



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

WHAT ROLE SHOULD ICVA PLAY IN ENHANCING MEMBER’S WORK ON GENDER IN EMERGENCIES?

A Scoping Study

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Introduction and Purpose

This scoping study was commissioned by ICVA in response to requests from members to improve its inclusion of gender considerations and explore how to operationalise its [Diversity Policy](#), approved in 2019. The purpose of this Policy is to reinforce ICVA's longstanding commitment to diversity, with a specific focus on:

- Consideration of Gender: focusing on girls, women, boys and men; Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA); and protection against violence due to sexual orientation and gender identity;
- Consideration of age: the rights of the child and considerations for the elderly;
- Disability and the rights of persons with disabilities.

Following the approval of the Diversity Policy, ICVA Secretariat's team increased its efforts to better support members in inclusion of age and disabilities considerations, with activities such as: co-organising the Annual UNICEF-NGO humanitarian partnership consultations; participating in the Reference Group on inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action; contributing to the development of various policy and technical guidance on child rights and rights of persons with disabilities; as well as organising various webinars to share the information and discuss these documents and their implementation with members and other relevant actors.

On gender considerations, however, the ICVA's Secretariat team's work has so far remained limited to PSEA and participation and contribution to the GenCap.¹ While a lot has been achieved on both subjects and the Secretariat will continue to invest in them, discussions among members and the Secretariat team have concluded not only in identification of the need for better inclusion of gender considerations, but also in a request by members for the Secretariat to do more in this regard.

This report presents the results of research undertaken by Plan International on behalf of the ICVA Secretariat in 2021. The findings seek to answer two central questions: 1) to what extent and how do ICVA members' work on gender equality in emergencies? 2) How can ICVA improve in order to support members' work on gender equality in emergencies?

Summary

Among ICVA members who participated in this study, gender equality is a key strategic priority and a core part of their mandate. They face numerous challenges to translate this into practice, many of which are systemic to humanitarian structures, despite policies to the contrary. This confirms the findings from other recent studies which have shown that a shift in staffing, leadership, and political will within humanitarian organizations is the only way to achieve real change.² For ICVA, this could

¹ The **Gender Standby Capacity Project** (GenCap) is an Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) initiative that was established in 2007. Its mission is to strengthen inter-agency capacity and leadership to deliver on commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian action. ICVA participates in the GenCap advisory board.

² See for example: IAHE Steering Group, 'The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls,' 2020. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluations/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-iahe-gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-and-girls-geewg-2020>

be reflected in the continuation of the localization work and the amplification of gender-progressive CSOs.

This scoping study finds that ICVA is currently engaged in a number of workstreams that contribute to or are complementary with the gender equality in humanitarian action agenda, such as the strong work with local women-led organizations, but that more should be done to A) capitalize on the gains and opportunities presented, and B) respond to the requests from ICVA members to support them.

These requests align well with ICVA's stated 'five activities' with the most important being around convening partners for learning opportunities, connecting members with expertise, and ensuring that an ICVA staff member holds a 'file' for gender equality so that it is resourced and tracked. National members in particular would benefit from connections with other members with expertise and with donors.

Methodology

A desk review of specialised and grey literature was conducted, along with key informant interviews. A total of twenty-two interviews have been conducted with twenty-five people between April and September 2021. The interviews comprised of six ICVA staff, staff from eight national NGOs, staff from four international NGOs and four other relevant individual practitioners who are not NGO affiliated. They were chosen for interview through recommendation from the ICVA secretariat because of their active engagement on gender equality work, and to ensure representation from all the ICVA regions.

The following organizations were interviewed:

*Resource Center for Gender Equality
Lebanon (ABAAD)
Abs Development Organisation for women
and children
Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network
(APRRN)
HAMI-Association for Protection of Refugee
women and children*

*Refugee Consortium of Kenya
Somalia NGO Consortium
International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI)
ActionAid International
FM4 Paso Libre
Care International
Women's Refugee Commission
Plan International*

The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, were held virtually, and were semi-structured. All remarks have been anonymised. Notes were taken with verbal and informed consent from each interviewee.

