ICVA IMPACT STUDY
Synthesis of independent review

December 2016
Research conducted by Organisation Development Support (ODS), Brussels

This synthesis was complied by ICVA, summarizing the findings of the ODS final report.
INTRODUCTION

Established in 1962, ICVA is a global network of non-governmental organisations whose mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective, working collectively and independently to influence policy and practice. Contributing to this mission, ICVA’s overall objective is to strengthen sustainable NGO engagement in the governance of the humanitarian sector, promoting more collective, principled and effective action, ensuring humanitarian strategy and policy better reflect operational and field realities.

ICVA’s Secretariat is based in Geneva, Switzerland, with regional representation in Africa (Nairobi, Kenya and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), Asia (Bangkok, Thailand) and the MENA region (Amman, Jordan). ICVA has over 100 members and three observers, comprised of international, regional and national NGOs. ICVA’s 2015 – 2018 strategy focuses on four priority topic areas for the network: forced displacement, humanitarian partnerships, humanitarian coordination and humanitarian financing.

Rationale, methodology & limitations

This independent review, undertaken by ODS from October – December 2016, identifies:

1. the impact of ICVA’s work;
2. its progress against key indicators outlined in its 2015-2018 strategy; and,
3. the added value ICVA brings to members.

Findings from this study will as well inform ICVA’s post 2018 Strategic Plan.

The study reviewed ICVA’s work across three key areas:

- Increasing NGO understanding of the humanitarian sector, policies and processes;
- Facilitating NGO engagement in the development of the humanitarian sector and its policies;
- Representing and amplifying NGO perspectives within the humanitarian sector.

The review analysed findings from:
- A comprehensive internal literature review;
- 29 key informant interviews with members and policymakers;
- An online survey (English, French and Arabic), circulated to ICVA’s membership, collecting 38 responses (38% of the membership - a relatively high participation rate);
- A roundtable held with five representatives of Geneva-based members;
- A roundtable held with four representatives of donor governments;
- Six case studies illustrating ICVA’s role in four policy processes and the in-depth experience of two ICVA members.

The study, gathering input from approximately 40% of ICVA’s members, does not represent an exhaustive evaluation, but rather an indicative snapshot of key findings and perspectives from members and other humanitarian actors.

Building on lessons from this exercise, annual studies will be undertaken to track the impact of ICVA’s work over time, with a particular emphasis on the impact of ICVA’s efforts to influence humanitarian policies.

Current as of December 2016
KEY FINDINGS

1. Increasing NGO understanding of the humanitarian sector, policies and processes

For NGOs to meaningfully engage in the humanitarian sector, NGOs must first understand the processes and mechanisms by which to engage. This first area of work represents ICVA’s efforts to increase NGOs’ understanding of policies and processes in the humanitarian sector. Primary activities include:

- Creating tools and learning products on specific aspects of the humanitarian sector, such as ICVA’s humanitarian financing and coordination learning streams

- Sharing information on policy processes, mechanisms and developments in the humanitarian policy agenda through analysis pieces and regular, accessible communications.

Overall findings (2016 – 2018):

- 87% of survey respondents reported that being a member of ICVA has contributed somewhat or significantly to their understanding of the humanitarian sector. Respondents from smaller (national and local) NGOs rated the activities somewhat higher than those from larger and international NGOs

- According to members, ICVA’s ability to disseminate information has reduced disparities in access to information between NGOs, governments and other humanitarian actors.

Additional key findings:

- According to large NGOs, ICVA has an important added value through monitoring and updating its members on processes they cannot follow on their own. Smaller and medium sized NGOs reported that receiving information was of most value - especially those organisations without a representative in Geneva.

- According to the survey, respondents indicated that information sharing (81%) and networking (68%) were the most important activities of ICVA.

- All NGOs reported the benefits from receiving “behind the scenes” updates from meetings and processes where ICVA has a seat at the table but individual members do not.

