



## ICVA at 60 Interview Transcript Nan Buzard

July 2021

*Hi*

*Welcome to our ICVA at 60 series.*

*A collection of interviews with leaders of ICVA in the build-up to ICVA's 60 anniversary in 2022.*

*Join us as we listen to ICVA Board members and staff, former and present, talk about some of the challenges during their time at ICVA.*

*In this episode we listen to Robert White, a consultant for the ICVA at 60 project, talk to Nan Buzard, who was Executive Director of ICVA from 2013-2017. Their conversation begins with a discussion around the ICVA at 60 history paper, the final version can be found on the ICVA website.*

*Nan talks about how ICVA is an early adopter of issues, how localisation and climate change will define the future.*

*Enjoy.*

**Robert White / RW**

**Nan Buzard /NB**

**RW:** Hello, Nan Hi, can you can you see, can you see me? Can you hear me?

**NB:** I can hear you and I can see you

**RW:** And feeling is likewise excellent.

**NB:** Excellent I Haven't had a moment to read the the documents, so I was just turning it.

**RW:** It's been a long time I can't I can't remember the last time. that I saw you.

**NB :** It was probably a while ago.

**RW:** Well, I'm sure it was when you were head of the office at some point a few years ago.

**NB:** so great idea. And who do you think is going to read it?

**RW:** Well, it will be one of the I think, one of the background documents in connection with the commemoration next year. . In fact, the next step is what I'm doing now. I'm interviewing about 15 or 16 different people like yourself. Former chairs ,former board members, former staff. Get your ideas on the

paper, but also on ICVA and ICVA moving forward into the future, so have a couple of questions I'd like to ask you if you don't mind.

**NB:** No, I'm sure. Go. Will you talk to Penny Lawrence? She was my chair.

**RW:** Yeah, she's on my list already, for sure. Great. Yeah. Mm hmm. And Tom Getman before that and Beth Ferris before that.

**NB:** Beth is great really, really had a very high caliber people who were part of ICVA. When was I there?

**RW:** Well, it's in my document, actually, I can

**NB:** I can't remember.

**RW:** Yeah, I made a listing on page, did you have the document there in front of you or

**NB:** Right in front of me? Oh, there it is.

**RW:** Look at Page 11, Page 11 is the listing of all the Chairs.

**NB:** I was there 2013. Look at that money increase, I am a great fundraiser. Look at that, that's amazing.

**RW:** Yeah,. And and since you were there, they maintained that level also, which is quite good.

**NB:** It's quite amazing, though, they've added a phenomenal number of staff. My God. Cyril Ritchie would be a really important person to. Look how long he was there for, my gosh. Well, wait a minute, we had more members than 68 in 2013. That's weird.

**RW:** I got that, I got all these members from the annual reports, which Fiona gave me every year over the last 20 years. Are you sure it's not right?

**NB :** I certainly thought it was more than 76, 80, 95. I don't know, I mean. I think if that's the data she has, but we always said easily 100, but anyway, it's not a big issue. So this is great.

**RW :** What it shows is the exponential growth of ICVA both financially and also the number of members over the years.

**NB:** I wouldn't use the word exponential, since that means quadrupling. I would say a steady if small increase.

**RW:** Ok.

**NB :** Ok, so very fun, very fun, and what day when is it going to be in 2022?

**RW:** I it's still being discussed, they're not sure when or even what's going to happen, what kind of commemoration they're planning. But again, this is one of the background documents

Whether there's going to be a one day person to person gathering with a panel or something different, it's all being discussed, so it'll be more for the future.

**NB:** The first thing which is kind of the beginning and you kind of have a line equal is the first mechanism for international NGO cooperation. Like, that's like a line when in fact, it's probably the most important thing. Not that one can write on one's laurels of the past, but to me, I would expand that. I don't know. Somewhere in there it's. You know, what did that mean, anything like, OK, so that's the what but what but what's the so what about that like, you know, early function information exchange. I mean, that's great. You have that list, but it's kind of dull, you know, when in fact, it's kind of pretty profound.

**RW:** Yeah, It's a good point. Yeah, and I don't really expand on that in the paper, so that's a good point to

**NB:** Maybe to say more about something about, you know, why did it matter then? Does it matter now? You know? Um. I mean, this is very savvy, which is always great, very clear. It's missing a little oomph and kind of so what. It's great. It's a very factual, very straightforward. You know, very useful, well constructed. I can see very little of the why. A lot of the what? Why do NGOs exist? Why were NGOs and humanitarian action? Why do NGOs care about these issues? It's great, I mean, they love the activities. I think it's great.