1. To what extent and how do ICVA members work on gender equality in emergencies?

1.1 Context

Humanitarian crises exacerbate pre-existing gender inequality, disproportionately affecting girls and women, and those living at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities such as sexual

Women's Refugee Commission: 'Gender Transformative Change in Humanitarian Action: A View from Inside', , 2021, <http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Gender-Transformative-Change-in-Humanitarianism-View-from-Inside.pdf>

orientation, disability, race, class, religion, ethnicity, displacement and other intersecting factors. Crises are high-catalyst settings for gender and social norm change, which often occurs organically because of power shifts that can be either consolidated or undermined by humanitarian actors. A humanitarian response that does not tailor toward an analysis of these factors risks doing further harm by entrenching these inequalities, being less effective³, and not upholding rights. This is recognised by the international development community through commitments such as [Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals](#), which starts by stating that ‘Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.’ The [IASC Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls \(GEEWG\) 2017](#) echoes this, explaining that: ‘The structural gender inequalities which lead to the differential impact of disaster on women, girls, men, and boys, can also perpetuate crises and insecurity’ and that ‘gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are human rights imperatives and requirements for **effective humanitarian action.**’

Within this context, ICVA members across INGOs and NNGOs incorporate gender equality work into their strategies and interventions in various ways, both through mainstreaming, and more intentional targeting. Amongst the organisations interviewed (albeit organisations chosen because of their gender work) each noted that gender equality was a key part of its strategic vision, and many were proud of the expertise and impact they have been able to achieve because of their gender equality work.

A report into all the challenges and successes faced in implementing gender equality work in humanitarian response would be a colossal task and not one that this report can do justice to. It would also be duplicative of research that already exists, such as the [The Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls \(IAHE GEEWG\)](#). Instead, whilst not exhaustive, the following was reported by the ICVA member representatives interviewed on the challenges and successes they experience. The findings presented here reflect the perspectives of the ICVA members who participated in this study largely align with the IAHE GEEWG report’s findings, particularly around the need for political will and leadership, better coordination, and more explicit focus on gender equality across sectors.

1.1 Challenges and Opportunities

‘We believe there is no difference between Islamic values and humanitarian values and we can use these to advance women’s rights.’ (KII – NNGO)

Gender transformative change – i.e. change which explicitly seeks to transform unequal gender power relations - is being attempted, in some cases successfully, by many ICVA members. In humanitarian crises, this norm change may be happening organically, as humanitarian crises present high catalyst settings for norms to change rapidly. Both international and national NGOs reported gender transformative projects in acute and protracted crises even in very difficult contexts. Anecdotally, the NGOs put this success down to having invested in and recruited more female nationals⁴. This

³ For effectiveness, see for example: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/7/the-effect-of-gender-equality-programming-on-humanitarian-outcomes>)

⁴ See, for example: From 2019 IASC Gender Accountability Framework report (page 31): Responses from 28 IASC crisis settings indicate that, in 17 contexts, there was at least one consultation held with local women’s organizations in 2019 to inform the humanitarian planning process. ...there is a clear correlation between where local women’s groups were consulted, and the increased likelihood to include specific provisions for GBV mitigation and response, women’s livelihoods, and sexual and reproductive health in the finalized strategic response plan. Among all HRP’s reviewed, only 55% had provisions for GBV mitigation and response, women’s livelihoods, and sexual and reproductive health. However, where local women’s groups were consulted, 70% (9 out of 13) HRP’s included specific

assumption echoes findings from the IAHE report and the [Women’s Refugee Commission White Paper on Gender Transformation in Humanitarian Action](#) that staffing, and particularly leadership, who are committed to a progressive agenda of change.

All of the INGOs and half (4) of the NNGOs interviewed had gender equality and/or feminist principles at the core of their mandate and purpose, and central to their organisational culture as well as programming. They connect this with their respective longer term strategic vision - for example, building resilience and gender equality both require an analysis of the underlying cause of vulnerabilities, viewing gender inequality as a risk factor for hazards and crises, and tackling climate change with a feminist approach. This systemic approach allows more holistic work whereby gender equality is not just ‘mainstreamed’- a word/approach which has begun to be meaningless – but part of the theory of change and effectiveness of the work.

