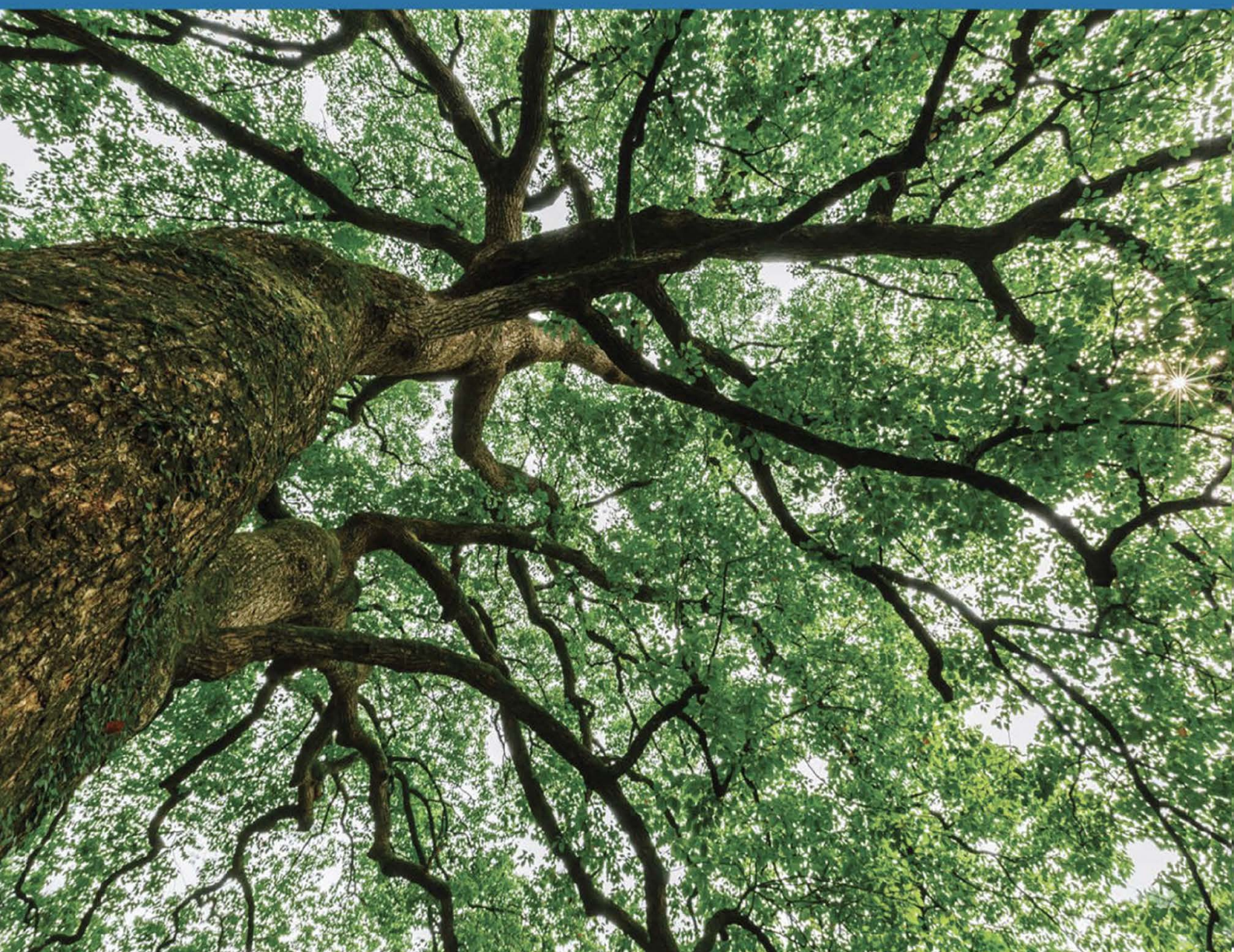


REVIEW OF ICVA'S SUPPORT TO NGO FORA (2018-2021)

Prepared for ICVA

April 2022



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

HUMANITARIAN
ADVISORY GROUP



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INTRODUCTION

The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), based in Geneva, Switzerland, with regional offices, is a network of over 140 non-governmental organisations (NGOs).¹ ICVA's membership is made-up of humanitarian international, national, secular and faith-based member NGOs working towards a system that enables people affected by humanitarian crises to receive equitable access to quality assistance and protection and to rebuild their lives and livelihoods with dignity.²

ICVA have increasingly worked with independent NGO coordination fora in humanitarian contexts as critical conveners for an effective humanitarian action.³ NGO fora are important avenues to bring together humanitarian NGOs to ensure a coherent and principled response. They are active in a range of areas: information sharing, supporting humanitarian trends analyses, enabling cross learning, agreeing on common priorities, developing shared objectives and messages on key issues, and facilitating collective representation of NGOs. NGO fora are composed differently across contexts (some include membership of only international NGOs, only national NGOs or both combined); and there may be multiple fora within a country context.⁴

ICVA has been committed to supporting these NGO fora and actively promoting the critical role of NGO fora in delivering principled and effective humanitarian action. Specifically, one of ICVA's priority focus areas in its 2030 strategy is on coordination - "to strengthen the collective ability of NGOs to actively engage in, influence or lead humanitarian coordination mechanisms to ensure they are inclusive, contextualised and accountable."⁵ ICVA works to strengthen the capacities of NGO fora to engage in the humanitarian system by providing organisational capacity development, advocacy support, and promoting the pivotal role that the fora play in the broader humanitarian community (including donors, governments, UN agencies, and NGOs).