**RW:** What I was thinking maybe of doing

**NB:** ICVA in 1996, I'm reading the activities on Page five. Actually I was involved with that forum in 1996. It was an important liaison body. Why was it important? You know, it was more than a geographical focus. It was because there were hundreds of NGOs, it was because it was a huge UNHCR focused country. You know, the the Yugoslav conflict was one of the enormous ones. You know, it's like there was a need for NGO coordination, cooperation, communication advocacy, leveraging the UNHCR that were assholes at the time. Like, that's not it's like there's no why here. I think you've got to drive a little bit on the why or why did it matter that it was doing these things? Why did it change? Ok, it focused from, you know, A to B, but why? You know, Ed was a human rights lawyer, I mean, there's just it's again, it's very good, it's very structured, it's straightforward, it's clear, it's just missing does it matter?

**RW:** Yeah. Ok.

**NB:** All right, I'll stop there, that's question one.

**RW:** No, and I just a final thought on that is one thing I was thinking of doing is putting maybe in brackets some of the comments made in my interviews interspersed through the paper to make it a little more lively also.

**NB :** Absolutely. I think that's a good idea.

**RW:** Ok, so my second question is. Well you were head of the office, but you've been associated with ICVA for probably, 'm not sure, 15, 20 years or more, maybe. What made you proud of being part of ICVA when you were proud, either from the outside or when you were the executive director? What gave you the most sense of pride being associated with ICVA?

**NB:** I don't like the word proud, so I don't know how to respond. What I thought was important, what was meaningful was. It was I was OK, if you want to use the word proud. I am proud. I don't like the word proud, Bob. Sorry, I thought it was incredibly important that global perspective, even though, you know. You know, I believe that there are common concerns and strength in numbers. There's something about that globalness that it wasn't SCHR the, you know, the the big eight as we called them, and it wasn't Interaction, which was, you know, U.S., I mean, you know, and those were, you know, between Interaction and SCHR your power brokers in terms of, you know, certainly volume of money going through those agencies. But if you wanted to talk about the kind of agencies that were interested in... I found Manisha and Ed quite intellectually extraordinary, you know, I mean, yes, they were kind of a little bit too. It was kind of their show, and they anyway that you don't want to put that in. But they did bring a kind of intellectual calibre and a profound focus on Protection. You know, I think I would guess I would say the ICVA was an early, in innovation language, an early adopter of key issues, whether it was migration and refugees, you know, back in the 60s before it was so front and center, whether it was protection, whether it was accountability, like before these things became mainstream in the humanitarian world, ICVA members and ICVA really focused on that.

**RW:** And I would assume also advocacy, a global advocacy, which was big, I think, when Ed was there and probably continued also when you were there.

**NB** Um, yeah, I mean, I spent more of my time stabilising a sinking ship because. The staff had left. There were grants unfinished, the finances were in arrears. It was not great and I'm not as much of an activist as Ed or Manisha. But from an advocacy point of view, I think the I think, you know, obviously the refugee convention was such a centerpiece, such a north star for all of us. I think the advocacy around, I mean, ICVA, when I was doing Sphere was a great supporter of kind of humanitarian standards and not standards in terms of, well, yes, humanitarian accountability of agencies as well as donors as well as host governments. I think that's pretty powerful. Like everybody was advocating to host governments, donor governments, NGOs, U.N. agencies. It was, you know, kind of everyone's held responsible and think that's pretty great.

**RW:** There's a related question I wanted to ask you on the same, the same point that I raised before, and that is on the regional hubs. There are four of them now, as you know, Bangkok, Amman and two in Africa. I guess they were started or, you know, already started or grew when you were there. And I hear so many positive things about them and what they've done for ICVA more globally. I just wanted to get your views on that also.

**NB:** I think that was really the. Have you talked to Tanya Wood? Is she on your list?

**RW:** She's a friend of mine, but I have not talked to her.

**NB:** So she so I would put her on the on the list.

**RW:** Ok.

**NB:** I would I. My memory is that it was a lot her brainchild to do the regional hubs. I think so. I just raised money and stabilized the ship. I didn't really have much vision. But, we I think we all knew that, you know, Geneva could not remain the center of the world and again, when he 2013 2014 was not very. That was still late to the game, but. Again, the recognition that Geneva was not the center of the world was really, really important. And that if you really wanted to be a global network with with

services and capabilities, you had to be close to those members. And I think that. I think it was a game changer for ICVA and. I'm thrilled to hear that it still is playing such an important role. I think it was Tanya who wrote the original proposal for Echo about the hubs and did the original first round of hiring of the regional hub managers. I think it's a really important to talk to her.