Funding, Capacity and Political Will

A challenge faced by all in implementing gender equality work is the lack of funding and technical capacity. Gender equality work is significantly underfunded, particularly gender transformative work and funding to local women’s organizations.⁵ Gender equality work may be lumped together with protection or Gender Based Violence (GBV) response, itself underfunded (only 0.3% of funds allocated to GBV of total humanitarian funding⁶), but not meaningfully integrated within it. NNGOs noted how difficult it is to compete with INGOs for funding in general, but especially on gender equality as they have fewer resources and technical experts to demonstrate impact to donors.

Whilst INGOs have many technical resources or experts, NNGOs are not always able to access these because the relevant translations are not made available, and/or they are rolled out in a way un conducive to implementation. Interagency tools are numerous, such as the IASC Gender Handbook, CARE’s Rapid Gender-Analysis Framework, and the IASC Gender with Age Marker, but some of these tools are considered difficult to use, and the regional roll-out trainings for the marker were perceived to be dominated by INGOs who have resources to send staff to these events. There is little follow up, mostly due to low capacity but also low accountability, with better coordination amongst global level actors needed for better roll-out, and relevance of tools and to minimise duplication.

The tools themselves are also often generic and lack specific or practical advice, and there is a perception that the discourse is erratic – e.g. sex and age disaggregated data is now in some cases referred to as sex, age, and disability, disaggregated data – but this change requires an overhaul of monitoring practices to actually be implemented well.

A number of the NNGOs also have their own tools developed, particularly in-house training materials, raising awareness of staff around gender equality. Many INGOs (CARE, Plan, Save the Children etc) have their own gender markers that are used for both humanitarian and development settings .

provisions for GBV mitigation and response, women’s livelihoods, and sexual and reproductive health.

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-gender-and-humanitarian-action/iasc-gender-accountability-framework-report-2019>

⁵ UN Women & UNFPA, ‘Funding for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Programming,’ 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/funding-for-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women-and-girls-in-humanitarian-programming>

⁶ ‘Where is The Money? How the Humanitarian System is Failing Women and Girls’ International Rescue Committee, 2019, <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/3854/whereisthemoneyfinalfinal.pdf>

Tools and references, however, are not able to fix such a systemic problem. The issues of leadership, staffing and organizational capacity are crucial to advancing the gender equality agenda, and that there is ‘no technical fix for a political problem’⁷ was well understood and referenced by both NNGOs and INGOs alike. This issue is then exacerbated by the overburdening of national staff, and particularly where protection or gender staff are expected to perform dual roles.

‘People are double and triple hatted on the ground, and so very stretched. Yes, there’s some overlap between protection person and gender, but at the HIGHER level this needs to be better understood and strategized so that we don’t overburden people.’ (KII – Consultant)

Terminology

Another challenge faced by members is that, although GBV is both a form and function of gender inequality, the two can sometimes be conflated, or set up in competition to be mutually exclusive when they are in fact inextricably interlinked. The GBV Area of Responsibility (AOR) exists within the humanitarian system, and even as it is severely underfunded, it is clearly visible and is part of a formal structure. This is not the case for gender equality as a cross-cutting concern. Within the cluster system, there is no structural dialogue between working groups on gender or gender-related actions. The *Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls* (IAHE GEEWG) found that a success factor was in humanitarian responses where a GEEWG coordination structure had been created that did not conflate GEEWG solely with GBV and protection.⁸

Working on gender equality requires a more systematic and structural approach, and is seen as too complex, particularly for donors, with the additional problem that gender equality mandated NGOs are too often seen as non-humanitarian. One interviewee explained: *‘Addressing GBV is seen as somewhat easier than gender transformative work for NGOs because they can easily explain the practical aspects such as service provision’* (KII-Consultant). This, however, does not begin to cover the gendered issues of an emergency context, and can instead simplify it to one issue or obfuscate the need for separate gender analyses that look beyond solely GBV response toward social norms that can then be entrenched by humanitarian responders with harmful practices.

