From Coordination to Shared Power: Lessons from 's Evolving Partnership Model

A Communiqué from the Pledge Learning Series

15 September 2026

The Pledge community convened its 3rd Learning Series session of the year titled **"From Coordination to Shared Power: Lessons from Christian Aid's Evolving Partnership Model"**, bringing together signatories, partners, and sector stakeholders to reflect on practical approaches to advancing locally led development and humanitarian action. The session featured insights from Patrick Watt, CEO of Christian Aid (CA), and was moderated by Blessing Osagie on behalf of the Pledge for Change Secretariat.

The discussion focused on how INGOs can move beyond commitments and intentions to implement structural and operational changes that shift resources, decision-making, and influence closer to local actors. Drawing on its recent organizational transformation, Christian Aid shared lessons from its journey to deepen partnership, strengthen local leadership, and reimagine its role within a broader civil society ecosystem.

Key Reflections

Participants heard how Christian Aid undertook a significant organizational review in response to changing funding realities, institutional learning, and a long-standing commitment to partnership. This process led to a sharpened programmatic focus, the closure of direct implementation activities, increased investment in unrestricted partner funding, and the redesign of its global operating model around regional hubs and networked partnerships.

A *central theme throughout the discussion was the distinction between coordination and control*. Participants reflected the need for effective accountability mechanisms while ensuring that coordination does not reinforce unequal power dynamics or limit local ownership. Patrick emphasized that ***genuine partnership requires mutual accountability, shared learning, co-creation, and a commitment to impact rather than contractual compliance alone.***

The session also highlighted the importance of moving from a mindset of scarcity and organizational control toward one of abundance, collaboration, and ecosystem thinking. Participants noted that INGOs can play a valuable role as conveners, connectors, and catalysts, enabling local actors and networks to lead responses and shape change within their own contexts.

Key Issues Raised

The discussion generated rich engagement around several critical issues facing the sector:

- The practical challenges of increasing the share of resources directed to local partners and creating sufficient financial flexibility to support power shifting.
- The need to simplify and harmonize due diligence and compliance processes, particularly through initiatives such as due diligence passporting and collaboration across networks such as the ACT Alliance, Charter for Change, and Pledge for Change
- The importance of defining organizational risk appetite and ensuring alignment between boards, leadership teams, and operational functions when pursuing more equitable approaches to risk sharing.
- Challenges faced by federated and confederated organizations seeking to implement locally led approaches within complex governance structures.
- The need for impact measurement systems that recognize long-term contribution and collective action rather than focusing solely on organizational attribution.

Emerging Lessons

Several lessons emerged from the conversation:

1. Meaningful power shifting requires structural, cultural, and financial changes in addition to public commitments.
2. Long-term, trust-based partnerships provide a stronger foundation for co-creation, shared decision-making, and locally led action.
3. Flexible and unrestricted funding remains one of the most important enablers of equitable partnership.
4. Reducing administrative burden and duplication, particularly due diligence and reporting requirements, remains a priority for the sector.
5. Organizational success should increasingly be measured by impact and contribution rather than institutional growth or financial scale alone.

Looking Ahead

Attendees welcomed the openness with which Christian Aid shared both achievements and challenges from its transformation journey. The discussion reaffirmed the value of peer learning and highlighted the importance of continued dialogue among signatories, partners, and allies working to advance locally led development and humanitarian action.

The Secretariat encouraged participants to continue sharing experiences, insights, and practical solutions that can help translate commitments into meaningful change across the sector. Participants were also invited to contribute feedback and engage with upcoming learning opportunities, including insights from the ongoing partner perception survey being conducted across the Pledge community.