



## Panel Session

### Shifting the Accountability Equation and Redressing Power Imbalances in the Aid Sector: Insights from the Pledge for Change Southern-led Assessment



The session, “Shifting the Accountability Equation and Redressing Power Imbalances in the Aid Sector”, was moderated by **Marie-Rose Romain Murphy** (Founder, Fondation Communautaire Haitienne-Espwa / The Haiti Community Foundation) and featured a panel of experts, including **Charles VanDyck** (Head of Capacity Development, West African Civil Society Institute), **Patrick Gathara** (Senior Editor, The New Humanitarian), **Fabeha Monir** (Visual Journalist, Filmmaker and Shifting Democracy Fellow, Global Press), and **Natalie Lartey** (Founder and Director, Wood and Water). The discussion centred on the lessons learned from the Pledge for Change Southern-led Assessment, with a focus on reshaping accountability in the aid sector and the importance of authentic storytelling and decolonisation in humanitarian narratives. The panel highlighted the need for INGOs to shift from traditional power dynamics to more inclusive, community-driven models that enable long-term, sustainable change.



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The session began with an introduction by **Marie-Rose Romain Murphy**, who outlined the key components of the Pledge for Change's mutual accountability framework, including self-reports, partner surveys, and the Southern-led assessments. This process is driven by two key review panels: the Global Advisory Review Panel, of which Charles is a member, and the Authentic Storytelling Review Panel, to which Patrick, Fabeha, and Natalie belong. **Charles VanDyck** provided an overview of the Southern-led assessment, emphasising its role in deepening accountability within INGOs, focusing on equitable partnerships, ethical storytelling, and systemic change.

The discussion shifted to authentic storytelling in the aid sector. **Patrick Gathara** explained how the Authentic Storytelling Review Panel evaluates INGOs' communications, particularly focusing on **inclusion, representation, and avoiding saviourism**. He emphasised the need to move beyond superficial changes in narratives, urging INGOs to assess how their stories reflect the true voices of the communities they serve.

**Fabeha Monir** shared her perspective as a visual storyteller, emphasising the need to not just focus on the end product (e.g., photos or videos), but also on the process - especially the inclusion of communities in shaping their own narratives. **Natalie Lartey** pointed out that many humanitarian stories lack socio-political context, with NGOs often overlooking the **historical and structural factors** such as

colonialism and racial injustice. She urged NGOs to integrate these elements when telling their stories.

The panel also explored power dynamics within INGOs and their relationships with partners. Charles discussed the need for INGOs to embed **power-shifting practices** into governance and leadership, moving away from transactional relationships to ensure co-creation with local communities. The conversation also focused on the need for INGOs to reconsider how they **visualise humanitarian crises**, urging them to move away from idealised imagery towards more realistic portrayals that highlight the complexity of the situations.

Finally, the discussion touched upon the structural changes needed for long-term impact. Charles stressed that INGOs must implement deep structural changes that allow for true power-sharing and co-creation. The session concluded with a call for collective action, not only among INGOs but also with Southern-led actors and donors, to drive real change in the aid sector. Marie-Rose Murphy closed with a reflection on the importance of humility in this journey, and the necessity for a **transparent process that involves local ownership of stories and solutions**. She further emphasised that true change can only occur when we approach this work with genuine collaboration and mutual respect, ensuring that local voices are always at the forefront of humanitarian efforts.



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*"Hope and fear cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Let's invite hope and embrace solidarity to make real, transformative change."*

**Marie-Rose Romain Murphy**

Founder, Fondation Communautaire Haitienne-Espwa / The Haiti Community Foundation

*"What is not said is just as important as what is said. We must acknowledge the socio-political context and history of the places we work in to tell the full story."*

**Natalie Lartey**

Founder and Director, Wood and Water



*"The issue is not just making promises but embedding change into governance and leadership practices to truly shift the power dynamic."*

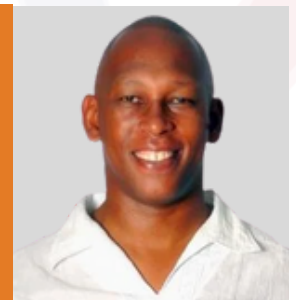
**Charles VanDyck**

Head of Capacity Development, West African Civil Society Institute

*"We need to move away from the charity framework. The real challenge is seeing communities as partners, not beneficiaries. Until we make that shift, the system will remain the same."*

**Patrick Gathara**

Senior Editor, The New Humanitarian



*"Storytelling should go beyond beautiful imagery; it is about going back to the people and asking them how they feel about their stories being told."*

**Fabeha Monir**

Visual Journalist, Filmmaker and Shifting Democracy Fellow, Global Press



## Critical Action Steps



**Embed power-shifting practices into governance** within INGOs to drive long-term structural change.



**Adopt inclusive, culturally sensitive storytelling** that highlights community agency and avoids victim narratives.



**Acknowledge historical and socio-political contexts** in humanitarian crises to create a fuller, more accurate narrative.



**Encourage collaboration between INGOs and Southern-led organisations** to foster equitable partnerships.



**Challenge traditional donor-recipient models** by positioning local communities as leaders in humanitarian action.



**Promote long-term, unrestricted funding** that enables flexibility and supports local-driven initiatives.