Coordination

The IAHE report notes that, although an inter-sector coordination mechanism for GEEWG is not required by humanitarian architecture, in many responses it is created organically, demonstrating a clear need for this support.⁹ In the vacuum, the GBV sub-cluster is defaulted to for this mechanism, which orients the work toward protection rather than gender equality.¹⁰ ICVA members confirmed the need for access to a more specific gender equality focussed platform, with NNGOs in particular having benefitted from collaborations as part of local gender networks in which good practices are exchanged. A good practice example of this is the [Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group \(Asia and the Pacific\)](#) a network of local, national, regional or international NGOs active in the Asia-

⁷ ‘Gender Transformative Change in Humanitarian Action: A View from Inside’, Women’s Refugee Commission, 2021, <http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Gender-Transformative-Change-in-Humanitarianism-View-from-Inside.pdf>

⁸ The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, IAHE Steering Group, 2020. (page ix) <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluations/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-iahe-gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-and-girls-geewg-2020>

⁹ Ibid, page xi

¹⁰ ibid

Pacific region, set up in 2014, to collaborate on strengthening gender in humanitarian action. The group is a strong, active network with regular activities and trainings.

A global forum to exchange learning and good practice was cited as a gap to be addressed in which several of the aforementioned issues could be resolved. ICVA's regional learning fora are also a useful good practice that NNGOs appreciate, and should be extended to include gender equality work as a theme.

'Learning from ICVA is important because we don't get the international level dialogue.' (KII-NNGO)

Risks

In cases where NNGOs operate in difficult political contexts, speaking out on gender equality can be controversial or even illegal. NNGOs felt that donors and INGOs were too scared of upsetting the status quo and were not supportive of the locally led NGOs who did speak out. Gender mainstreaming and targeting are still being implemented, just under different guises by NNGOs, but without the support of donors. They attribute this to a social conservatism and western assumptions about women's roles in development contexts rather than listening to the voice of grassroots women's movements who are active in these spaces¹¹. This attitude and practice contributes to closing these spaces to women-led/women's rights organisations rather than supporting them. NNGOs requested the support of ICVA to amplify their work to the global level and to support them to combat the violations against civil society.

'We can't say anything about women's rights or we will get arrested. We need ICVA to say this. We cannot reach the SDGs without funding and donors are too scared. So what are we going to do?' (KII-NNGO)

Localization

'We don't take for granted that just because INGOs have gender goals in their documents that that necessarily means they are gendered in their implementation! There is a disconnect between how the mother organization views gender and how the field staff interpret that kind of work.' (KII – NNGO)

As noted in the quotation above, a shared skepticism exists regarding whether gender equality ideals actually get implemented, and whether the humanitarian structure is conducive to this work. NNGOs in particular were skeptical of INGOs' rhetoric around gender equality and the lack of evidence for this on the ground, and of how it may not be diffused in a way as to aid localization. Rather, it can be seen as a kind of organizational virtue signalling - a way for INGOs to convey their value to others in the assurance that they will not be held to account on these commitments. This perception is based on the similarity of the power differential between INGOs and NNGOs to gendered power differentials writ large. As noted in the conclusion of the [Women's Refugee Commission White Paper on Gender Transformation in Humanitarian Action](#), the discourse on gender transformation overlaps with the discourse on decolonization of aid and anti-racism within the sector- all of which will require localization and 'the will to shift power.'¹² A majority of the INGOs interviewed did, however, place work to support and amplify locally led women's or girls' rights organizations at the core of their respective gender equality approaches. A [project](#) to highlight run by one NNGO, APPRN, connects a team of women from diverse refugee backgrounds with an academic institution to work together as

¹¹ KII, NNGO

¹² 'Gender Transformative Change in Humanitarian Action: A View from Inside', Women's Refugee Commission, 2021, <http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Gender-Transformative-Change-in-Humanitarianism-View-from-Inside.pdf>

principal researchers for gender audits of humanitarian responses and to analyse the gender commitments in the Global Compact on Refugees. This project builds local capacity and promotes locally led research.

