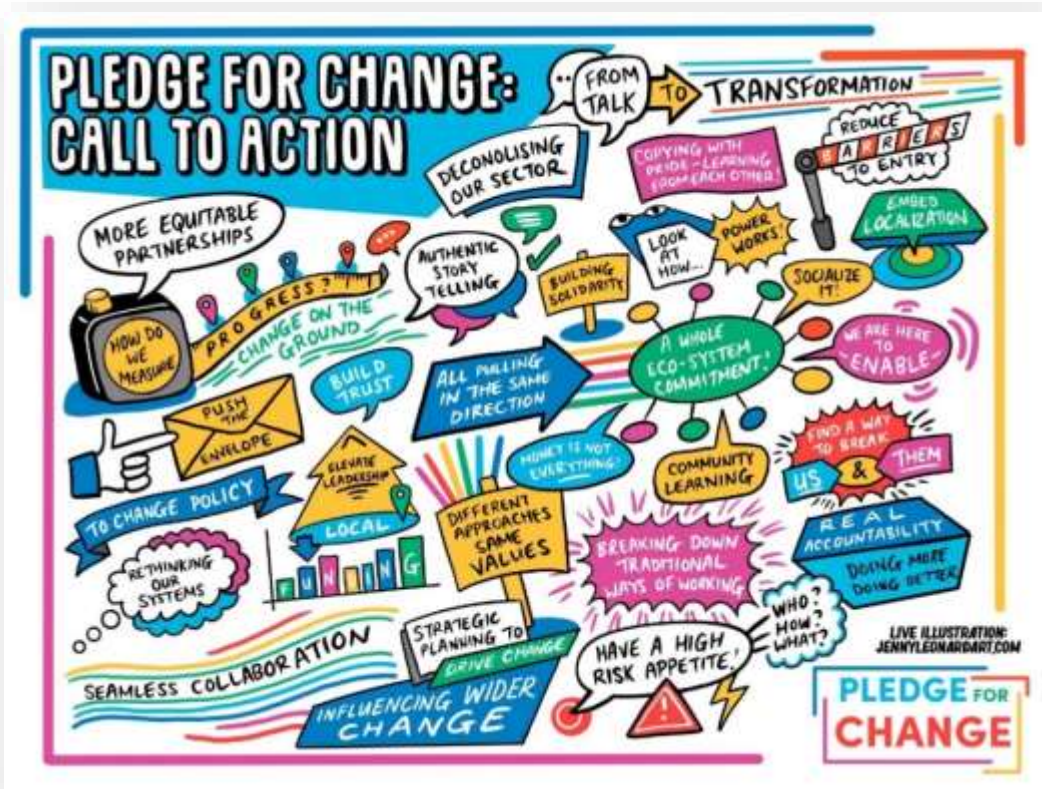


PLEDGE FOR CHANGE 2024 ANNUAL RETREAT REPORT



Pledge Members on the 18th of April, 2024.

To access photos from the retreat, please find them here: [Photo Gallery](#)

Overview

On the 17th and 18th of April of 2024, the Pledge for Change Secretariat hosted the second annual retreat at the Ole Sereni hotel Nairobi with active participation of global leaders. The participants included Global Civil Society leaders, INGO leaders, funders, and representatives from the aid eco-system and the wider Pledge community. The main theme for the event was collective action to achieve the three pledges: Equitable Partnerships, Authentic Storytelling and Influencing Wider Change.

This event followed the [Pledge Supporter Sprint](#) in March to bring forward the power and contributions of our global supporter group, in recognition of the globally distributed community and the structural and pragmatic exclusions that meant that not everyone was able to join us in Nairobi.

The facilitation team (Marie-Rose Romain Murphy, Reshma Khan, Sidhee Patel and Kate Moger) aimed to create a safe, brave space in which we could create community while becoming comfortable with discomfort and honest reflections and experiences from across the eco-system. “Elephants in the room” were provided to allow us to notice and name how normative discourses or discrimination was showing up in our discussions.



Kate Moger addressing an ‘elephant in the room.’

On **April 16th**, before the retreat, the [Steering Group](#), [Working Group](#) Co-Chairs and [Global Advisory](#) Groups visited the National Museum of Kenya for a decoloniality session. Attendees visited an exhibition showcasing Kenya's history in three significant phases: pre-colonial Kenya, the period of colonial rule, and independent Kenya. We shared a [list of questions](#) for reflection and discussion, and we highly recommend visiting the museum next time you are in Nairobi (and maybe connect with someone who visited to ask them how they experienced the visit and answered the questions).

Embracing joy through connections and reflecting on individual journeys

On **April 17th**, Following [opening words](#) from Degan Ali (Executive Director of Adeso), Sofia Sprechmann (Secretary General of CARE International) and Kate Moger (Pledge Director), we started our time together with games designed to foster connection and find common ground. Participants were invited to deeply reflect on their personal and collective journeys as changemakers; the challenges and opportunities they had encountered and how they had learnt from this. Despite the multiplicity of experiences and journeys in the room, it became evident that as a community we are connected by a common vision and goal to positively influence the global aid system.