**RW:** That's a good point. I'll try Tanya for sure. Yeah. Maybe again, so in that subject, not really a concern, but rather just an observation, that one hub was moved from Dakar to Nairobi, and I'm sure there are good reasons for it. But to me it leaves wide open the whole central and West Africa, the whole Francophone. And just to get your views on that one also.

**NB:** Well, I think Africa has bedeviled every agency in terms of how many hubs to have. I mean, look at the Federation, they went from five to three to four to two. I mean, you know, I think it's it's such a huge continent with such a range of languages, types of governments, humanitarian crises, old the new. You know better than anyone, Bob, that there are certain refugee moments, often conflict moments that are kind of defining around the humanitarian kind of narrative. And Rwanda and the Great Lakes certainly was. So Nairobi's always been. And then and likewise Sudan, the Ethiopia famines. I mean, if you go back to the 70s and 80s, you know, Eastern Africa was so much more in the news, no surprise that it was primarily Anglophone and you had a lot of Anglophone NGOs, except for that the French group who were much more established in West Africa. But I think probably it's a mix of where the big refugee movements were. I mean, if you think about the Sahel, it's quite relatively recent in terms of being kind of regularly spoken about. I mean, yes. There's been humanitarian coordinator in Chad, and I mean, it's not like there hasn't been a lot, but it's not it doesn't have the same historical profile of Ethiopia, South Sudan, Rwanda. Dadaab, I mean, you know, like it's just it's so big. Maybe I'm speaking from my generation.

**RW:** And then I think I think that's still largely the case, frankly, just looking at the more, more recent developments also.

**NB:]** But but I think it's also a thing about language. I also think it's because there weren't French speaking people in a lot of the NGOs, whether they were American or European other than, you know, Belgian and French. And I think that, you know, there just wasn't the physical staff at that point, relying so much on international staff to expand. And then it was also a very it's a pretty frightening place. You know, I mean, with the militias and the, you know, I mean, it's not a. Security is pretty intense. Insecurity is pretty intense there. So anyway, so I think the movement there was probably more. There were I remember the Dakar one and I remember the Nairobi, and now there's only Nairobi.

**RW:** Well, there is Addis also with the African Union.

**NB:** Yeah, that was yeah, yeah, that's right. But that's more a government oriented. I mean, it's interesting that's less of a- it's representing NGOs at the African Union.

**RW:** In Nairobi is really the main hub for Africa. You're right. Yeah.

**NB:** Yeah, and I also think, you know, DaKar certainly is an interesting hub, I don't, you know, I don't know why ICVA chose that. You have to have members also demanding and finding it useful. And one thing is that I think a lot of NGOs, it's kind of like one off countries like someone's in Dakar, someone's in Chad, someone's in Nigeria. And then inside, like in Nigeria, they have their own Nigerian NGO focused forum.

**RW:** Ok. My next question is maybe moving forward. I don't know how much you've been involved with since you left, because now you're with the ICRC now, right? I guess. Congratulations on that, by the way.

**NB:** Thank you. It's fascinating.

**RW:** That's. I'm sure, all even more than 100 percent of your time, I'm sure. But the question is more ICVA focus, even from your perspective being maybe not as close as you were before. Why do you think ICVA remains important today and moving into the future? How would you see ICVA moving into the future?

**NB :** The really interesting question. Um. If one takes the premise that quote, localization will become more and more the norm. Um, that puts ICVA in a very interesting and extremely difficult place. You know who is, you know, how does it, you know, because it is relatively polarized conversation, because it's not straightforward, what is the right thing to do or the best thing to do or how to do it? I think that the level of, kind of not so much negotiating, but positioning with credibility and trust across such a complex membership is going to be pretty tough. I think it would require an extremely diverse board that is willing and able to work together through some some pretty unworkable stuff when it really comes down to it because it's really about livelihoods and money and power for everybody. I think ICVA has a pretty significant future. For three reasons. One, it's got a pretty interesting history to build on. Two the issues of Refugee and migration rates are going to stay with us and only increase because more and more populations will be on the move, even if they are even if Fortress Europe becomes even more fortress Europe now doing through the vaccination.