This report documents the findings of a review of ICVA's work with NGO fora over the past four years and provides evidence-based recommendations for future engagement and support to NGO fora.

The report is structured as follows: the introduction is followed by a discussion of methods used. The section on ICVA's roles in supporting NGO fora shows the reconstructed program logic based on ICVA's grant proposals and other documentation. This is followed by the main findings in relation to the programme's effectiveness, relevance and impact. The last section presents recommendations.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the review was to understand the impact of ICVA's work in support of NGO fora, with a specific focus on understanding the relevance and effectiveness of work with NGO fora across contexts between 2018-2021. The following two key objectives guided the study:

¹ ICVA, *About ICVA*. <https://www.icvanetwork.org/about-icva/>

² ICVA, *About ICVA*. <https://www.icvanetwork.org/about-icva/>

³ InterAction and ICVA Network, *How to engage with InterAction and ICVA: A guide for NGO fora*, 2019. <http://ngocoordination.org/en/library/how-engage-interaction-and-icva-guide-ngo-fora>

⁴ ICVA, *Humanitarian coordination: NGO fora and consortia – from local to global*, August 2021. <https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/08/Topic-Three-NGO-Fora-and-Consortia-Briefing-Paper.pdf>

⁵ ICVA. *ICVA 2030 strategy: A collaborative future for an effective humanitarian action*, May 2021. https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/07/ICVA2030_Strategy_ENGLISH.pdf



Objective 1: To review the effectiveness and relevance of ICVA’s work to support international and national NGO Fora on their advocacy, coordination, and engagement priorities.

This included an assessment of the impact achieved because of ICVA’s work with NGO fora, unpacking what is working well and why (effectiveness). The analysis of effectiveness included understanding the enablers and barriers that shape results. The assessment also considered how ICVA’s work contributes to addressing the most important needs and challenges in the sector (relevance).



Objective 2: To give evidence-based forward-looking recommendations for ICVA’s ongoing work with NGO fora, considering the findings of the review and the expressed needs of NGO Fora.

The focus of this second objective was to provide recommendations with respect to future work with NGO fora. This included consideration of who ICVA works with (considering the balance of INGO, N/LNGO and civil society); what ICVA works on (considering the balance of core functions: coordination, advocacy and engagement); and how ICVA works with NGO fora. This analysis supported recommendations for engagement with NGO fora and ICVA’s role going forward.

METHODOLOGY

The review sought to understand how activities with NGO fora have impacted on operations as well as different actors’ perceptions of the factors shaping these activities and their successes. Relevant documentation (including strategy, implementation plans, advocacy materials and reports) was coded against the key themes of the review and provided important context and background to the primary data collection stage of the review.

The team held a focus group discussion with ICVA regional representatives to gather regional perspectives on the review themes and to collectively identify the most appropriate contexts and people to interview. Key informant interviews were conducted with 15 stakeholders (12 NGO fora representatives and 3 external) to explore the effectiveness, relevance and impact of ICVA’s work with NGO fora.

Figure 1: Methodology



The data analysis process compiled primary and secondary data against key themes to draw out key findings and recommendations.

LIMITATIONS

Key informant interviewees were selected based on HAG and ICVA's contacts and connections and therefore may reflect some bias. It should also be noted the sample size is small across several different country contexts to accommodate the available resources for this review. Findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative of emerging trends but not necessarily representative. Where the team has been able to disaggregate findings – for example, between experiences of national and international NGO fora these should be interpreted with caution. Disaggregated findings provide examples and potential issues that would require further validation in more in-depth studies and future evaluations.

ICVA'S SUPPORT TO NGO FORA (2018-2021)

ICVA has long engaged with NGO fora informally and opportunistically. In 2017, ICVA received an initial grant from ECHO to increase the capacity and impact of in-country NGO collective action at the field level⁶ and then subsequent grants to complement and build on this initial base of engagement.⁷ The justification for supporting NGO fora within the ECHO proposal was that well-resourced and effectively supported NGO fora can better support coordination and advocacy and ultimately enable effective humanitarian operations.⁸

The NGO Fora Support Programme intentionally engages with a mix of national NGO fora, international NGO fora, and mixed NGO fora.⁹ Whilst ICVA's activities around governance and organisational support, coordination, and advocacy are intended to benefit all NGO fora types, it is evident that some of the projects are geared toward strengthening local humanitarian actors and networks including national NGO fora. This was clearly articulated in the "Local Capacity and Leadership Strengthening for Enhanced Humanitarian Action Initiative" proposal that intended to support CBOs, local and national NGOs, women-led organizations and national NGO Fora in target countries,¹⁰ and national NGO networks were identified as the primary target for the Syrian NGO Network Engagement and Partnership Programme.¹¹ The small grants project during the COVID response provided support to four national NGO fora and two international NGO fora.

