



+ twenty-five years

...and beyond

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ICVA at Twenty-five ...and Beyond

On 6 March 1987, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) commemorates 25 years of cooperation between non-governmental, multilateral and governmental organizations world-wide.

Initially the result of a merger in 1962 between the Conference of Non-governmental Organizations Interested in Migration, the Standing Conference of Voluntary Organizations Working for Refugees, and the International Committee for World Refugee Year, ICVA today brings together over 80 member organizations, all of which are engaged in activities of a humanitarian and/or developmental nature.

One of the main purposes of the merger was to build upon the spirit of cooperation and consultation which had been fostered by the founding members in refugee matters, extending it to all areas of voluntary agency activity that could benefit from a permanent international liaison structure.

This 25th anniversary document attests to the vitality of an organization growing in membership and addressing the most salient issues of concern to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in humanitarian assistance and development cooperation.

General Conferences

At least once every five years, ICVA members meet in a General Conference to elect a new Governing Board and discuss cooperation on major issues of concern.

The 1981 General Conference held in Sri Lanka was particularly notable for being the first in ICVA's history to be held in a Third World country. The Conference was opened by Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa. The overall theme for discussion was *The Role of Voluntary Agencies in Building a New World Community*.

Following the Sri Lanka Conference, ICVA's work was focussed on the unfolding economic and social crisis in Africa. By organizing its General

Conference for 1985 in Dakar, Senegal, ICVA wished not only to emphasize its concern for the human tragedies on that continent, but also to highlight the pivotal role of African voluntary agencies in relief and recovery efforts. The theme of the conference, which was inaugurated by President Abdou Diouf, was *Development in an Age of Economic and Social Crisis: the Challenge to Voluntary Agencies*.

The next General Conference is planned to take place in Latin America.

Special ICVA Consultations

At the request of its members, ICVA convenes, or organizes in cooperation with other organizations, special consultations on salient issues of concern. Some recent events included:

- Consultation of national and international voluntary agencies involved in Resettlement of Refugees from Indo-China and/or Assistance to Refugees in Camps in Southeast Asia (1979).
- Conference on the Plight of Non-Bengalis in Bangladesh Who Opt to Go to Pakistan (1982).
- Consultation on Scholarships for African Refugees (1982).
- OAU Secretariat/ICVA Meeting for Voluntary Agencies

Involved in Refugee Assistance in Africa (1983).

- Voluntary Agency Meeting on the Drought in Africa (1984).
- Voluntary Agency Consultation on Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central America and Mexico (1984, 1985 and 1986).
- NGO Consultation on the Emergency Situation in the Horn of Africa and in Sudan (1985).
- Workshop on NGOs in Africa jointly sponsored with the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (Geneva) and the International Coalition for Development Action (1985).
- Redd Barna/ICVA Symposium on the Care and Placement of Unaccompanied Minors Displaced by War, Natural Disasters or Refugee Situations (1985).

On the occasion of its 25th Anniversary, ICVA has initiated a process of serious reflection on a number of major humanitarian and developmental issues by organizing Round Table discussions involving key individuals from governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental sectors on the:

- Problems of Protection of and Assistance to Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Light of Current Institutional and Legal Frameworks; and,
- Future of Development Assistance and the Role of NGOs.

Governing Board, Working Groups and Sub-Groups

Composed of 20 elected or co-opted member agencies, ICVA's Governing Board oversees the activities of the organization in between General Conferences. In addition to approving and monitoring the budget, the Governing Board establishes working groups, receives reports from them, discusses substantive issues and determines the collective views of the Council. In recent years, the Governing Board has concentrated specifically on: increasing Third World membership; promoting national and regional NGO councils; discussing issues such as the effects of the international debt crisis on the poor; improving the response of the international community to natural and man-

made disasters; issuing statements on humanitarian concerns, in particular, on situations such as East Timor and Lebanon; clarifying the apolitical nature of humanitarian organizations; and, defining the term *voluntary agency*.

Much of ICVA's substantive work is carried out within working groups and sub-groups. Following the General Conference in Dakar, two working groups were constituted: Refugees and Migration; and Development Issues. Each working group has established a number of sub-groups and *ad hoc* groups on special issues: refugees and displaced persons in and from Central America and Mexico; economic and social crisis in Africa; Middle East;

Southern Africa; refugee children and adolescents; food issues; population, the environment and natural resources; management of NGOs; and China.

Working groups and sub-groups normally meet twice yearly alternating between Geneva and another venue. They provide an international forum for member agencies to discuss issues, exchange information on specific situations or projects, develop common perceptions and undertake joint activities. These groups frequently utilize the *lead agency* approach in which one or more agencies with particular expertise or interest are designated to study specific topics, prepare papers or organize consultations.

