ICVA Asia Regional Hub: A Six-Month Progress Update.

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Introduction

The humanitarian system is under immense pressure to respond more quickly and efficiently in order to adapt to increasing humanitarian needs and shrinking resources. Stronger collaboration, communication, and coordination is more important than ever to mitigate the severe impact of disasters and crises on the world’s most vulnerable populations.

As a global network of NGOs, ICVA works to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by supporting stronger partnerships through inclusive engagement, promoting practice grounded in humanitarian principles, and influencing policy through collective advocacy. After hosting the NGO Humanitarian Reform Project in 2011-2013, ICVA recognized how closer links to humanitarian action foster greater opportunities for mutual accountability across the various sectors of the humanitarian system. A series of consultations with our members and key partners led to the development of a Regional Framework that centers on improving humanitarian partnerships, practice, and policy by introducing hubs in three regions: West Africa, MENA, and Asia. The fundamental goal of ICVA’s regional hubs is to enhance collective humanitarian influence by improving how global policy and advocacy links to humanitarian action at the national and local levels.

Opened in July 2013, the Regional Hub for Asia is based in Bangkok, Thailand and hosted by ICVA member Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network. Since its inception, the Asia hub has engaged in activities related to: supporting national NGOs to increase their participation and engagement in the international humanitarian system; improving links with and between ICVA members and other humanitarian NGOs, as well as with coordination mechanisms across the region; researching and promoting the role of NGOs in interagency coordination mechanisms; and strengthening relationships between the NGO community and UN agencies.

Following on from our report “Strengthening NGO Partnership, Practice and Policy for Improved Humanitarian Action: A Progress Report on the first 9 months of developing ICVA’s Asian Regional Hub,” this report highlights the activities undertaken during the period from May to December 2014 and provides an overview of what to expect in 2015 from the Asia Hub.

1. Strengthen humanitarian partnerships to enable more effective response with equity of national NGO engagement

To focus on practical ways of promoting positive partnerships, the Asia Hub has worked closely with regional and national humanitarian stakeholders to bring out the constructive processes that sustain complementarity of skills, knowledge, and perceptions within partnerships. Some example activities include:

Promoting national NGO engagement in regional and global fora

- Nominated 12 national and local civil society organisations to attend the World Humanitarian Summit Regional Consultation for North and South-east Asia;
- Supported seven (7) national NGO networks to attend the “Regional Meeting of NGO Coordination Fora” hosted by ICVA in September to enhance the participation of national NGOs in interagency coordination mechanisms.

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1 The NHRP II focuses on strengthening the role of national and international NGOs in coordinating and engaging with humanitarian reform and the Transformative Agenda in order to improve humanitarian outcomes for communities affected by disasters and conflict
NGOs and CSOs and to improve partnerships by expanding links between national networks;

- Supported six (6) national NGOs to participate in ICVA’s “Symposium to Strengthen the Role of National NGOs on Humanitarian Country Teams” organised in Geneva during November with the purpose of identifying challenges and opportunities for national NGOs engaging in HCT, providing a platform for peer-to-peer learning, and identifying ways to strengthen national NGO influence of HCT decision-making; and

- Represented the ICVA network on the Southeast and North Asia Regional Steering Committee and participated in the Regional Consultation for the World Humanitarian Summit in Japan.

Supporting NGO coordination mechanisms

- Organised a “Regional Meeting of NGO Coordination Fora” with 21 representatives from across Asia to improve understanding of NGO coordination by discussing common themes and challenges and to support the Asian NGO coordination community by improving collaboration and communication; and

- Completed a regional Mapping Exercise inclusive of desk-based research to identify the NGO coordination fora in the Asia-Pacific region working on humanitarian coordination, humanitarian response, disaster risk reduction, and forced displacement/refugee rights advocacy.
Strengthening UN-NGO partnerships

- Promoted civil society interests within the global humanitarian architecture through collective representation on the IASC Regional Directors Network and the following IASC sub-groups:
  - Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations, Including Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (AAP/PSEA)
  - Asia Pacific Emergency Preparedness Working Group
  - Integrating Cross-cutting Issues into Humanitarian Response: An Asian Regional Approach
  - Ad hoc Gender in Humanitarian Assistance Working Group, mandated by the Regional Directors Network

- Coordinated formal and informal communications between NGOs and UN agencies through information sharing, promoting active engagement of NGOs in IASC Task Teams, and supporting consultations with NGOs to feed into UN policy discussions, with particular emphasis on the Transformative Agenda protocols; and

- Promoted wide civil society engagement by contacting NGOs for contributions and nominated ICVA members to participate in the High Commissioners Dialogue on Protection at Sea.

2. Improve humanitarian practice by NGOs to deliver principled, accountable and better quality response

To enable peer-to-peer learning, improve information-sharing, and capture examples of good practice on NGO coordination and performance, the Asia Hub convened platforms for humanitarian practitioners to examine collective practice on humanitarian financing, quality and accountability to affected populations, and humanitarian principles. Some example activities include:

Advocating and applying humanitarian principles

- Hosted a roundtable discussion in Bangkok on the MSF report, “Where is everyone? Responding to emergencies in most difficult places” featuring a panel of representatives from humanitarian agencies working in Asia. One of the key outcomes of the dialogue was the sense that while the obstacles to providing effective humanitarian assistance are complex and substantial, the challenge remains that we need to do more than bear witness to the weaknesses of the system by working together to tackle these complicated issues; and

- Facilitated a session on the importance of humanitarian principles that focussed on the Code of Conduct and included a robust discussion on how to translate principles into practice as a faith-based organization during a seminar jointly convened by ICRC and Dompet Dhuafa.
Supporting exchange on Quality and Accountability within the sector

- Conducted a review of relevant regional papers for the IASC Cross-cutting Issues sub-working group and worked with the IASC Gender advisor (Global Protection Cluster), the communications with communities lead from OCHA regional office, and the Cash working group regional lead.