Across the proposals and programs, a program logic that underpins the engagement with NGO fora can be discerned. It is outlined at a high level below (see Figure 2) and captures the intended changes as

⁶ ICVA, *Strengthening In-Country NGO Fora to Promote More Efficient NGO Collective Action at Field* (Grant proposal).

⁷ Proposals reviewed in relation to NGO fora support: Syrian NGO Network Engagement and Partnership Programme, Support to Collective NGO Action in Humanitarian Advocacy in Eastern and Horn of Africa, Strengthening in-country NGO Fora to promote enhanced NGO collective action at field level (2017) Strengthening in-country NGO Fora to promote enhanced NGO collective action at field level during the COVID-19 Response (2020)

⁸ ICVA, *Strengthening In-Country NGO Fora to Promote More Efficient NGO Collective Action at Field* (Grant proposal), page 1

⁹ ICVA, *NGO Fora Support Programme*, July 2017.

¹⁰ https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/07/ICVA_NGO_FORA_flyer_Final_July2017.pdf

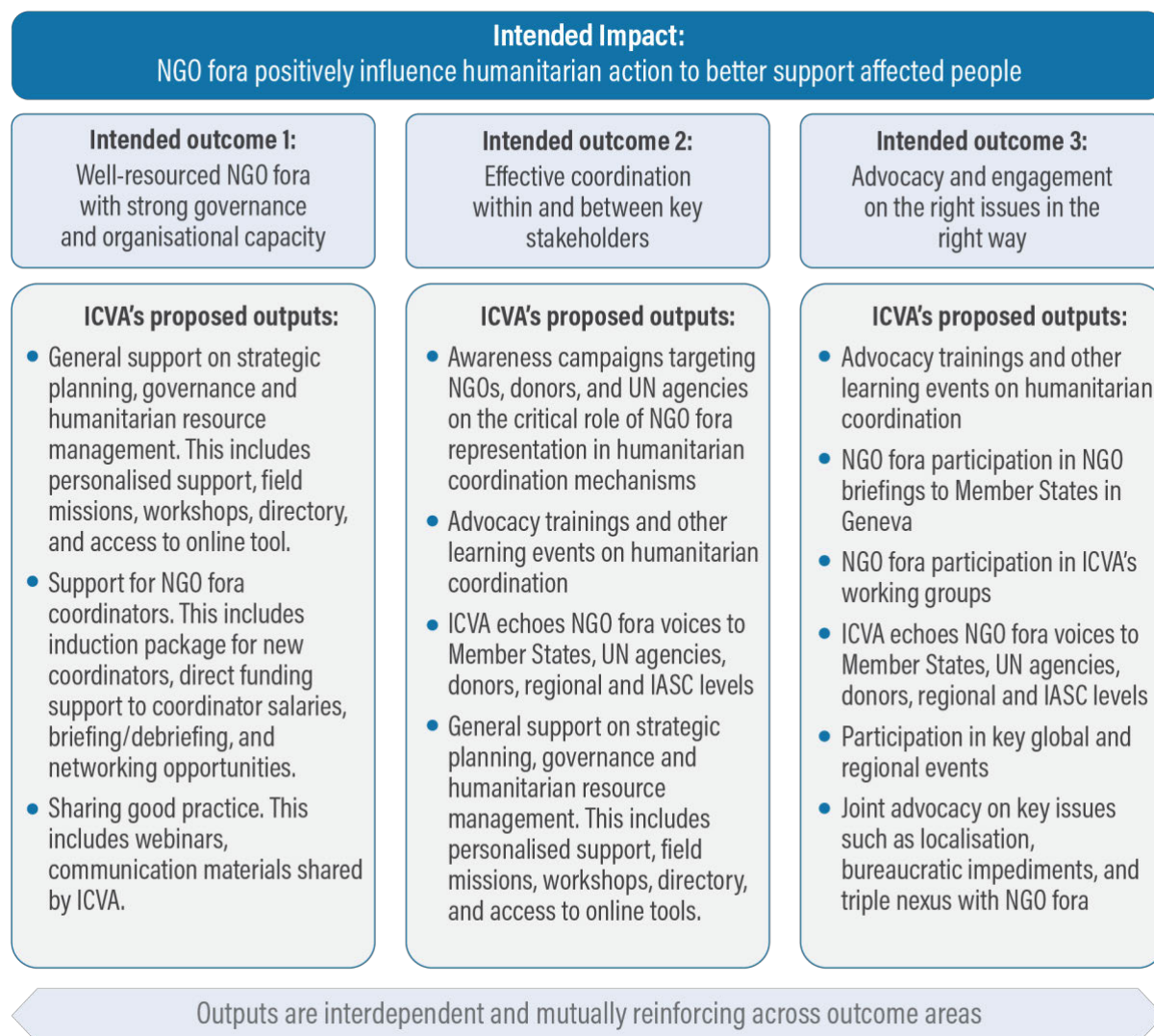
¹¹ ICVA, *Local Capacity and Leadership Strengthening for Enhanced Humanitarian Action Initiative* (Grant Proposal). p. 1

¹¹ ICVA, *Syrian NGO Network Engagement and Partnership Programme Summary*, October 2020, p. 3.

https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/09/syrian-ngo-network-engagement-and-partnership-programme-summary_final.pdf

articulated across proposal documents¹² and resources about ICVA's NGO Fora Support Programme.¹³ Note, however, that the program logic has been constructed by the review team drawing on documentation and interviews and was not articulated in this way by ICVA. The purpose for retroactively building the program logic is to provide a structured lens to unpack which aspects of the program and its logic have supported effective programming and where are the opportunities to strengthen approaches.