Working groups frequently initiate discussion and develop positions which are eventually adopted by the Governing Board as ICVA standing policy documents or statements.

ICVA has established a special fund to facilitate the participation of Third World agencies in its activities. This fund has been particularly useful in involving Third World representatives in the ICVA Governing Board, working group and sub-group meetings.

Relations with Intergovernmental Organizations

In recent years, ICVA has focussed much attention on improving collaboration between intergovernmental organizations and voluntary agencies. Today, it acts as the principal NGO liaison body for a growing number of intergovernmental organizations. Some examples:

- **World Bank:** The World Bank/NGO Committee was established in 1981 to foster dialogue and cooperation between the Bank and NGOs on such issues as development policy, operational cooperation, food security and the debt crisis. ICVA provides the secretariat for NGO members of the Committee,

which include a majority of ICVA members. NGO members of this committee have constituted themselves into an NGO Working Group on the World Bank which is an *ad hoc* committee of ICVA.

- **Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (DAC):** ICVA has cooperated with DAC and its member governments to organize meetings on collaboration between governments and NGOs. In addition, ICVA and some of its members have been invited to plan and participate in seminars and meetings organized by DAC.

- **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):** ICVA frequently initiates and/or jointly organizes meetings between UNHCR and voluntary organizations both at the time of the annual meeting of the UNHCR Executive Committee and on specific subjects such as collaboration in project implementation and the development approach to refugee situations. A series of *round table* talks with UNHCR have been held on various refugee situations. These are sometimes followed by ICVA missions to the countries of a region, such as Central America.

● **United Nations Office for Emergency Operations in Africa (OEOA):** OEOA was established as a temporary office in 1984 by the United Nations Secretary General in response to the emergency situation in Africa with the aim to better coordinate the efforts of the UN system and the international community. In July 1985, at ICVA's initiative, an NGO Consultative Group to OEOA was set up to facilitate ongoing consultations on an international level. In addition, ICVA actively lobbied the UN Secretary-General to set up, in the light of the OEOA experience, mechanisms for that organization's future response to special emergencies.

● **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):** Throughout the years, ICVA has convened meetings for NGOs with individual UNDP Resident Representatives visiting Geneva. In 1986, an ICVA delegation met with the Administrator and senior staff of UNDP to review the status of cooperation between that organization and NGOs and to discuss ways to improve working relations, particularly in the field.

● **Intergovernmental Committee for Migration (ICM):** ICVA regularly delivers a statement at the ICM Council sessions and participates actively in the planning committee for ICM seminars on migration.

● **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD):** In 1986, IFAD and ICVA jointly sponsored a meeting between IFAD officials and operational NGOs to discuss collaboration in the implementation of IFAD's special programme for sub-Saharan Africa. Following the meeting, ICVA is cooperating with IFAD to elaborate guidelines for NGO cooperation with that organization.

● **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA):** Periodic consultations are jointly organized by UNRWA and ICVA either at UNRWA headquarters in Vienna or in the Middle East, at which

such issues as cooperation with NGO's, employment and training, income-generation, health, fund-raising, protection, and information exchange are discussed.

● **World Food Programme (WFP):** At the request of the World Food Programme, ICVA participated in a WFP mission to the Thai/Kampuchean border in 1986 in order to assess the international relief programme to vulnerable groups there, and the NGO involvement specifically.

Relations with Third World Governments

ICVA has a strong tradition of cooperation with governments, particularly in the Third World, in order to strengthen the collaboration between the latter and NGOs. In recent years a number of countries have been concerned including:

- **Angola:** A meeting between NGOs and the Minister of Social Affairs of this country was organized recently by ICVA in order to review some of the acute needs and to explore ways in which voluntary agencies could assist in meeting such needs.

- **Benin:** ICVA assisted in promoting the attendance of voluntary agencies at the Benin Round Table (1983) organized

to discuss the *New Substantial Programme of Action* recommended by the UN Conference on Least Developed Countries.

- **China:** A consultation convened by ICVA for Chinese Government officials, UNDP/Beijing and NGOs was organized to explore the possibility of establishing NGO programmes in China. Following the meeting, ICVA participated in two exploratory missions to that country which identified and elaborated potential NGO projects for minority groups.

- **Ethiopia:** ICVA was invited by the Government to send a mission to the Ogaden and the southern region to assess the

situation of persons displaced by war and drought and of refugees returning from Somalia.

- **Honduras:** At the request of its members, ICVA sent a mission to Honduras in 1985 to investigate a military attack on a refugee camp and to discuss with the Honduran authorities cooperation with voluntary agencies in preventing similar actions of this kind.