Q. As a result of participation in ICVA, how much has your organisation’s understanding of the policies and governance of the humanitarian sector improved in the past 3 years in relation to ICVA’s focus areas?

A. 92% reported an improvement

- Somewhat improved, 45%  
- Significantly improved, 42%  
- Other, 8%  
- A little improved, 5%
At least 150 NGOs (75% national and Southern NGOs, medium-sized NGOs and NGO fora) demonstrate increased understanding of humanitarian policies and organization of the aid sector.

- 38 member NGOs (out of which 36 National/Southern/Medium and fora) responded to the survey;
- 33 member NGOs (representing 87% of survey respondents) stated their involvement in ICVA has increased their understanding somewhat or significantly.
- 219 participants from three ICVA humanitarian financing learning stream webinars responded the sessions were somewhat or very useful to them.

Key analytical review, educational tools and guidelines for increased NGO understanding of the aid sector are disseminated to at least 5,000 aid workers

- ICVA learning stream short whiteboard videos viewed a total of 2,803 times.¹

Existing and new educational tools are disseminated to at least 5,000 aid workers via webinars, workshops, social media, ICVA websites, etc.

- A total of 1,844 registrants for four webinars held in 2016.²
- ICVA’s December Monthly Bulletin disseminated to 3,512 recipients.

### 2. Facilitating NGO engagement in the development of the humanitarian sector and its policies

Utilizing long established relationships with humanitarian actors, including its membership within the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC), ICVA acts as a bridge, promoting dialogue and engagement between NGOs and other humanitarian actors (including the UN and donors) on key humanitarian processes and policy developments. This second area of work represents the majority of ICVA’s activities, supporting NGOs to engage and meaningfully influence the humanitarian sector. Aligned to ICVA’s focus areas, key activities include:

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¹ [ICVA update] As of July 2017, whiteboard videos have been viewed a total of 5,239 times, representing an average of 19 views per day since the commencement of the learning stream in September 2016.

² [ICVA update] As of 15 June 2017, webinar recordings have been viewed a total of 5,248 times, representing an average of 19 views per day since the commencement of the learning stream in September 2016.
• **Forced Displacement:** Contributing to the development and roll out of the Global Compact on Refugees; influencing UNHCR and IOM’s partnership strategies and approaches; and coordinating NGO statements at UNHCR’s Standing and Executive Committee meetings.

• **Humanitarian Financing:** Improving NGO access to and conditions within the Country Based Pooled Fund and other pooled funds mechanisms; following the implementation of the Grand Bargain; simplifying and harmonizing donor conditions; and shaping overall humanitarian financing policies through co-chairing the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team.

• **Humanitarian Coordination:** Improving the IASC governance system as a standing invitee and NGO representative at the IASC Principal level, the Emergency Directors’ Group and the Working Group; and promoting a more inclusive and efficient leadership model and field coordination structures.

• **Humanitarian Partnership:** Following post-WHS processes, most notably the Humanitarian- Development nexus and the New Way of Working; strengthening dialogue between Member States and NGOs; strengthening dialogue between NGOs and regional inter-governmental organizations (e.g: African Union, ASEAN, League of Arab States, OIC) and key Member States (e.g: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, China, India); and strengthening the engagement between NGOs and governments at national levels hosting humanitarian action.

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<tr>
<th>Key indicator and target</th>
<th>Value as of December 2016</th>
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<td>At least 150 NGOs (75% national and Southern NGOs, medium-sized NGOs and NGO fora) participate actively in defining and influencing global humanitarian policies through and/or with ICVA.</td>
<td>249 NGOs were engaged in defining and influencing global humanitarian policies through or with ICVA in 2016.</td>
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<td>NGOs report an increased level of engagement in the development of the humanitarian sector and meaningful influence in policy elaboration.</td>
<td>83% of NGOs actively engaging classified themselves as National, Southern, or medium-sized international NGOs.</td>
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<td>NGO feedback confirms policies better reflect NGO perspectives, field realities and accountability to affected populations.</td>
<td>60% of survey respondents reported that working with ICVA helped them engage in the development of the humanitarian sector.</td>
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<td>42% of survey respondents felt that their representation in ICVA has improved.</td>
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<td>Feedback from interviews highlighted some cases where ICVA involvement resulted in outcomes aligned with NGO needs (Partner personnel costs), and some (Less Paper More Aid) where it has the potential for impact.</td>
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Overall findings:

• Although less than the first impact area (increasing NGO understanding), the facilitation of NGO engagement in policy processes was judged very positively.