Figure 2: Program logic constructed from proposals and documentation that underpins ICVA's work with NGO fora



¹² Proposals reviewed in relation to NGO fora support: Syrian NGO Network Engagement and Partnership Programme, Support to collective NGO action in humanitarian advocacy in Eastern and Horn of Africa, Strengthening in-country NGO Fora to promote enhanced NGO collective action at field level during the COVID-19 Response

¹³ ICVA, *NGO Fora Support Programme*, July 2017.

https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/07/ICVA_NGO_FORA_flyer_Final_July2017.pdf. See also ICVA Network. *Syrian NGO Network Engagement and Partnership Programme Summary*, October 2020. [icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/09/syrian-ngo-network-engagement-and-partnership-programme-summary_final.pdf](https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/09/syrian-ngo-network-engagement-and-partnership-programme-summary_final.pdf)

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings and evidence with respect to the effectiveness and relevance of ICVA's work with NGO fora. At the highest level this review finds that **ICVA has been largely effective in supporting NGO fora to positively influence humanitarian action**. It has been particularly effective at supporting improved coordination dynamics, strengthening governance of national NGO fora, and strengthening connection and learning between national, regional and global discourse. Stakeholders reflected that ICVA could further strengthen effectiveness by increasing the clarity of the intended outcomes of engagement and providing clear scope for their work and engagement with NGO fora.

ICVA activities that focus on governance, capacity strengthening, and coordination have been largely relevant to NGO fora needs, and NGO fora were very positive about most activities that focused on country-specific challenges and issues and addressed them in a practical and tangible way. On the other hand, advocacy activities, and the specific thematic focus of advocacy, has varied in relevance to NGO fora. ICVA faces a challenge to identify and clearly communicate advocacy issues that are relevant to both global and national actors, and where this is not feasible, to be transparent about whom the activity is intended to serve and with what outcome or potential benefit to those that engage.

The overall relevance and effectiveness of the support provided by ICVA is well captured in the response from NGO fora representatives to the question 'would you recommend other NGO fora to engage with ICVA?'. The overwhelming response across respondents was yes.

Figure 3: Would you recommend other NGO for a to engage with ICVA?

	N	%
Yes definitely	11	98%
Yes probably	1	2%
Maybe	0	0%
No	0	0%

EFFECTIVENESS — STRENGTHS

Intended Outcome: Well-resourced NGO fora with strong governance and organisational capacity



Finding 1: ICVA's support to governance of national NGO fora has been effective and important

"ICVA is the first actor that helped [our national NGO forum] to have an open view on what we can do and what other NGO fora do. The charter and code of conduct are born out of close collaboration with ICVA" (National NGO forum representative).¹⁴

ICVA has been particularly effective at supporting the governance of NGO fora that may not have had resources, templates or knowledge about establishing strong governance mechanisms.¹⁵ This support has included formal training workshop events as well as mentoring and coaching to coordinators on how to manage members, roles of steering committees and management of a general assembly.¹⁶

Whilst this support has been appreciated across different NGO fora, the support under this outcome area is more effective and better received by national and mixed NGO fora.¹⁷ For example, one national NGO forum representative shared that ICVA's support on good governance came at the right time when the forum needed help managing their membership and ensuring that an inclusive process was in place for member consultations given that the forum's membership is diverse in terms of mandate (humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development).¹⁸ ICVA has continued to provide informal support to strengthen governance as needed and as issues arose in the NGO forum, which has been greatly valued.¹⁹ Another national NGO forum representative shared that ICVA supported in establishing their policies such as their code of conduct, and continued to provide support on financial and administrative management.²⁰

Governance support has also been requested and provided for international NGO fora but was less positively received. For example, ICVA engaged with at least two international NGO fora that needed support in strengthening functionality of Steering Committee structures. One NGO forum representative shared that ICVA was consultative in understanding their needs, supported the drafting of the Terms of Reference for the strategic review, and engaged with country directors to get their buy-in for the process.²¹ However, improved governance was not always achieved, not necessarily as result of ICVA's support but potentially due to different expectations and levels of need within international NGO fora that require different approaches and clearer terms of engagement.²²



Finding 2: ICVA has successfully supported NGO fora organisational capacity

NGO fora representatives reported that ICVA strengthened their forum's organisational and coordination capacity, including ensuring that key roles were resourced where necessary. For example, when Ethiopia was experiencing escalating crisis, ICVA advocated for the NGO forum to coordinate more effectively but there were no resources to support coordination. ICVA provided initial funding for a director role for the forum and supported advocacy to donors to ensure continued support. This type of support for salaries

¹⁴ Interview 12

¹⁵ Interviews 3, 4, 11, 12

¹⁶ Interviews 4, 8, 11, 12

¹⁷ Interviews 11, 12

¹⁸ Interview 11

¹⁹ Interview 11

²⁰ Interview 12

²¹ Interview 3

²² Interviews 3, 4

and other areas of organisational capacity has been extremely welcome as organisational development and coordination is often underfunded. Often the NGO fora members receive funding for project activities that do not include support for the institutional and coordination capacities required to deliver strong projects.²³ In this sense, ICVA fills an important gap in funding that allows fora to move from project-based reactive engagement to more strategic and proactive engagement.