**NB:** Three. We are on this planet together, and there's got to be a place and an ability for inclusive and diverse actors, it's not only the North, it's not only the South, it's not only the east is not only the West, but to actually say What does that look like financially, politically, structurally is, I think, pretty hard. But I think there's I think there should be. And I also think advocating on behalf of NGOs to governments at a global level, you know, not the most popular, lots of scandals, not always clear. You know, all the same issues are their value for money. I mean, none of them have gone away. So I think for the future. You know, ICVA needs to also, and I think it has looked at kind of the nuts and bolts of the role of NGOs, the financing northern NGOs, roles in supporting southern NGOs. I mean, you know, the whole drill. I'd be curious what Ed said about that. Have you interviewed Ed already?

**RW:** Yeah, I talked to him a few days ago, actually. Pretty well, I said no, but he has his own NGO. Maybe you know this. Which I have not known, actually, it's called here, HERE here.

**NB:** Oh, the research, yeah,

**RW:** Humanitarian experience and research center. So yeah, yeah.

**NB:** And he's doing well.

**RW:** Apparently, from the way he was explaining to me, I had not known where he was or what that was, but he talks me about it. He seemed pretty, pretty happy with it and pretty happy with how it's moving.

**NB:** So, yeah, that's great. I have to. I haven't paid attention to that either, so that's great to hear. I'm really glad.

**RW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**NB:** So actually, that's a good point. I would say that that is I think I'm sure it has, but clearly, you know, climate change is. Going to drive everything. Conflict. Debt. And in some ways, you know, you look at the cost of of the recent German floods. I don't know. I think that there's going to be a lot of advocacy needed. I think also even say, you know, interesting, I wouldn't say if ICVA should get into vaccine advocacy, but it would recognize and it's probably taken a position. Any time you have two and three tier systems, you have a problem, whether it's around migration, whether it's around vaccines. And so I think, climate will at the end of the day, underpin. Will probably become the. I don't know, I think that I haven't been in touch with it, but I'm sure that that will become absolutely a defining feature, maybe around climate and migration or climate and refugees, but absolutely defining feature.

And I think this is actually raises up an interesting question, which is, you know, ICVA has for the most part has refugee oriented NGOs now they may be, you know, not only about refugees like the Norwegian Refugee Council or IRC they may be NGOs where CAFOD like some of the issues, you know, like some of the or Oxfam, it's not only about refugees, it could be about poverty, but I think this will bring up interesting potentials for new , if not members, new alliances with environmental groups. You know, what would that look like? What is that? I mean, I think the future of kind of how networks connect or how issues become critical, like, you know, I would say I would take that questioning of a kind of the fundamental information sharing advocacy positions, certain kinds of training. You know, if you take like the top three or four or five things that ICVA does, what would that look like with the climate lens? I think that is very interesting. What changes do something drop out? You can't just keep expanding things. So you know what would shift in terms of capabilities, finances? Anyway, that's I hadn't thought about that, but it's just kind of on my mind now.

**RW:** Yeah, no. It's a good point, actually. Yeah, let me just tell you a couple of things. I found my notes with that about how ED was looking to the future for ICVA just just so you know, he made reference to the they just came out with a 2030 strategy. The next 10 year strategy, which Ed made reference to he, had not read it very much in detail, but he made reference to it

**NB:** Strategy and he hadn't read it.

**RW:** But this is the ICVA 2030 strategy. Ok. Ok. Because he told me he purposely, it makes sense, actually. He was there for, what, 12, 13 years and he's purposely staying on the outside of ICVA, I guess, to give Ignacio and the staff a chance. So he had not read it, but he knew about it. He saw the increasing need for networking that ICVA would be playing in the future. Yes, increasing need for advocacy also, and being more more relevant to the NGO members because now there's something like one hundred and thirty five members, so they face very huge compared to how it was before.

**NB:** Yeah. And what you know, what service do you offer that makes NGOs want to join, like, is there a point where you can't have too many, you have too many, you know.

**RW:** Yeah, that's true. And he made reference to climate change also, as you have just now in the future as impacting on ICVA. In fact, in their annual meeting that I just attended about a month ago, climate change was was their topic. What was the focus of the discussion?