2. How can ICVA improve in order to support members' work on gender equality in emergencies?

2.1 Current Situation at ICVA

'Until your email came through for this interview, I've never seen anything on gender in emergencies so far at ICVA.' (KII – ICVA)

Amongst ICVA staff interviewed, consensus was shared that gender equality is: a) *not* currently a strong focus at ICVA; and b) that they would like to see this improved. It was also felt, however, that this perceived deficiency was partly a natural result of ICVA not being operational and not because of any objection to it in principle, although values clarification exercises would be welcome at the secretariat to ensure a common understanding. Low resources, staff constraints, lack of expertise, and the concern that ICVA was overstretching its mandate were all cited as the main reasons for this gap. Rather than ICVA being seen as a leading expert on gender equality in emergencies, a more realistic and strategically aligned goal would be to explore the role of ICVA to convene, facilitate and support its members, and learn from the example of how PSEA is mainstreamed.

Within operational humanitarian work, a multitude of resources exist on gender mainstreaming, many of which have come from ICVA members. Since ICVA works on coordination and influencing rather than being operational, it can be unclear to staff what opportunities exist to enhance their work in gender equality within ICVA's mandate. There is also a lack of common understanding of how gender dimensions can be incorporated into that work, and ICVA's added value in doing so. There may also be misconceptions that gender mainstreaming is just a technical aspect of interventions rather than a larger, core aspect of them which reflects misconceptions widely held in the humanitarian sector. A compounding factor is the lack of resourcing for gender equality work. Within the ICVA Secretariat, some staff members hold 'files' or focal point responsibility for certain themes, such as 'nexus' and 'localization', but none are on gender. Whilst one file/ focal point person exists for 'diversity' which subsumes gender, age, and disabilities, this is so large a topic as to be unwieldy. As both the IAHE report and the WRC White Paper note,¹³ progress on gender equality will not occur if it is not resourced with expertise.

In ICVA's current strategy, a diversity policy was adopted, with a specific focus on age, gender and disability. On gender consideration however, the ICVA's Secretariat team's work has so far remained

¹³ 'Gender Transformative Change in Humanitarian Action: A View from Inside', Women's Refugee Commission, 2021, <http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Gender-Transformative-Change-in-Humanitarianism-View-from-Inside.pdf>
The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, IAHE Steering Group, 2020. (page ix) <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluations/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-iahe-gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-and-girls-geewg-2020>

limited to PSEA workstreams and participation and contribution to the GenCap. The GenCap representation was seen by NGOs, particularly INGOs, as an important function to ensure that NGO voices are heard. This representation is not extended to other gender in emergencies fora where it would also be welcome. For example, whilst an ICVA representative is a member of all the respective IASC results groups, including the disabilities reference group (as another core part of the diversity policy), there is no ICVA representative engaged with the IASC Gender Reference Group (GRG). Addressing this gap and having a representative to the GRG may result in overlap between agency roles and representational roles, but ICVA could still do more to bring national NGO concerns to the table, as has been done with other result groups (e.g. localization results group – ICVA brought in eight new members, including women-led NGOs.) Additionally, since the Gender Reference Group is separate from the other respective results groups, there is no regular and systematic exchange between groups, which ICVA could facilitate to ensure that representational role has a gender lens. The current gap has resulted in missed opportunities – such as with the IAHE report. This report has had the most uptake and influence so far of the IAHE reports, impactful with UN Agencies and donors, side events at the global Humanitarian Partnership meeting and at ECOSOC, but ICVA had little to no input. ICVA did, however, input to the formal management response endorsed by the IASC, and written by the IASC gender reference group. This document, however, is considered UN-centric yet the management response will inform NGO action and would have benefitted from more NGO and ICVA involvement. ICVA did, however, coordinate an NGO response to IASC’s recent (Nov 2021) review proposing to remove the gender and MHPSS reference groups from its formal structure.