- **Somalia:** A meeting of voluntary agencies was organized in Geneva in cooperation with Government officials to discuss the massive problem of refugees in that country.

● **Sudan:** ICVA has organized in Geneva a number of meetings with the Sudanese authorities, including the Vice-President of that country. In addition, special assistance was given to the Sudanese Refugee Commissioner in preparation for an international conference on the refugee situation in Sudan.

● **Uganda:** In cooperation with one of its members, Euro Action-ACORD, ICVA organized a meeting in 1979 between NGOs and the Minister of Culture, Rehabilitation and Community Development to discuss cooperation on meeting the relief and rehabilitation needs in that country.

● **Tunisia:** At the request of the Minister of Social Affairs, ICVA convened an information session for intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations on the government's *Productive Family Programme*.

Joint Statements and Guidelines

In addition to exchanging views and information on matters of common interest, ICVA members establish collective views on certain issues to inform the international community of their concerns. Some examples include

- **Statement on the Indo-Chinese Refugee Problem (1979):** Prior to a meeting convened by the United Nations Secretary-General on the Indo-chinese refugee problem, ICVA organized a consultation of voluntary agencies on the issue and prepared a collective statement for the UN meeting.

- **Recommendations Concerning Unaccompanied Refugee Minors from South East Asia.** One of the concrete results of the ICVA consultation on the Indo-Chinese refugee problem was the development of recommendations by an ICVA sub-group for UNHCR and governments on the particular problems of unaccompanied refugee minors from South-East Asia.

- **The World's Food - Ten Years After: An NGO Perspective:** At the request of the World Food Council (WFC), ICVA prepared an NGO assessment on developments since the 1974 World Food Conference.

The report, based on contributions from some 30 ICVA member and non-member agencies, was submitted to WFC for use as an official document at its 10th ministerial session held in Ethiopia in June 1984.

- **Statements** to the International Conferences on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA I and II) advocating a development approach to refugee assistance.
- **Statements** to annual sessions of the Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

- **Regular Statements** to the Council of the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration.

- **Statement** to the UN Conference on the Emergency Situation in Africa.

- **Statement** to the 1986 Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the Critical Economic Situation in Africa issued by ICVA's Governing Board on the negative effects of debt adjustment policies on the poor.

- **Guidelines:** In 1984/1985 two of ICVA's working groups prepared substantive papers concerned with the NGO approach to development

projects and their financing. The Governing Board endorsed these papers as ICVA Standing Policy Documents and they were widely disseminated as:

- **Guidelines for Improving the Quality of Projects in the Third World Funded by Non-governmental Organizations;** and,

- **Suggested Guidelines on the Acceptance of Government Funds for NGO Programmes.**

ICVA has a long tradition of, and experience in, promoting NGO cooperative initiatives in many different fields. Such initiatives have often developed into special programmes.

Involvement in NGO management development began in 1984 when ICVA launched a series of management training workshops designed for senior NGO executives from regional or national coordinating bodies. The experience gained in organizing these workshops and in participating in several other management programmes led to the establishment in 1985 of a special programme – *Management for Development* – to promote and facilitate management services for NGOs world-wide.

Soon after the creation of the programme, ICVA invited a number of other NGO coordinating bodies to co-sponsor a seminar on the theme *Management Development and Training: Recent Experience and Future Priorities*. The principal outcome of the seminar was the creation of the *NGO Management Network*.

ICVA provides the interim secretariat for the NGO Management Network, which it helped to initiate in February 1986. On behalf of the Network, it publishes a quarterly newsletter *NGO Management*, operates a resource centre and information service on management issues and organizes international and regional seminars for NGO

managers and management specialists.

A principal objective of the Network is to foster sub-regional and national networks as focal points for NGO management development.

Publications

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In addition to some of the publications already mentioned, the following is a list of ICVA material produced in recent years:

- African Refugees - A Challenge to the World
- Note on the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II)
- Timely Solutions: Voluntary Agencies and African Refugees
- Compendia on Assistance to African Refugees by Voluntary Organizations
- Report on a Voluntary Agency Meeting on the Drought in Africa
- The Debt and the Poor in Sub-Saharan Africa
- Disasters and Development: Possible Cooperation Between the World Bank and NGOs
- A New Approach to World Bank/NGO Cooperation
- Concise History of the World Bank/NGO Committee
- Associations and Committees Serving Voluntary Agencies at the Country Level
- Development in an Age of Economic and Social Crisis: The Challenge to Voluntary Agencies (Report of the ICVA General Conference 1985)
- ICVA NEWS, ICVA INFORMATIONS, and ICVA NOTICIAS (appearing six times per year)
- ICVA at a Glance
- ICVA Member Agency Profiles
- Annual Reports, Summary Records and Reports on ICVA activities
- Commissioned reports on: the drought in Ethiopia; ICARA II follow-up by NGOs; and voluntary agency perspectives on refugee aid and development.

