020, having been awarded (like the OI EU Advocacy Office in Brussels in April 2019) the maximum of 3 stars in this assessment.

Across Oxfam**, 'Green Teams United'** are in the process of developing an approach called 'Pick and Go' (temporarily on hold as a result of the COVID crisis): a library where an Oxfam office can drop their best green practice for others to use. Events such as the Global Strategy Forum in September 2019 have introduced initiatives including the use of reusable bottles and water dispensers to reduce the amount of plastic waste, with vegetarian/ vegan/ halal food options always prominent on any meeting menu. More efficient use of online storage of documents has allowed for global board meetings to become almost 'paperless'.

A confederation-wide **environmental strategy** is under development and will build on Affiliate best practice and include a clear proposition for all of Oxfam. Starting September, we will review our **procurement policies** with a view to strengthening the environmental aspects that they already include. A new **Oxfam Travel Policy** will reflect lessons learned from the COVID crisis in terms of moving meetings and events into a virtual space. Going forward, we hope to integrate the collection of **carbon emission data** more effectively in regular reporting processes (while acknowledging overall reduced capacity in the OI Secretariat, after our restructure, for confederation-wide data collection and analysis).

We acknowledge that continuous effort will be needed to agree and work towards confederation-wide strategies, objectives and monitoring mechanisms that can demonstrate our responsible stewardship for the environment, and commit to further driving these and other climate protection initiatives across all of Oxfam.

Stakeholder Feedback

The Independent Review Panel noted examples of how Oxfam receives and learns from external stakeholder feedback through partner surveys, program mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. You requested more information on how Oxfam gathers feedback from the communities it works with, e.g. through regular community consultations, satisfaction surveys or other feedback mechanisms (as well as on our findings and actions taken in response); and on how internal stakeholders, such as staff, are able to provide feedback (e.g. through staff surveys, internal feedback and complaints mechanisms or staff meetings).

Our work with people and partners across regions is diverse, spanning many countries and relationships in development, humanitarian and influencing spaces.

Likes and dislikes in terms of preferred feedback mechanisms vary widely between different countries and are dependent on the type of programming being undertaken. The way feedback is responded to also depends on a variety of factors – but wherever possible, 'closing the feedback loop' i.e. ensuring people who raise issues to us receive a response, is an integral component in the way Oxfam manages feedback.

Across the world, **we have consistently found that people prefer to give feedback face to face** to a member of Oxfam or partner staff, or community volunteer. Oxfam's guidance states that at least two channels need to be in place for a functioning feedback system, and Oxfam and partners always consult communities on their preferred ways of giving feedback – resulting in a broad variety of channels including hotlines, community feedback committees, suggestion boxes, social media platforms, community facilitators, or help desks. Oxfam teams always ensure that community members are aware of how they can give feedback.

Information is tracked in as simple a way as possible, often including Word documents or Excel spreadsheets to record details of the feedback (excluding sensitive misconduct, which is inputted through confidential reporting mechanisms), note what action was taken, and categorise the issues to help with analysis that is used to inform programmatic decision making.

Adjustments had to be made to feedback collection processes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, where face to face contact has been limited where possible, e.g. by establishing new or additional hotlines to offer assurance to communities that they had not been abandoned by Oxfam, even where our staff was temporarily less visible.

As part of our effort to improve stakeholder engagement and feedback, Oxfam is continuing to roll out a **digital feedback collection, management and analysis system, called** '**Your Word Counts'**. Your Word Counts enables teams to capture feedback instantly on mobile devices, automatically assigning it to the appropriate technical team and allowing for the case to be updated until it has been resolved. The data is then automatically included into a dashboard that can be used for reporting internally and externally, as well as to inform programming decisions. Your Word Counts has been a focus for humanitarian programmes and is expected to roll out into development work in the next 12-24 months.

To date this system has been implemented in 14 countries – some of them no longer operational, as those responses have come to an end, and with a number of additional countries in the pipeline. To date, over 9,000 pieces of feedback (positive feedback, requests

for assistance, minor and major dissatisfaction) have been managed through this system since it was first introduced in 2018.

One of the central pillars of Oxfam's humanitarian approach is community engagement, demonstrating our commitment to ensuring that our responses are rooted in the needs, capacities, and agency of the people most directly affected; and a maintenance audit in 2019 of Oxfam as a **certified agency against the Core Humanitarian Standard**, noted improvements in how Oxfam consults communities and the timeliness of our complaint management.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Independent Review Panel noted the reference to guidance on stakeholder engagement in the design and delivery of programs and requested more information on Oxfam's Program Standards as well as more detail on engaging stakeholders in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs.

Stakeholder engagement, including community members, partners, governments and others is key to our work and **we promote collaborative and effective, results-focused and accountable practices in all our programs and projects**. This is clearly reflected in the Oxfam Program Framework which describes the ways in which Oxfam will design, develop, implement and review programs, projects, advocacy initiatives and campaigns at country, regional and global level. The framework provides a clear approach as well as tools and guidance for effective program delivery, including a set of Program Standards and MEL and Social Accountability requirements.

Our minimum standards ensure program quality and have a strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement. For instance, Program Standard 1 and 2 refer to **collaborative, iterative and participatory problem analysis and program design**; Program Standard 6 sets the benchmark for our work in partnership; Program standard 10 requires programs to engage in **participatory and evidence-based learning** , while Program Standard 11 is about **accountability to stakeholders**. CAMSA (our Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability) supports teams in adhering to the Program Standards, providing more detailed requirements, guidance and tools on MEL practice for each stage of the program and project cycle. It includes a wide range of activities and tools for stakeholder and community engagement at any stage of the program cycle, from early program design to participatory monitoring and evaluation to program and partnership reviews and feedback mechanisms.

