

ICVA CASE STUDY #3

ADVOCACY FOR THE SAHEL REGION

Short summary of the case study:

ICVA has been focusing on and ensuring support to members working in the Sahel for a number of years. The establishment of its first Africa regional office in Dakar confirms this emphasis. After the relocation of the Dakar office to Nairobi, ICVA's priority on the Sahel has continued. Through various meetings in 2019, including the Council of the European Union COHAFSA under the Finnish presidency and the IASC, ICVA advocated for additional support in the Sahel region to improve the humanitarian situation. Regional-level advocacy and country-level support of NGO forums are two of the key areas of emphasis of ICVA, elaborated in more detail below. ICVA activities in the Sahel are undertaken in view of the worsening humanitarian situation in the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), exacerbating levels of poverty, social exclusion, food security, migration, urbanisation, rapid population growth, and violent extremism.

Timeline of the initiative:

The Dakar Regional Office was established in 2013, under the host arrangement with Plan International, to respond to developments in the Sahel, and subsequently to the Ebola outbreak in 2014-2016. In 2017 the Dakar office was closed and merged with the new ICVA Regional Office in Nairobi, hosted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC). ICVA has placed increased priority in the Sahel region, with initiatives in various operational and representational areas.

ICVA's role and influence:

In line with the constant deterioration of the situation in the sub-region, ICVA has ensured support to members working there. ICVA has been influential in networking, cross-border messaging, supporting country-level forums, and linking NGOs to the UN, IASC, ECOSOC, and regional bodies and forums. Some examples follow:

Regional-level and country-level advocacy:

- **IASC Principals:** In May 2019, an ICVA mission (Executive Director and Regional Representative for Africa) to Mali produced field perspectives on the situation in Mali and the Sahel region. This led to discussion on the Sahel region at an IASC Principals meeting in late May, focusing on humanitarian challenges in countries of the Sahel. ICVA then arranged an update on the Sahel

for its members. The UNHCR High Commissioner in a meeting with ICVA in June 2019 gave a briefing which included one item on the Sahel.

- **Council of the European Union Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA):** In September 2019, the ICVA Executive Director gave a presentation to COHAFA, highlighting the serious challenges in the Sahel, with devastating consequences on civilians, peace and stability in the region. It focused on five priorities for the Council's attention: humanitarian access; failure to address policies; support to local and national leadership; security approaches, and strategic and principled use of resources. The presentation was shared with the ECHO office, with which some shared concerns were agreed. This led to exchange of regular updates between the ICVA regional representation and the ECHO regional office in Dakar.
- **ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS):** In June 2020, ICVA supported the international non-governmental organisation (INGO) forum in Mali to participate on a high-level panel, "Transition Event from Relief to Development" moderated by Robert Piper, UN Assistant Secretary-General, Development Cooperation Office. The panel considered achievements, challenges, and opportunities to strengthen collaboration at country, regional and global levels.
- **West and Central Africa Regional IASC** (based in Dakar and comprising UN, NGO, and donor regional directors): In July 2020, the Forum of INGOs in Mali (FONGIM – Groupe de Travail Humanitaire), in collaboration with ICVA, gave a presentation on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in Mali.

Support to the region and countries, including national NGO forums:

Overall, ICVA country-level action in the Sahel has been organised around the regional crisis, bringing ICVA added value to members and more broadly to NGOs and the aid community, contributing to raising the region's humanitarian profile and focus from donors, and allowing for a sounder and more coordinated response. Much of ICVA's work is in supporting national forums. Some country activities are as follows:

- **Burkina Faso:** ICVA supported the work of the Burkina Faso INGO forum GOAH (Groupe des ONG pour l'Aide Humanitaire), emphasising the magnitude of the crisis to the international community and donors. The work was carried out in collaboration with UN OCHA, with support from the mission of the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator (DERC) and NGOs at the Emergency Directors Group (EDG) level, and the UN Joint Steering Committee (JSC) mission in the country (UNDP crisis bureau and OCHA). The work included advocacy to include the country in EDG calls, and supporting NGOs in emergency meetings with the Resident Coordinator and Deputy RC. ICVA worked to ensure that the Humanitarian Coordinator role was assigned to the Resident Coordinator. ICVA also advocated with donors to ensure that GOAH was funded appropriately.
- **Mali:** ICVA contributed in positioning the Sahel as a regional crisis, in the Horizon Scanning Exercise carried out by the UN Principals, following a mission of the ICVA Executive Director and Regional Representative for Africa to Mali. The mission included meetings and exchanges with member NGOs, national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs) and the INGO forum (with 35 members), donors and UN agencies, including the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator.
- **Chad and Lake Chad Basin:** In Chad ICVA carried out several missions in 2019 driven by two main elements: the general situation in the country and in the Lake Chad Basin, and the opportunity and interest in the Whole of Society Approach. Chad is also one of several countries experiencing

progressively restrictive civic space laws, and as such NGOs have seen their space reduced. ICVA is contributing by sharing information on NGO issues with organisations based in Chad. A final mission at the end of the year was dedicated to scanning the NNGOs' environment in the country and identifying opportunities for improved coordination and collective action. ICVA also co-facilitated workshops in Ndjamena on the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