**NB :** How could it not be

**RW :** And then he raised the questions like, are we reaching the most vulnerable? Are we in the hardest to reach places? What is it that only NGOs can do in the future? Right? Raise good questions. So yeah,

**NB:** Yeah, I think that question of, you know what? It's that I think going back to those basics, which is what is that role of NGOs, you know?

**RW:** Yeah, yeah. Right?

**NB:** And it's the role of charities. That's one of the biggest issues, you know, you look at like the NHS in the UK, you know, it's like a charity. It's a fucking charity. Like what should be a charity and what should be a state responsibility. Anyway these are all questions, as you know.

**RW:** But yeah, yeah. Well, OK, got one last question, one last question for you not to say too much of your time. And that is if you think about an anecdotes going back your time with ICVA and previously.

**NB:** [What struck me was one time when a Libyan NGO wanted to join ICVA. They were doing food distributions, and we were trying to do due diligence on kind of the quality of their work and, you know, kind of the background of their origins and you know. And it was really struck me that they didn't have a lot of the kinds of Western or Northern Mission statements or governance bodies or. But they had their own organization and they had their own work, and we had seen a video of their work that showed armed guards at their food distribution, and we were like, Oh. And in fact, I then spoke with ICRC and others who were more familiar with the thing and like that there was no way not to have armed guards and it just showed me the limit and bias of myself in terms of kind of what constitutes humanitarian work, what constitutes that humanitarian impulse.

**RW:** Yeah. Yeah.

**NB:** But that's one that struck me. You know, membership is not so straightforward once you start to really, truly be global.

**RW:** Do they finally become a member of ICVA?

**NB :** Yeah, they did.

**RW :** Oh, good, good.

**NB:** Yeah, no, it's great.

**RW:** I imagine that same point could refer to so many of the local and national NGOs that are that remember, because that's part of the priority of ICVA these days, as it has been in the past.

**NB:** But it comes with it comes with risks to, you know, I mean it, you know, it isn't always as clear cut. I mean, you do need to have some sense of is it just a group of individuals that came together for a summer or, you know, like what's the you know, what is that line between kind of formal and informal humanitarian response?



**RW** : Its makes a good point.

**NB** : And if it matters, why does it matter what matter is in that? Hmm. Well, Bob, I envy you, what a wonderful intellectual kind of opportunity you have.

**RW**: Well, I'm very happy to be doing this, I'm kind of retired. I still have a very small contract with UNHCR. I've been there for 30 40 years, but I'm happy to work with Ignacio and Fiona. They're really great people. Well, the whole team is great. I know most of them now and very happy to be there to help out with this 60 year commemoration.

**NB**: Very exciting. The whole year of 2022. Or is there a date?

**RW**: I don't know if there's any. It's a good point. I'm not sure if there's any fixed date.

**RW**: Just tell me a few words. What are you doing? I don't know what you're doing with the ICRC.

**NB**: Oh, I, I'm head of innovation. So I do a lot of thinking about the future. And it's a very interesting role because we're kind of like venture capitalists, we hear things that are happening in the house. We pay attention and then we invest and try to support test. And then if it's something that has a proof of concept, really try to accelerate it. So it's it's wonderful because I work across all of the metiers, which is pretty significant at the ICRC.

**RW** : So it must be huge, as far as I know, ICRC has more staff than even UNHCR.

**NB**: We have about 18000 staff. But the budget's only two billion, I think, you know, UNHCR is at least four now or five even. I love ICRC. You know, also grappling with its past and its future, but it's a it's a wonderful organization. And this is the moment really to say what's the future of Geneva, of humanitarian action of NGOs? It's a very uncertain world, as you well know. Anyway, Bob, thank you so much. If any clarifications or needed. Don't hesitate to reach out and thank you for sharing the paper. Please share any updates because I'm very happy to really take a serious look at it.

**RW**: Okay. Well, thanks again. Nice talking to you. All right. Ok, thanks.

**NB**: Thanks. Bye bye.

**RW**: Thanks. Thanks.

*This conversation between Nan Buzard and Robert White was recorded in July 2021.*

*Founded in 1962, ICVA (International Council of Voluntary Agencies) is a global network of over 140 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in 160 countries, operating at global, regional, national and local levels. Our mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by working collectively and independently to influence policy and practice.*

*For more information about ICVA, and the history of ICVA visit [www. icvanetwork.org](http://www.icvanetwork.org).*