Despite the perception that gender equality is not an ICVA priority, there are a number of ways in which ICVA staff mainstream gender into their work. This is, for the most part, performed ad hoc, and with the impetus on the individual staff member rather than on a systematic approach. In MENA, for example, where the regional representative also holds focal point status for localisation, the January 2021 research paper on localization contains a number of specialised recommendations related to women-led and women-focused NGOs. This reflects a prioritisation of women led networks in MENA, and their representation on panel and board discussions at events organized by ICVA, or their selection to speak at pledging conferences or high- level global events (e.g. Yemen pledging conference). ICVA is a conduit for members to engage in these fora, and its role in promoting NGO engagement in these global fora was positively received by members. However, it was recommended that this role be extended in gendered ways, by promoting feminist activists and women-led/women’s rights organisations. This may not be as replicable in each context; although all regional representatives mentioned attempting this approach, it can be a challenge where the NNGO directors are predominantly male.

Within the three pillars of the ICVA strategy - 1) forced migration, 2) humanitarian coordination and 3) humanitarian financing- members have been active to look for the inherent gender perspectives and influence ICVA. However, there is much space for improvement in ensuring that gender equality is meaningfully integrated throughout, rather than tokenistically referred to. Forced migration, in particular, is one area in which there is much overlap with gender equality work and more could be done to scope cross-cutting issues throughout the three pillars. The potential for the gender equality agenda is perhaps most comparable to ICVA’s work on Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), which has a dedicated resource person, fund management, and clear coordination role.

2.2 Recommendations: What do members want from ICVA?

The requests and recommendations from interviewees broadly reflect ICVA's five activities detailed in the 2019-2021 strategy.¹⁴ These are: 1) Analysing and Explaining; 2) Convening; 3) Connecting; 4) Influencing and Advocating; and 5) Supporting. As a result the recommendations have been structured to reflect this:

Analysing and Explaining

- **Add a file/focal point responsibility on gender in emergencies** to the existing file responsibilities that are distributed amongst staff at the ICVA secretariat. To bolster this, include gender as a core cross-cutting theme in the strategy, to join nexus, PSEA and localization, in order for ICVA staff to be able to better support members.
- **Produce a briefing paper and case studies on gender in emergencies** to respond to members' needs, particularly around gender transformation in emergencies. In order to make the 'cross-cutting issues' in the strategy more meaningful and visible, demonstrate this through briefings that show how they are intertwined with the other ICVA focus areas and ensure that the findings from the IAHE report are reflected there.
- Provide a management response to the recommendations in this report.

Convening

- Continue and scale up the regional work whereby different actors from the region are brought together for **learning opportunities**, with thematic sessions on gender equality and gender transformation in related contexts and connecting changes at the implementation level with broader policy-level discussions.
- **Convene an NGO working group on gender in emergencies**, since this does not currently exist and duplication is frequent, compounded by funding for gender initiatives being minimal and challenging to access. This working group would answer calls from national NGOs who are struggling to partner with other agencies with expertise on gender in emergencies, and answer calls from INGOs who lack a mechanism to share learning on implementation rather than just on high-level policy. It would also serve to facilitate and elevate the discourse and learning on gender transformation in emergencies which is sorely needed.
 - ICVA could convene this space to share learnings and also raise concerns on their behalf with the IASC. ICVA could connect this space with regional fora that already exist, such as the GIHA network in Asia
 - This work would also support ICVA to build alliances with members with gender expertise and matching them with other members who seek support.
- ICVA should continue the MENA Project in MENA on **strengthening women led networks – (WECAN)** and scale this to other regions to leverage expertise and influence. ICVA could then channel the voices of these networks of influence with other key stakeholders.

Connecting

- ICVA should continue to **amplify women's rights and women-led organisations**, by connecting them to advocacy platforms and networks, or with important stakeholders. This

¹⁴ <https://www.icvanetwork.org/strategy>

would involve diversifying ICVA membership and working on understanding the mandate of these organisations as broader than women’s issues isolated from other rights frameworks and to fight for the space for gender-progressive CSOs.