Training and workshop events focused on a range of topics succeeded in building skills and knowledge independent of project delivery. NGO fora representatives described how these events helped advance their objectives and advocacy, particularly on localisation.²⁴ Thematic support was provided in relation to localisation, triple nexus, WASH implementation, digital fundraising, advocacy work and media engagement, and PSEA.

Small grants have also been an important resource for NGO fora to fund staff and initiatives to proof-of-concept stage, that can then be supported by other donors through longer term funding. Six NGO fora reported receiving small grants from ICVA to support coordination during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁵ Grants covered different activities including training to NGO network members on thematic areas, developing advocacy papers on localisation during the COVID-19 pandemic, and funding assessments on NGO networks' operational capacities which were then used as evidence in their advocacy for representation at the HCT.

“Just to show that sometimes out of all the advocacy support or technical organisational support we may want, at the end of the day it's the money or resources that may trigger a change.” (ICVA representative)²⁶

Figure 4: Activities to support this outcome



²³ Interview 2

²⁴ Interviews 6, 10

²⁵ Interviews 1, 2, 7, 10, 11, 12

²⁶ Focus group discussion

Intended Outcome: Effective coordination within and between key stakeholders



Finding 3: ICVA has effectively supported improved coordination dynamics in specific country contexts

In many of the contexts where ICVA works the NGO fora landscape is complex and there is often tension around the role that different actors play.²⁷ ICVA has been described as an effective ‘mediator’ and ‘mentor’ in navigating these relationships and supporting more effective dialogue and coordination.²⁸ ICVA has played an important role in raising problems in coordination dynamics and issues of importance to NGO fora and their partners.²⁹ This support has included informal advice and mentoring as well as support formally raising issues and developing advocacy approaches to encourage shifts in coordination.³⁰ ICVA have promoted and supported the engagement of NGO representatives in formal review processes intended to improve coordination.³¹

Raising the voice of national NGOs in Coordination Bodies

ICVA’s focus on raising the voice of national NGOs has been particularly effective. This was evident in Myanmar, where local actors proactively approached ICVA to ask for support to advocate for a local NGO forum to have representation on the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). ICVA and Local Resource Center (LRC) successfully advocated for one seat on the HCT in 2017, which was expanded to four seats for local actors within a year. The momentum has continued from this initial advocacy and this year both a UN and INGO representative have given their seats to two additional local actor representatives.

“ICVA has really contributed to expansion of CSO space in Myanmar in the HCT [and has] allowed our voices to be considered with international actors” (*National NGO forum representative*).

Figure 5: Activities to support this outcome

Outcome 2: Effective coordination within and between key stakeholders



Advocated for the representation of 2 national NGO fora (Local Resource Center and Palestinian Network PNGO) in their respective country-level HCTs



22 NGO fora (12 in 2020 and 10 in 2021) received small grants via ICVA to strengthen in country coordination work including operational capacity training on different thematic areas (e.g. PSEA, humanitarian principles, localisation, WASH implementation, digital fundraising)*



1 NGO forum reported receiving a grant to support salary of coordinator⁺



Support for HCT reviews and peer-to-peer reviews[^]

*Information from ICVA ⁺Interview 4 [^]Interviews 6, 8

²⁷ Interviews 13, 14

²⁸ Interview 13

²⁹ Interviews 4, 8, 15

³⁰ Interview 8

³¹ Interviews 6, 7, 15

Intended outcome: Advocacy and engagement on the right issues in the right way



Finding 4: ICVA has strengthened two-way exchange between national, regional and global discourse

“Having ICVA being able to take messages up through EDG and IASC structures and we see it fall back to the response level — strong NGO voice which opens things up. From Geneva then back down to response level” (*International NGO forum rep*).³²

The quote above captures the essential brokering role that ICVA has played for NGO fora, ensuring a two-way exchange that influences discourse and decision-making in both directions (national-regional-global-regional-national). ICVA has been instrumental in brokering linkages and conversations for fora in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and South Sudan into regional and global discussions on issues including localisation and country-specific advocacy issues such as famine in Ethiopia. This has included ICVA accompaniment to key regional meetings, assisting with drafting / reflecting priorities in communication to global platforms, raising the issues directly or supporting representatives to raise issues in key forums.³³ Equally, ICVA also plays a significant role in translating global issues and discussions to the national level and supporting the national fora to frame their thinking in global developments.³⁴