Accountability for Change

Alix Tiernan (Christian Aid), and Doreen Omitto (Adeso), the Monitoring, Evaluating, Accountability and Learning Working group Co-Chairs facilitated this session. Alix took the participants through a session which aimed to **re-energise all signatories and supporters around the commitments** made at the first Pledge for Change retreat exactly one year ago. Do we all know what we said we would work towards? We looked at all 17 commitments, and asked everyone to talk about which they could identify with or were excited about. The participants also ranked the commitments to see which are the most important now, feeding into action planning on delivering against these commitments.

After looking at the Pledge commitments, we took some time in groups to **model mutual accountability**: using Appreciative Inquiry and Stories of Change we shared what we had seen change in our organisations so far, and what we wanted to do more of going forward. This session inspired us to recognise achievements so far and gave an opportunity for peers to provide feedback and learn from each other in a safe space.



Alix Tiernan from Christian Aid leading the Accountability for Change Session

The group's priority commitments emerged as:

Pledge 1: Equitable Partnerships

- Equitable partnerships will be our default approach by 2030. National and local organisations will lead humanitarian and development efforts wherever possible. We will help them take control, and we will engage directly only when there isn't enough national or local capacity to meet people's needs.
- We will take a more collaborative approach to risk management. We will avoid applying stricter risk requirements to our partners than ourselves and look for ways of minimising the compliance burden on partners.

Pledge 2: Authentic Storytelling

- Our fundraising and communications will reflect our commitments to anti-racism, locally led initiatives, gender equality and equitable partnerships. We will use our platforms to show the actions led by local communities both during a crisis and as they recover, and the impact made by local organisations.
- We will use language and imagery to inspire wider cultural change. We will co-produce stories, photographs and video with local organisations and talent. Wherever possible, we will put local people at the centre of the story.

Pledge 3: Influencing wider change

- We will share what we learn and demonstrate how we are shifting power and resources to the Global South with the aim of encouraging other INGOs to follow suit (this is linked to another commitment, where we commit to tracking our progress and reporting it).
- We will speak out against any government policies or international action that perpetuate a colonial approach to aid and development.
- We will argue for these changes to be made across the aid and development sector and we will create opportunities for Global South leaders to lead conversations and advocate for change in public platforms.

The group noted the interconnectedness of the three pledges and the importance of taking an integrated and intersectional approach to the changes we are trying to make.

Voices from the Global Advisory

The Global Advisory leaders from Latin America, India, Indonesia, and DRC presented the work they are doing in their respective revolutionary spaces. Asier Hernando from The Sherwood Way presented the [Latin America Declaration](#), Tarini Ross from Humanitarian Aid International shared more about the campaigns they are running and the development of the [DATA](#) platform. Méschac Nakanywenge from UPDDHE/GL talked about bringing together pledge signatories present in the country to advance existing localisation commitments from the Grand Bargain, Charter for Change and others – by using the energy and engagement of the Pledge signatories to make change possible.



Sofia Sprechmann, Patrick Gathara, Rose Caldwell and Patrick Watt holding the Latin American Declaration.

Social Hour

At 6pm local time, guests were invited to a social hour on the Ole Sereni rooftop where they got to enjoy and listen to a wonderful [Congolese band](#) sing songs about revolution and love. It was a perfect wrap to the end of the day.

Social Sculpting and Systems Change

On **April 18th** we began with visualising and embodying the ecosystem in the room. Participants were asked to group themselves based on categories and labels we often use: for example by genders, according to local/international, global north/global south, language and other identities. Through this exercise, we connected with the ‘othering’ that happens via the descriptions and assumed meanings that fail to represent the intricacies and interconnectedness of our world and experiences.

Stories of Change

Patrick Gathara, Senior Editor of the New Humanitarian led the session, and shared his [narrative](#) of a recent expedition to London. Some of the highlights:

- We need to use inclusive language and avoid jargon that excludes certain voices. (Examples of the words ‘field’, and ‘on the ground’ sound absurd from a Global South perspective).
- The way we speak about the world shapes how we perceive it.
- We need ethical frameworks in authentic storytelling to address unequal power dynamics when sharing positive and negative stories about communities.
- It is important to question the authenticity, the intention, and the motivation behind our stories.
- We must acknowledge (and question) the relationship between storytelling and funding and how funding is influenced by the way stories are framed and shared.
- We should question who the aid sector is for and whether the aid efforts are truly serving those that need it or the organizations that provide the aid.

The participants were then asked to share their stories of change. You can read some examples here: [Stories of change folder](#).

Moving from Talk to Action:

We will promote and support existing country level mechanisms and local leadership, for example via National Reference Groups

We will convene signatories in the countries and regions where we work and/or organise local or regional summits with community leaders.

We will pilot due diligence passporting and a Reverse Call for Proposals

We will harmonize templates for partnership agreements.

We will facilitate the south-south platform for southern leaders and share practices.

