# Looking Ahead: Priorities and Aspirations for 2027, 2030 and Beyond

## Pledge for Change Annual Virtual Gathering 2026 Communiqué

On **6 and 7 October 2026**, the Pledge for Change community convened its Annual Virtual Gathering, bringing together changemakers from across the sector, including signatories, supporters and partners. Across two interactive sessions, members reflected on the progress made since the launch of the Pledge, examined the challenges that continue to slow transformation, and collectively envisioned what success should look like by **2027, 2030 and beyond.**

The gathering was designed as a space not only to share progress, but to listen, challenge assumptions, and shape the next chapter of the movement together. Each session included grounding reflections, a joint solidarity message from a signatory and supporter representative, updates on progress across **PALM , Pledge 4, LIFT,** as well as the **Authentic Storytelling, MEAL and Equitable Partnerships Working Groups**, followed by facilitated forward visioning exercises through individual reflection, breakout discussions and plenary dialogue.

## Key Reflections

Throughout both sessions, one message stood above all others: **the conversation has moved beyond changing policy to changing power.** Participants agreed that transformation will not be measured by the number of commitments made, but by **who makes decisions, who controls resources, whose knowledge shapes action, and whose voices and stories are heard**. Participants reflected that change will happen when decision-making shifts closer to communities, resources follow local priorities, and communities tell their own stories on their own terms.

The discussions reaffirmed that localisation must be experienced where it matters most, **by communities themselves**. Participants repeatedly stressed that change cannot remain an organisational ambition; it must be visible in the everyday realities of local partners and communities through greater autonomy, stronger leadership, more equitable partnerships and sustained access to flexible funding.

The importance of transforming donor mindsets also emerged as a critical priority. While many signatories shared examples of acting on insights from their partner survey results to improve their partnerships, participants recognised that meaningful systems change will require donors to evolve alongside implementing organisations. Funding mechanisms, compliance expectations and definitions of accountability must increasingly support local leadership rather than constrain it.

## Key Issues Raised

Across the forward visioning exercises, four interconnected priorities emerged.

- **Fundamental transformation of funding and partnership models**. Long-term, flexible and predictable funding should become the norm, distinguishing genuine strategic partnerships from transactional project relationships. Organisations were encouraged to act on partner feedback, demonstrate how survey findings influence organisational change, reduce unnecessary risk transferred to local organisations and build partnerships that foster long-term sustainability rather than dependency.
- **Local leadership must set the agenda**. Local organisations and communities should define priorities, lead decision-making and shape development responses, while international organisations increasingly play enabling and brokering roles. Participants envisioned a future where at least half of funding reaches local actors directly, governance structures become more representative, and South-South cooperation continues to strengthen without reproducing colonial models of development.

- **Need to reshape narratives, language and evidence**. Community-led storytelling, authentic local evidence and locally defined measures of success should replace externally imposed narratives and reporting frameworks wherever possible. Many participants also advocated moving from the language of "aid" towards one of "cooperation," recognising the importance of reclaiming narratives that strengthen civil society while supporting localisation.
- **Lasting transformation begins with internal organisational change**. Organisations must confront the gap between public commitments and operational realities by redesigning systems, incentives and cultures around local leadership. As one participant noted, "*The biggest change would not have been another partnership policy or framework. It would have been the machinery behind the policy.*" This observation captured a recurring theme across both sessions: meaningful change requires redesigning the structures that continue to concentrate power, not simply introducing new commitments.

Members called for stronger coordination across Pledge initiatives, greater collaboration between signatories, clearer prioritisation and more collective work to influence donor behaviour, legislation and the wider humanitarian architecture. There was broad agreement that the **Pledge must remain a space for honest dialogue**, one where difficult conversations can be held openly, progress can be celebrated without overlooking shortcomings, and members can hold one another accountable with trust and solidarity.

The conversations deepened by focusing on what success would truly look like by 2030. Participants increasingly framed power as something tangible: reflected in the movement of money, authority and risk, rather than in policy statements alone. Communities should not simply participate but rather own their aspirations, exercise meaningful influence and retain control over their stories and decisions. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that the voices of women, young people and historically marginalised groups shape both funding decisions and development priorities.

## Emerging Lessons

It was noted that systems change cannot happen without **culture change**. Organisations were challenged to rethink leadership, incentives and measures of success so that leaders are recognised not for the size of the budgets they control, but for **what they enable local organisations and communities to lead and own**. This shift requires humility, reflection on positionality, and a willingness for international actors to relinquish power rather than simply redistribute responsibilities. Participants equally recognised that localisation cannot thrive where civic space is shrinking, and that safeguarding independent civil society is fundamental to achieving equitable development and locally led humanitarian action.

Despite recognising the complexity of this work, the gathering remained grounded in hope. One participant captured this spirit simply: **"We live with hope, and we all ultimately desire the same thing."** That shared aspiration, to create a humanitarian and development system rooted in solidarity, dignity and locally led action, was evident throughout the conversations.

## Looking Ahead

Looking beyond 2030, participants imagined a bold future for the Pledge. Rather than remaining solely a movement of commitments, the Pledge could evolve into a **global reference community** for organisations seeking to shift power, offering practical learning, evidence and guidance on equitable partnerships. Participants also envisioned a growing network of mentors supporting organisations embarking on their own localisation journeys, helping embed accountability and partnership differently across the sector.

The Annual Virtual Gathering demonstrated that the Pledge community is increasingly united around a common understanding: transformation will not be achieved through additional frameworks alone, but through changing how decisions are made, how resources are shared, and how organisations themselves operate. The conversations reaffirmed that while significant progress has been made, the work ahead demands greater urgency, deeper collaboration and continued courage to challenge existing systems.