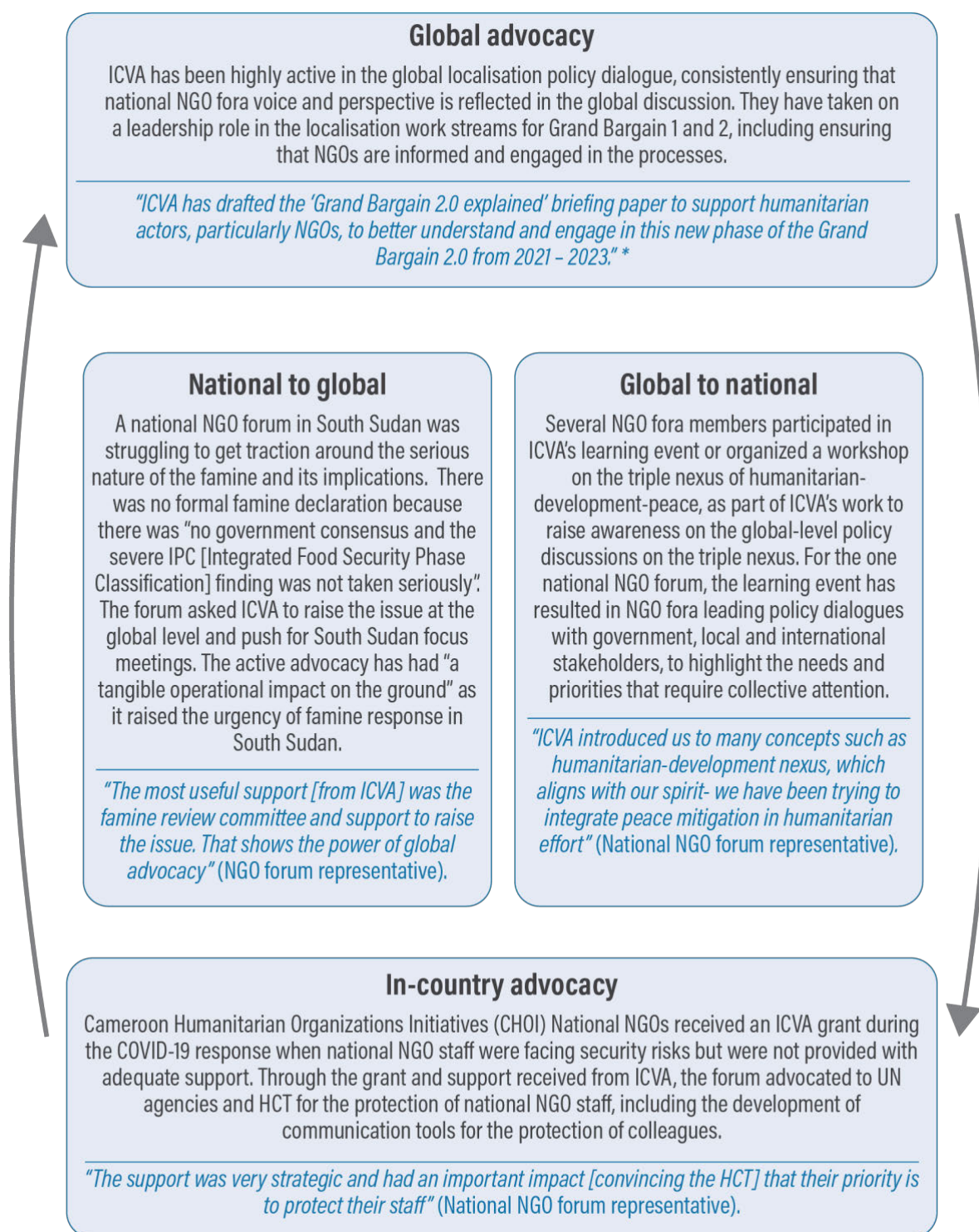
Figure 6 below features some examples of where two-way advocacy has been particularly effective and reflects ICVA working in the right way on advocacy and engagement. However, as raised later in the report under relevance there are also examples that suggest there is more work to ensure that ICVA is also working on the ‘right issues’ or at least clarifying the right issues for whom (see relevance section of report).

³² Interview 8

³³ Interviews 3, 14, 15

³⁴ Interview 13

Figure 6: Two-way Influence and Advocacy



* ICVA, The Grand Bargain 2.0 Explained: An ICVA Briefing Paper, March 2022.

Figure 7: Activities to support this outcome



EFFECTIVENESS — OPPORTUNITIES



Finding 5: There are clear enablers and barriers to effective engagement

Enablers and barriers emerging from this review provide clear direction for ICVA on opportunities to strengthen and promote enablers at the same time as minimizing and reducing the impact of barriers. Obviously, these are context specific so already in some country contexts ICVA has all or many of the enablers in place, with few barriers to effective engagement. The reverse may be true for another context. These will be revisited in the recommendations section but are summarised here as an important context for effectiveness opportunities.

Table 1: Enablers and barriers to effective ICVA engagement with NGO for a

Strategic and partnership-based	Enablers	Barriers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong relationships between ICVA and NGO fora (supported by regional rep roles)³⁵ Strong relationships with UN and donors to facilitate and broker engagement with NGO fora³⁶ Cross-learning and exchange opportunities among NGO fora (especially when working on the same type of issues)³⁷ ICVA's ability to tailor support to country needs³⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of clarity on ICVA's role and the support they could provide³⁹ No articulated guidance for when or why to engage with a specific NGO forum⁴⁰ Limited two-way accountability⁴¹ Lack of visibility for NGO fora on ICVA's global level advocacy and engagement⁴²

³⁵ Interviews 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15

³⁶ Interview 8, 13, 15; See also Beer, Clayton and Adrio Bacchetta. *ICVA 2019-2020 Mid-Strategy Impact Study*, February 2021.