- **Cameroon:** As part of the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, Cameroon is experiencing a similar situation as other Sahel countries, in terms of displacement and violence. The crisis scenario is three-fold: violent extremism in the far north in the Sahel region; instability in northeast Nigeria, and problems in Anglophone areas. Cameroon is also affected by volatility in areas hosting refugees from the Central African Republic. ICVA was instrumental in helping to establish an NNGO forum (Cameroon Humanitarian NNGO Initiative). A second, INGO forum was also established (Cameroon Humanitarian INGO Forum), after it was decided to have two separate, but connected, forums.
- **Niger:** In line with its pivotal position in the migration crisis and its exposure to the Lake Chad Basin crisis, ICVA has enhanced relations with the NGOs working in the country.
- **Sudan:** As part of the Sahel and in light of the political situation in the country, ICVA has included Sudan in the list of countries, advocating activities to support NGO collective action, particularly through the INGO forum.
- **Senegal:** The regional IASC forum in Dakar meets every six weeks, chaired by UN OCHA. An INGO is now chairing the regional IASC. There is no separate INGO forum. UN OCHA looks to the INGOs and ICVA for guidance on advocacy issues. Most INGOs have a regional presence in Dakar.

How the process and outcome reflected ICVA's priorities, and related to the Theory of Change:

Three of the "Top Outcomes" in the ICVA Theory of Change have been positively influenced through the work of ICVA in the Sahel:

- **Cross-cutting issues:** NGOs navigate and influence changes in the response to affected populations. Policies and systems improve. ICVA supports NGOs, and NGO alliances. Alliances strategise and reach out to decision-makers.
- **Coordination:** Coordination contributes to effective assistance and protection to those affected by crises. NGOs actively engage in coordination mechanisms, leading to collective and strengthened NGO ability to influence these mechanisms.
- **Forced migration:** NGOs form alliances on forced migration issues. NGOs connect to key stakeholders to influence, collaborate and exchange.

How the work has influenced the humanitarian sector:

With the help of ICVA, including its advocacy work, the voices of NGOs have been kept high on the agenda. There is increased joint planning and evaluation, and increased prominence and impact of the country NGO forums. Efforts have been made to get NGOs more involved at regional IASC levels. ICVA

advocacy has also led to increased NGO involvement both regionally and globally, in such bodies as COHAFA, the IASC Principals, and ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs.

What has been the positive impact so far?

ICVA has been instrumental in having the Sahel viewed as a region and not as a collection of individual countries. Three factors justify this regional approach:

- Underdevelopment affects all countries in the region, including nutrition and food security problems, and general insecurity;
- With some 70 % of the population in the Sahel 17 years old and younger, it is forecast that the regional population will double in 17 years, with corresponding stress on and implications for unemployment and poverty (source: UNFPA), and
- Following from the above, the phenomenon of unregulated migration of persons from the Sahel, exposing people to abuses, will increase.

ICVA has been advocating this regional approach in a number of forums summarized above – IASC, ECOSOC HAS, and the Council of the European Union. INGOs have valued hearing from ICVA on developments in UN structural reform and other issues, and on bringing them together on specific Sahel-related advocacy issues.

What could be further improved?

- The Sahel region was more easily covered by ICVA in the past when its Dakar office was in place. Resources permitting, an ICVA presence in Central/West Africa would allow for more effective coverage. It is noted that several arrangements were under discussion, such as additional staff, a secondment, or requesting an ICVA member to represent ICVA in the region.
- ICVA documents (and those of most other organisations) are largely in the English language, although some key information has been translated into French, Spanish, Arabic and Chinese. In most countries in the Sahel Region and Central Africa, French is the predominant language, and knowledge of another international language is minimal. This presents serious operational and linguistic handicaps. The COVID-19 documents were circulated in English, creating a handicap for many French language speakers in the region.

The way forward – some recommendations:

- **Regional presence:** With only two small offices in Africa (Nairobi and Addis Ababa), and with a large number of ICVA members in the continent, consideration should be given by ICVA to provide more resources to this huge region. It is noted that Senegal continues to be a hub for a large number of international NGOs, intergovernmental and UN agencies, and is easily accessible to Sahel countries. It is felt that ICVA could be even more effective if it had a presence in Dakar, including support to a regional NGO forum there. It is noted that this recommendation would be even more relevant in non-COVID-19 times, as with current restrictions work is being carried out remotely.

- **Forum support:** Similarly, given the growth and prominence of the NGO forums in the Sahel region, facilitated by ICVA, and the positive impact generated by their acknowledged focus on collective action, additional resources and support for the forums should be envisaged.
- **Translation:** Translation of key ICVA and related documents into other major languages, such as French for the Sahel region, should be considered.
- **Visibility:** It is felt by some that ICVA is not well known in this region, and should do more to make known its work. In Mali, for example, very few of the NGOs based there know what ICVA is or does (in Mali there are 15 ICVA members). Regional dissemination of advocacy updates was one example of what could be done to increase visibility.