• 60% of survey respondents felt that their ability to more actively engage & influence humanitarian policies has improved somewhat or significantly as a result of their engagement in ICVA.

Additional key findings:

• ICVA plays an important role in connecting NGOs with senior UN officials, especially in Geneva, and to some extent through the regional representations.

• Most interviewees reported that through ICVA they could contribute to policy processes that they could otherwise not have engaged. This was particularly important for the smaller and national NGOs and for processes which ICVA was the one of the few representatives of the NGO sector (such as the Grand Bargain). Large NGOs also saw value in ICVA’s representation at these processes, through complementing their own advocacy efforts.

• ICVA is recognized by donor agencies and UN as the “one stop shop” for organizing consultations or discussions with the NGO sector, often even on a very short notice.

3. Representing and amplifying NGO perspectives within the humanitarian sector

In addition to helping NGOs engage directly in policy processes, ICVA also acts on behalf of the NGO sector to increase the space and responsibility given to NGOs. This is achieved through:

• Participating in UN institutional and intergovernmental policy processes with and on behalf of the NGO community on several platforms of engagement.

• Conducting research on key humanitarian issues and developments.

• Advocating for NGO space and amplifying NGO expertise in key humanitarian forums and processes

Q. Do you feel that there has been an improvement in the past 3 years in the extent to which your organisation’s voice is represented by ICVA in policies of the humanitarian sector in relation to ICVA’s focus areas?

A. 65% reported an increase
Overall findings:

- The direct impact of ICVA's advocacy on the outcomes of negotiations is challenging to trace. This limitation is due to the complex nature of advocacy efforts and often confidential processes through which governments, the UN and others create their policy positions, compounded by the challenges of attributing impacts to one source of influence.

- However, **50% of survey respondents perceived the extent to which their organization's voice is represented by ICVA in policies of the humanitarian sector has improved somewhat or significantly.** Organizations whom answered “significantly” comprised of smaller or local NGOs.

Additional key findings:

- **Interviewees highly-appreciated the contributions of staff from ICVA's Secretariat, bringing professionalism and thorough understanding of the issues at hand, along with the diplomatic skills to defuse some potentially disruptive conflicts.**

- **There is a degree of internal tension between the constituencies of ICVA.** Despite increased efforts, southern NGOs interviewed reported they often do not feel sufficiently heard and represented within the network. In most negotiations, ICVA amplifies NGO perspectives - often involving a diversity of viewpoints which are synthesized by the Secretariat.

- **The membership was also not unanimous in their vision for the future of the development of common positions.** Some members would like the Secretariat to be more propositional, taking a stronger leadership role in developing draft positions. Others would welcome more consultation and increased effort to represent the voices of Southern and smaller members.

- **ICVA has often acted as a form of trade union, “taking the brunt” for confrontational positions and functioning as a third party in zero-sum negotiations.** The collective voice also has a multiplier effect; interviewees recognized the impact of ICVA in these processes is larger than the sum of individual NGOs. This has led to important achievements, such as negotiating the UNHCR salary cap or the Less Paper More Aid initiative on reporting requirements.