³⁷ Interviews 4, 7, 8; See also Beer, Clayton and Adrio Bacchetta. *ICVA 2019-2020 Mid-Strategy Impact Study*, February 2021.





³⁸ Beer, Clayton and Adrio Bacchetta. *ICVA 2019-2020 Mid-Strategy Impact Study*, February 2021.

³⁹ Interviews 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 12

⁴⁰ Interviews 1, 3, 5, 15

⁴¹ Interviews 1, 3, 5

⁴² Interviews 1, 5

Procedural	 Enablers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular and responsive in-country engagement⁴³ • Structured communications and feedback⁴⁴ 	 Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent or unpredictable engagement⁴⁵
	 Enablers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localisation agenda increasing opportunities and funding for national/local NGOs⁴⁶ • Support on locally relevant issues⁴⁷ 	 Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of needs priorities and expectations of different NGO fora (in particular between national/mixed/international)⁴⁸ • Disconnects between global level issues and local experiences or priorities⁴⁹ • Challenges facing NGO forum members in accessing funding for organizational development⁵⁰

Finding 6: The lack of agreed process and structure around the way ICVA engages with NGO fora undermines effectiveness for some stakeholders

ICVA has operated very opportunistically in the way it engages with NGO fora. As a result, there are few structured processes to identify which fora ICVA will work with, what specific needs those fora have, and what support will then be matched to those needs with specific and agreed outcomes for the process. ICVA has intuitively and largely successfully built activities with NGO fora based on strong relationships and conversations. The strong relationships need to stay as a key enabler (see Table 1) and were noted as critical to the effectiveness of ICVA,⁵¹ but they could further be supported by agreed objectives and processes that provide clarity and accountability.

“It’s more a question on common ground. ICVA are very responsive, [but we have] no idea about their strategic areas. That’s the missing piece. More organized and consistent and predictable discussion about what we can achieve together [would help]” (INGO forum representative).⁵²

⁴³ Interviews 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15

⁴⁴ Interviews 2, 7, 10

⁴⁵ Interviews 1, 3, 5

⁴⁶ Interviews 2, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 15

⁴⁷ Interviews 4, 6, 8, 10

⁴⁸ Based on the coding and disaggregated analysis of all interviews

⁴⁹ Interviews 2, 3, 5

⁵⁰ Interviews 2, 7, 11, 12

⁵¹ Interviews 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11

⁵² Interview 5

The need for greater clarity of process was raised in relation to the following areas:

- **Needs assessment:** some NGO fora described the support being provided by ICVA as not necessarily appropriate for their immediate needs or reflecting a good understanding of where the forum was at. In some cases, this resulted in disjointed or inappropriate support. This was particularly raised where NGO fora were struggling with the basics of establishing their structure and governance, but ICVA was proposing information sharing and capacity workshops.⁵³
- **Activity plans:** there was a lack of clarity for some NGO fora with respect to what type or range of support they could expect or ask for, or indeed how these plans link into the needs assessment. Some NGO forum representatives suggested that the lack of understanding as to what can be offered leads to mismatched expectations, whereby fora think that ICVA can and should in fact be offering much more.⁵⁴
- **Accountability:** some international stakeholders felt that the lack of agreed activity planning linked to specific intended outcomes undermined ICVA's accountability. In two countries, this was interpreted as ICVA being extractive and using information from in-country for global advocacy without adequate understanding of how and why information is being used linked to shared objectives.⁵⁵

“Accountability not happening. Unsure what is [the] responsibility of ICVA, and our responsibility. What's added value of ICVA doing that, not agreeing priorities. Given the multiple priorities, it could be useful to hone in two priorities and achieve on specific results” (INGO forum representative).⁵⁶

RELEVANCE

Is it relevant for us or them? (ICVA regional rep)

The issue of relevance (whether the engagement with NGO fora is focusing on the right things) is fundamentally a challenging area because it is not clear in the ICVA strategy, proposals or documentation who the engagement is intended to be relevant to. There is an implicit assumption in the proposed program logic, proposals and reporting that the activities for intended outcomes 1 and 2 are centred on the NGO fora themselves (strong governance and organisational capacity *and* effective coordination). However, for intended outcome 3 (Advocacy and engagement on the right issues in the right way) the actor of relevance is less clear; it could serve the advocacy needs of NGO fora in country contexts, or the needs of the global community and ICVA's role in those global fora. This dilemma is reflected in the following review findings on relevance.



Finding 7: Activities that focus on governance, capacity strengthening, and coordination have been largely relevant to NGO fora needs.

NGO fora were very positive about most activities that focused on country-specific challenges and issues and addressed them in a practical and tangible way. Examples include the in-country support provided in

⁵³ Interview 4

⁵⁴ Interviews 1, 2, 5

⁵⁵ Interview 1, 4

⁵⁶ Interview 5

Afghanistan and South Sudan to broker agreements between NGO fora and UN agencies to improve coordination; funding to support the exploration of localisation in the specific context of Indonesia; and the capacity strengthening support provided to members of the Palestinian NGO Network which helped increase their engagement in WASH cluster meetings.⁵⁷



Finding 8: Advocacy activities, and the specific thematic focus of advocacy, has varied in relevance to NGO fora.