- At a minimum, ICVA should ensure that panel discussions are **gender balanced** and that **women’s rights or women led organisations, youth movements etc are invited to engage with key strategic decision-making fora** that ICVA convenes or connects to. This is also a key part of ICVA’s localization agenda as detailed in the localisation briefing.¹⁵

Influencing and Advocating

- ICVA members would benefit if ICVA **played a bigger role** in gender practitioner spaces, namely the **IASC Gender Reference Group**, to which it could also negotiate space for more NGOs. ICVA may also be interested to explore membership of the GBV Call to Action.
- ICVA should explore how influencing policy at all levels on ICVA’s focus areas can better have gender equality integrated throughout.

Supporting.

- ICVA’s exploration of a **GIE training** in East Africa could be replicated or offered to other regions if successful.
- As above, consider an in-house training or induction package for ICVA staff to ensure values clarification and consensus at the secretariat level.
- **Build alliances with members that have expertise** on this issue in order to connect them with other members and with important stakeholders.
- Resources on gender equality must be invested in for any return to be realised. ICVA can learn from and replicate its experience with the PSEA workstream to **raise resources for gender equality**.

Conclusion and Next Steps

ICVA has a unique and pivotal opportunity to affect change on behalf of its members to ensure that humanitarian strategic priorities and decision making reflect and model the humanitarian commitments to *Leave No One Behind*. Evidence from the ICVA members who participated in this study point to a struggle between the values for gender equality they seek to uphold and the humanitarian system and architecture which can obstruct their realization. An example of this occurred just as this report was being finalized, with the IASC review proposing to remove the gender reference group from its structure and conflation of GEEWG with GBV (as reflected by the challenges faced by NGOs in section one) rather than as a goal in itself. ICVA coordinated and signed a letter among 19 NGOs to raise this concern – the resulting success still to be determined.

The challenges faced by ICVA members are all related to this dilemma of empty rhetoric between policy and practice, whereby despite best intentions the humanitarian system is not conducive to inclusive change. Some of these challenges fall outside the scope of ICVA’s mandate and are therefore not reflected in the recommendations above. The process of sourcing recommendations from members showed that members are clear on the added value of ICVA in this space and what they

¹⁵ <https://www.icvanetwork.org/resources/localisation-humanitarian-leadership-january-2021>

want to see. In particular, the recommendations to convene members with expertise, amplify them and connect them to high-level stakeholders came through strongly.

ICVA is to be commended on this approach seek input from members on how to better contribute to gender equality in humanitarian action. To embed this further, ICVA should provide a management response with accountability framework to the recommendations made above and indicate where resources can be made available to support these interventions.

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Acronyms

GEEWG – Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls

GBV – Gender Based Violence

IAHE- Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation

ICVA – International Council of Voluntary Agencies

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organization

KII – Key informant interview

NGO- Non-Governmental Organization

NNGO – National Non-Governmental Organization

PSEA – Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Annex

Interview Questions

Questions for National NGOs

1. Which Humanitarian responses has your organisation been involved in, and in what capacities?
2. Do you have a gender policy? How is it enforced? What accountability practices are there around this?
3. How is GiE articulated in your organizational strategy/vision?
4. What is your organizations position on gender equality in emergencies work?
5. What
 - a. challenges/
 - b. successes/
 - c. learning

do you have to share on your organisation's gender equality in emergencies work? (prompt on gender transformation in emergencies)

6. What technical expertise, staff, resources, or coordination mechanisms do you have to implement your GiE work? Are there interagency tools that you rely on?
7. What recommendations do you have for ICVA to improve as a network on GiE? What would you like to see from ICVA to advance GiE work, and what role do you think they should play?

Ask to share any guiding documents, tools resources on GiE.

Questions for INGOs

1. How is GiE articulated in your organizational strategy/vision? (prompt on gender transformation in emergencies)
2. What technical expertise, staff, resources, or coordination mechanisms do you have to implement your GiE work? Are there interagency tools that you rely on?
3. What recommendations do you have for ICVA to improve as a network on GiE? What would you like to see from ICVA to advance GiE work, and what role do you think they should play?