Promoting access to humanitarian financing

- Hosted the IASC initiative “Future of Humanitarian Financing,” a regional cross-sectoral dialogue attended by 20 representatives from the humanitarian, academic, corporate, legal, and development sectors to identify innovative financing strategies for adapting humanitarian response to match the growing needs and meet the challenges of the future; and,

- Participated in the “Asia Regional Business Consultation” for the World Humanitarian Summit that brought together representatives from business, government, UN agencies, and the humanitarian community to discuss ways to enhance collaboration and coordination to effectively target contributions from the private sector in emergency preparedness and response.

3. Improve humanitarian policy which supports more effective humanitarian partnership and practice

To promote collective NGO advocacy and influence on policy-making, the Asia hub works closely with NGOs and other regional humanitarian actors to share experiences from operational programmes implementing transformative agenda protocols and partnerships within the humanitarian system. Furthermore, the Asia hub regularly communicates global policy developments from UNHCR and coordination issues from the IASC, UN OCHA, and other...
international organisations to ICVA members and partners in the region to strengthen a feedback loop that supports humanitarian actors implementing policies which are reflective of good partnerships and practices.

Promoting discussion and understanding of the Transformative Agenda (TA)

- Participated in an ITA Task Force Protocols Review evaluating leadership, coordination, accountability, and preparedness of applications of the protocols;
- Engaged with OCHA’s Policy Branch to highlight issues with implementing the TA for NGOs and discussed ways to improve the UN agencies’ reliance on NGO partnerships to meet objectives; and
- Coordinated survey responses from Asia-based NGOs operating in humanitarian crises on their perceptions of humanitarian leadership, coordination and accountability.

Influencing policy on forced displacement

- With ICVA member, APRRN, organised a Bangkok dialogue, the “Nansen Initiative’s Civil Society Pre-Meeting in Southeast Asia” to improve understanding of how natural hazards and climate change interlink with displacement and to identify prevalent protection issues for persons displaced by disasters;
- Participated in the 5th Asia Pacific Consultations on Refugee Rights with ICVA’s Senior Policy Officer and facilitated a session on “Finding durable solutions to protracted refugee situations – Afghanistan and Myanmar”;
- Coordinated comment submissions from UNHCR’s Asia-based partners to feed into further planned activities and roll out of UNHCR’s “Enhanced Framework for Implementing with Partners” as part of the ongoing consultative strategy process;
- Promoted wide civil society engagement by contacting NGOs for contributions and nominated ICVA members’ participation in the High Commissioners Dialogue on Protection at Sea;
- Coordinated NGO comments on key issues in the Asia region to submit during the High Commissioner’s Structured Dialogue on Protection at Sea consultations in Geneva; and
- Participated in UNHCR’s dialogue on “Building a Community of Practice for Urban Refugees” and emphasised the issue of translating the outcomes of the High Commissioners Dialogue on NGO-IFRC-UNHCR Partnerships into practice in the field.

Supporting linkages with regional bodies

- Increased the engagement of civil society during the World Humanitarian Summit Regional Consultation for North and South-east Asia by partnering with ADRRN to coordinate 186 CSO surveys, making the largest stakeholder contribution from the national consultations in preparation for the regional consultation; and
- Participated in the Disaster Response Dialogue, which was jointly convened by IFRC, OCHA, ICVA, and SDC in Manila to bring together humanitarian actors in civil society and UN agencies with National Disaster Management Authorities, government officials, and the private sector from across the region and provide a platform for identifying ways to improve trust and cooperation for more effective humanitarian responses.
Framing the year ahead

Since its inception in 2013, the Asia hub has successfully supported ICVA members and long-established partners in Asia, and has made considerable progress towards building a bridge for local and national humanitarian practitioners, often under-represented in the humanitarian system, to have stronger voices on the global stage.

Under ICVA’s 2015-2018 Strategy, the Asia hub will continue to improve national and regional linkages, to strengthen ICVA’s role in closing the gap between humanitarian practice and policy by promoting better partnerships between all stakeholders.

The following is a brief outline of our upcoming activities in months ahead.
Forced displacement
- Mission to Myanmar including forced migration
- Regional UNHCR-NGO Structured Dialogue consultation
- Monitor roll-out of UNHCR’s Implementing Framework

Humanitarian partnerships
- Engage and follow World Humanitarian Summit activities in the region
- National consultation with NGOs in the Philippines on the Principles of Partnership
- Research and workshops exploring good partnership practice for INGOs and NNGOs

Humanitarian coordination
- Engage in IASC meetings and missions and share information with regional partners
- Regional meeting on NGO Coordination
- Support the development of the NGO Coordination Resource Centre

Humanitarian financing
- Support research and advocacy on donor conditionality (UN partnership agreements)
- Monitor NGO challenges to Country Based Pooled Funds to inform advocacy
- Humanitarian financing dialogue

Humanitarian partnerships
- National consultation with NGOs in the Philippines on the Principles of Partnership
- Research and workshops exploring good partnership practice for INGOs and NNGOs
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