- **An interviewee from Mercy Malaysia stated the most significant added value of ICVA is the representation of the voice of smaller local and regional NGOs, who would have very little traction in policy processes on their own. “Being a member of ICVA gives us the possibility to influence changes in the way the humanitarian sector works, to be part of the big scheme of things. It also gives us additional credibility to have our voices heard through ICVA, and ICVA makes sure that these voices are heard by the right people”.**

- **In relation to the Grand Bargain, ICVA’s advocacy efforts resulted in success at an early stage, by lobbying for NGO engagement in the Grand Bargain negotiations.** Following lobbying efforts by ICVA, negotiations initially limited to the top humanitarian aid donors and UN agencies was expanded to include 15 donors and 15 aid agencies. This group included three NGO consortia (ICVA, InterAction and SCHR), ensuring NGO perspectives were included in this process.

- **In the final lead up to the World Humanitarian Summit, ICVA coordinated a set of key NGO messages for each High Level Leaders’ Roundtable.** The briefing notes, were well received by partners, with one government representative reporting they had used them whilst preparing their own positions. The briefing notes offered a unique opportunity for NGOs to have their voice represented in the High-Level Roundtables. For many NGOs, this represented the only vehicle through which they could contribute into this process.
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND ICVA ACTIONS

1. Increasing NGO understanding of the humanitarian sector, policies and processes

The review identified a number of recommendations to further increase ICVA’s impact in this area, including for ICVA to continue ensuring information shared is accessible, easy to understand and visually appealing (such as using infographics, photos etc). Respondents recommended ICVA publish an annual work plan with clear objectives and sufficient space to respond to emerging priorities.

ICVA action:
⇒ ICVA’s Board reviews and approves the annual work plan. From 2018 onwards, ICVA’s annual work plan will be published on its website and an comprehensive brochure has been created.

2. Facilitating NGO engagement in the development of the humanitarian sector and its policies

- ICVA should continue efforts to organize meetings with policymakers at national and UN levels in a more structured manner.
- ICVA should strive to provide increasingly systematic and structured debriefs following missions.

ICVA action:
⇒ ICVA is striving to ensure consistent and structure feedback and debriefs following key meetings and events, whilst remaining nimble and flexible.

3. Representing and amplifying NGO perspectives within the humanitarian sector

Recommendations identified within this area of work included for ICVA to:
- More clearly communicate its strategy of being either predominantly propositional or consultative when creating policy positions with members.
- Continue concerted efforts to foster stronger engagement of smaller and Southern members in the development of common positions.
- To remain closely involved in the follow-up in global policy processes of 2016, such as the New Way of Working and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.

ICVA action:
⇒ ICVA has developed a policy to guide the development of positions on humanitarian debates, which outlines the various processes taken to develop position according to their implications and sensitivity.
⇒ Key organizational indicators developed in 2016 state targets, aiming for 75% of NGOs engaged in ICVA activities to be from small, medium size and national NGOs.
⇒ Increased recent investment in ICVA’s regional hubs will assist in connecting members to each other within the regions.
4. Thematic Focus

- The review confirmed the **current four strategic focus areas** (forced displacement, humanitarian financing, humanitarian coordination and partnerships) were well regarded by the members and those interviewed and will continue as priorities in ICVA’s post-2018 strategy.

- Members, government and UN policymakers suggested processes and areas which would welcome a stronger involvement from ICVA, including the **localization agenda**, shrinking civil society space, the humanitarian development nexus and the Global Compacts on migration and refugees.

5. Communications and membership

- The review confirmed that **ICVA needs to dedicate additional resources to developing more effective and clear communications and a forward-looking membership strategy**. This recommendation is being actioned through a review of ICVA’s communication tools and membership documentation and processes.

- Further, **ICVA should continue its efforts to become a more dynamic network**. Currently, interactions follow a hub-and-spokes model, driven by the Secretariat. Opportunities should be fostered for members to interact together and support each other, with minimal involvement from the secretariat.

**ICVA action:**

⇒ In line with membership requests, ICVA has increased its engagement in 2017 in each of the abovementioned policy areas.

**ICVA action:**

⇒ ICVA is considering the investment of additional resources into its communication strategy, products and outreach during 2017.
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