INGOs will tell partners about their Pledge commitments to keep them accountable.



Pledge leaders discussing the actions they will take.

1. We will shift fundraising and communication to be locally driven, emphasizing authentic storytelling co-created with communities and respecting their dignity.
2. We will avoid relying on single narratives, censor voices, sensationalize, or use AI solely. We will acknowledge communities and co-create stories.
3. Local actors will advocate for fair partnerships, hold themselves accountable, and challenge unbalanced proposals.
4. Training will be inclusive, and standards for partnerships will be developed jointly.
5. We will increase flexible funding and prioritize local organizations' long-term success.
6. INGOs must demonstrate commitment to these principles and offer support based on local needs.
7. Donors should require INGOs to uphold these standards.
8. Mechanisms for feedback from local partners and information sharing will be established.



Reflection to Action

Attendees were asked to get into groups and discuss their reflections to actions. The table below shows the format they used to write down their reflections:

<p><i>What has changed?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There has been a paradigm shift in the donor landscape, with donors becoming more aware of local needs and power dynamics. This is leading to a more equitable distribution of resources. - Partnerships are being renegotiated with a focus on equality and respect. This includes decentralizing decision-making, empowering local organizations, and ensuring their voices are heard in high-level discussions. - There is a greater awareness of the problem of inequality within the development sector. This is leading to conversations about how to address structural problems and promote social justice. - There is a growing emphasis on transparency and accountability in development work. This includes ensuring that local communities have a say in how resources are used and that projects are designed to meet their needs. 	<p><i>Why has it changed?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To challenge the traditional, unequal model of development. - Promote equity and fairness in partnerships, moving away from a North-dominant system. - Ensure accountability to local communities, ensuring their voices are heard and needs met. - Promote sustainability through local leadership and ownership of projects. - Ensure dignity and respect for all participants in the development process.
<p><i>How did the change happen?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was a growing awareness of the ethical implications of the traditional development model, and a recognition that it needed to be changed. This led to new internal guidance and policies and a more collaborative and committed culture within INGOs. - A few committed leaders played a pioneering role in pushing for change. They helped to build momentum for the Pledge for Change movement and to develop new strategies and approaches. - Internal movements towards decolonization and localization also played a role. These movements challenged the traditional power dynamics between INGOs and local organizations. - Social movements such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and the Grand Bargain, also helped to create pressure for change. These movements highlighted the importance of equity, justice, and inclusion in all aspects of society, including the development sector. - Changes in funding streams also played a role. 	<p><i>Who has the power?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Committed leaders within INGOs who push for change through conversations and collaboration. - Communities and grassroots movements: Their voices and needs are a key driver, demanding a more equitable partnership. - INGO staff: Process managers and staff who implement the changes on the ground. - The whole system



Online Session: Call to Action

To accommodate colleagues who could not join in person, the Pledge for Change Secretariat hosted a hybrid **Call to Action** session to hear from leaders and donors about how they are realizing and committing to the pledges. The panelists were: Brandon Lee ((Global Affairs Canada Director General of Grants and Contributions), Sarah Rose (USAID Senior Advisor for Localisation, Abby Maxman (Oxfam US CEO), Tom Hart (Interaction CEO), Ciaran Donnelly (IRC SVP), and Nana Asantewa Afadzinu (WACSI and RINGO). The recording of the session can be found [here](#). (Passcode: *Pledge@2024*)

Closing remarks

Sofia and Degan wrapped up the 2-day event by sharing the main takeaways and challenges discussed during the retreat. A major highlight was the strong sense of community building among the pledge members who emphasized moving from talk to action. Leaders committed to exploring ways to promote the three pledges through due diligence reporting, improving storytelling practices, and influencing donors to advocate for changes in partnership models that reflect equality.

However, a challenge highlighted was the lack of accountability for Pledge supporters. As a result, Degan encouraged fellow Global South Leaders to hold themselves accountable, advocate for equitable partnerships, and challenge unbalanced proposals.

The participants shared the actions they are planning to strengthen the aid ecosystem based on their shared learning and commitments during the event:

- To focus on internal reflection and improvement rather than external verification
- To embed the pledges within their organizations and actively seek feedback from local partners.
- To move away from a system based on mistrust towards genuine partnerships.
- To challenge the status quo.
- To work openly and collaboratively with stakeholders.
- To develop ways to measure and demonstrate progress towards decolonization.
- To hold all stakeholders accountable to the pledges they have committed to.

We are so grateful to everyone who traveled to the Ole Sereni and gave your precious time and energy to the Pledge for Change. Feedback from the event shows that colleagues value the opportunity to build relationships across the eco-system and to challenge ourselves to new ways of thinking and doing. We are excited to see how you will make change happen in your organisations, contexts and communities as a consequence of these conversations. We would be grateful for any further reflections, learning or insights on how to maximise the opportunities from this kind of event, so as usual please do not hesitate to reach out to pledgeforchange@adesoafrika.org with any comments or questions.

Annex: **Guest list**