All other guidance documents for program delivery reflect the same approach. Recent examples are:

the **Oxfam Country Strategy (OCS) Review and new OCS formulation guidelines**, which include a strong focus on stakeholder and partner involvement in the process of setting our priorities and developing strategies.

Guidance on "Setting up Community Feedback systems in Oxfam Programs", which already had a strong focus on stakeholder engagement and which now includes an entire section on how to work with partners to ensure appropriate community feedback in joint programs;

the **"Top tips on partnership and LHL in Oxfam Humanitarian Programming"** as well as the **"COVID-19 Partnership and Local Humanitarian Leadership essential requirements"** provide strong guidance on stakeholder participation and locally-led interventions.

While the level of stakeholder engagement can vary depending on the type of program or project, activities and context, we do consider it a priority in all our programs and essential for effectiveness and accountability and teams on a yearly basis review their programs against their adherence to the standards mentioned above. Findings and learnings from these reviews are captured in the **One Oxfam Program Report** which allows us to be held accountable, to learn, plan and constantly improve.

Complaints handling mechanisms and overview of complaints (internal)

The Independent Review Panel noted that Oxfam encourages internal stakeholders to report malpractice and our commitment to the protection of whistleblowers. You requested further information on complaints mechanisms for internal stakeholders, as well as clarification on whether each Affiliate has a nominated focal point for receiving complaints and some further detail on the types of complaints (e.g. fraud, safeguarding) received through our whistleblower mechanism. You also recommended that we make our whistleblower policy publicly available online.

Oxfam remains committed to ensuring that all our staff and all those who come in contact with our organization feel safe and respected at all times. Important progress continues to be made in this area, including approval of **Standard Operating Procedures** for safeguarding case management and a 6-step response plan agreed by all Oxfam Affiliates.

Our **One Oxfam Safeguarding Core Standards** offer a simplified, easy to understand and 'non-negotiables' document, offering a summary of Oxfam's multiple public safeguarding commitments to guide practice (assess gaps, support planning, analyse performance), strengthen safeguarding systems and ultimately help hold managers in Oxfam accountable. The standards encourage mainstreaming of safeguarding across Oxfam's work by highlighting the roles and responsibilities of various functions within the organization, and reinforcing Safeguarding as a shared responsibility. Short introductory videos to the Standards are available to Oxfam staff in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

Our trainings stress our **policy of non-reprisal**. This includes new anti-corruption training that is available in four languages, and which to date has been taken by over 5,000 staff across the confederation. The training clearly distinguishes between 'genuine suspicion' vs 'malicious reporting' and encourages staff to speak up – emphasizing that they will not suffer recrimination for reporting any suspicion, even if it is not confirmed in further investigation (while treating malicious reporting as a disciplinary matter).

In July 2020, we successfully completed the roll out of a **Global Case Management (GCM) system** for Safeguarding and Fraud & Corruption to all 20 Oxfam Affiliate Case Management teams and Oxfam International. This milestone fulfils a key recommendation and our commitment to the UK Charity Commission and Oxfam's Independent Commission recommendation to oversee and deliver safeguarding through one central database. The system will align Affiliate processes, data and ways of working, introducing a unified approach to case management across the confederation that will further strengthen Oxfam's trends analysis, accountability, and risk management.

Going forward, the GCM will enable us to identify (for closed cases) the type (e.g. safeguarding or corruption) and sub-type of misconduct, the region where it occurred, whether the complainant is an Oxfam staff member or not, whether the survivor is a minor, if the case was closed after initial review or after investigation, and its final outcome.

To ensure confidentiality and data protection, only designated safeguarding and anti-corruption functional teams/ leads have access to the GCM system and information about specific incidents and cases.

We hope to develop a first report from the Global Case Management System at the end of this calendar year, and to add more indicators over time based on good practice developed by other organisations (such as Plan International).

A **Global Misconduct Webform** is directly linked to the GCM system and available on most of the Affiliate Websites as an additional multi-lingual channel to report incidents in total confidentiality. OI Secretariat staff can also report any suspicion of safeguarding breaches, financial misconduct or HR related issues via a specific email address for this purpose, or via their line managers. Our [Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy](), [Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy]() and [Terrorism Financing and Financial Crime Policy]() are now all available on our global website. Anyone outside of Oxfam – e.g. volunteers, partners, consultants or contractors – can also communicate safeguarding concerns or suspicions related to fraud/ corruption related misconduct [online]().

Our latest **6-month safeguarding report**, covering the period October 2019 to March 2020, was released in June and is publicly available at [this link](). As part of our commitment to "zero tolerance to inaction" and as the risk of sexual abuse has increased substantially during COVID-19 lockdowns and social restrictions, whilst survivors face increased difficulties in reporting, we have rolled out new online pandemic-specific training on reporting, investigating and case management; and are helping to author a sector-wide briefing for donors and management on how safeguarding investigations need to be run during the crisis. In addition, we now have (statistics as of March 2020):

- stronger new policies and guides on PSEA, child/youth safeguarding, reporting, digital, minimum standards, case management;

- 37 trainers and new tools for our "Safe Programming Strategy" based on the principle of "do no harm"; as well as 33 safeguarding experts that are shared across its global confederation and 182 staff who work as "focal points" throughout all our program countries, all fully trained in 2019 and reporting any complaints received on to Affiliates for further action;

- published research from Myanmar, Iraq and Ghana that analysed the barriers against people reporting sexual misconduct and revealed new designs of community-led feedback, specific to local contexts; and

- new behavioural feedback to senior managers on issues critical to engender culture change across the confederation.

ENDS