The Future

In the twenty-five years of its existence, ICVA has established itself as a major voice for voluntary agencies and their concerns in the fields of humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. Voluntary agencies recognize this fact as evidenced by an expanding membership in ICVA, particularly from the Third World. Its representational role is also gauged by the recognition of the Council by a growing number of governments and multilateral agencies. This acknowledgement is a reflection of the significant role NGOs are playing in international humanitarian and developmental relations.

ICVA is fully conscious of the fact that it has no *raison d'être* independent of its constituency. It exists solely to promote the development and strengthening of NGOs world-wide and to act on their behalf to articulate their concerns.

Since the major issues of concern to voluntary agencies today (and in the foreseeable future) are in relation to the Third World, ICVA's focus will naturally be on the *South*. In this context, a priority for the Council will be to promote the development of Third World NGOs. This is being done through the establishment of regional, and eventually national, NGO management networks as a means to stimulate their self-improvement and self-sufficiency. Governments in the Third World and intergovernmental organizations still do not

have an adequate appreciation of the crucial role Third World NGOs play in the development process. ICVA will strive in various fora for greater recognition of *Southern* NGOs by governments and multilateral agencies. At the regional and national levels, ICVA will continue to support the establishment of NGO consultative mechanisms as a means of promoting greater collaboration among NGOs and with governments and intergovernmental organizations.

As Third World NGOs develop, the emphasis of *external* NGOs will shift from a direct operational role to one of support to southern counterparts. As this takes place, *Northern* and *international* NGOs will have to play a more active advocacy role with their governments and multilateral agencies in promoting relevant aid, trade, financial and humanitarian policies which are more equitable to the peoples of the Third World. ICVA's involvement in advocacy of these issues must grow if the Council is to remain relevant in the future.

Voluntary agencies embody the principle of free association of individuals for the purpose of human betterment. As such, they are a fundamental expression of democratic societies. One major positive development over the past quarter century has been the emergence of a voluntary sector in most newly independent countries. ICVA is proud to have contributed to this development, and will endeavour to ensure that this growing voluntary spirit flourishes!

Support

As an international association of voluntary agencies, ICVA receives financial support first and foremost from its member agencies in the form of annual membership fees and contributions for special projects. In addition, a number of governments, multilateral organizations and foundations have recognized the representational and facilitating role played by the Council and are contributing to its regular programmes and/or special projects. In recent years, principal *external* donors have included the:

- Australian Development Assistance Bureau;
- Canadian International Development Agency;
- Ford Foundation;
- Intergovernmental Committee for Migration;
- Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;
- Swedish International Development Authority; and,
- World Bank.

Action Aid • Adventist Development and Relief Agency, International • African Association for Literacy and Adult Education • All Africa Conference of Churches • American Council for Nationalities Service • American Friends Service Committee • American Joint Distribution Committee • Asian Institute for Rural Development • Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development • Association de coopération internationale au développement • Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development • Austcare • Australian Council for Overseas Aid • Baptist World Alliance • British Refugee Council • Canadian Council for International Cooperation • CARE International • Catholic Relief Services • Christian Children's Fund • Church World Service • Comité européen d'aide aux réfugiés • CONCERN • Conseil des organisations non gouvernementales d'appui au développement • Danish Refugee Council • Deutsche Welthungerhilfe • Diakonia • Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church • Euro Action-ACORD • The Experiment in International Living • Find Your Feet • Food for the Hungry International • Foster Parents Plan International • Free China Relief Association • HelpAge International • HIAS • Individuell Människohjälp • InterAction • International Catholic Child Bureau • International Catholic Migration Commission • International Federation for Family Life Promotion • International Planned Parenthood Federation • International Rescue Committee • International Social Service • Islamic African Relief Agency • Jesuit Refugee Service • Jewish Agency for Israel • Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service • Lutheran World Federation • Maendeleo ya Wanawake • Movimento Sviluppo e Pace • Norwegian Refugee Council • NOVIB • Ockenden Venture • OISCA-International • OXFAM • Rädda Barnen • Raphaels-Werk • Redd Barna • Rural Development Foundation of Pakistan • The Salvation Army • Sarvodaya • Save the Children • Save the Children Fund • Solidarios • Technoserve • Tolstoy Foundation • Union nationale des maisons familiales rurales d'éducation et d'orientation • World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations • World Concern • World Council of Churches • World ORT Union • World University Service • World Vision International • Zambia Council for Social Development • ZOA Vluchtelingen zorg