There are some strong examples of advocacy issues that have been successfully raised globally by ICVA on behalf of NGO fora that are well documented under Outcome 3 in the effectiveness section. These also were perceived as highly relevant to the country context; for example, raising drought concerns in Ethiopia at the global level or raising coordination challenges in the South Sudan response at the IASC.

However, thematic issues of relevance in the global discourse are not always translating to relevance in country contexts. NGO fora representatives were much less convinced of the relevance of higher-level global agendas to their day-to-day operations. Representatives discussed examples of localisation, COVID-19, climate change and nexus discussions, and despite training workshops and advocacy initiatives focused on these issues, not all NGO fora representatives were convinced that these were the most relevant issues to them at the country level. For many they would prefer an advocacy focus on addressing bureaucratic and administrative challenges in context; trends analysis that is context specific; and country funding processes and allocations.⁵⁸

“ICVA find the common themes so you end up with climate change, localisation. Things are so broad. Takes time but no return on investment for us.” (INGO fora rep)⁵⁹

ICVA recognises that global issues may not always be relevant to national context and that a trade-off is required whereby sometimes NGO fora will engage in these broader humanitarian issues in a reciprocal arrangement.

“We are perceived/tolerated as bringing them things that are not perceived as a priority. They do it because maybe at the back of their mind they think there might be some value, dedicated time, energy and resources.” (ICVA regional representative)

Whilst this issue is informally recognised it has not been articulated and discussed with NGO fora partners. There is evidence that suggests that NGO fora are happy to contribute into global discussions and indeed recognise the associated value to the sector, however, the reciprocal relationship remains informal and unclear. This lack of clarity has led to misunderstandings and perceptions of ICVA extracting data from NGO fora on issues of perceived irrelevance in some limited contexts.

⁵⁷ ICVA Network and Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network. *Final Report: Strengthening In-Country NGO Fora to Promote Enhanced NGO Collective Action at Field Level During the COVID-19 Response*.

⁵⁸ Interviews 1, 2, 3, 5, 7

⁵⁹ Interview 3



Finding 9: There are concrete examples of the impact of ICVA's engagement with NGO fora

Three impact areas identified in the review are: increased funding to CSOs and local organisations; increased engagement in coordination mechanisms and HCTs; and more strategic policy and advocacy work. Considering these three impact areas NGO fora have positively influenced humanitarian action in some country contexts because of ICVA's support. It is not possible, or appropriate, to say within the context of a light touch review whether influence has led to better support for affected people (as stated in the program logic impact statement). This would need to be the focus of a more detailed evaluation process.

The following provide examples to support the finding that ICVA's engagement with NGO fora has had positive impact.

Increased funding to CSOs and local organisations

- Improved quality of proposals and documents has led to greater success in obtaining UN contracts for CSOs in Cameroon.⁶⁰
- Palestinian Network NGO reported that the trainings on WASH implementation led to increased engagement in WASH cluster meetings and increasing their access to humanitarian pooled funds by 34%.⁶¹

Increased engagement in coordination mechanisms and HCTs

- The small grant that one national NGO forum received was used to fund assessments on NGO networks' operational capacities which were then used as evidence in their advocacy for representation at the HCT.⁶²
- Palestinian NGO Network efforts, supported by ICVA, continue to ensure that local CSOs are well represented and funded in HRPs.⁶³ They released the "PNGO Recommendations and Guidance and Vetting Criteria for HRP" and had discussions with the Good Humanitarian Donors (GHD), the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), and OCHA which concluded that a joint workshop on the vetting criteria in HRP and HPF will be discussed beginning of 2022.⁶⁴ Overall, increased capacity has led to greater engagement and opportunity to contribute into Humanitarian Country Teams therefore enhancing localisation at multiple fronts.

"ICVA has really contributed to expansion of CSO space in Myanmar in the HCT [and has] allowed our voices to be considered with international actors" (Local NGO fora rep).

⁶⁰ ICVA Network, *Strengthening in-country NGO Fora to promote enhanced NGO collective action at field level during the COVID-19 Response Partner Report*, p. 3

⁶¹ ICVA Network and Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network. *Final Report: Strengthening In-Country NGO Fora to Promote Enhanced NGO Collective Action at Field Level During the COVID-19 Response*.

⁶² Interview 7

⁶³ ICVA Network and Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network. *Final Report: Strengthening In-Country NGO Fora to Promote Enhanced NGO Collective Action at Field Level During the COVID-19 Response*.

⁶⁴ ICVA Network and Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network. *Final Report: Strengthening In-Country NGO Fora to Promote Enhanced NGO Collective Action at Field Level During the COVID-19 Response*.

More strategic policy and advocacy work

- For Syrian Network League, ICVA's advocacy support helped them in their media engagement by explaining how to tell compelling stories and how to tailor their messages by mapping their intended audience and stakeholders to engage.
- For one international INGO forum, the linkages that ICVA facilitated with the forum and the Emergency Directors Group, Regional Humanitarian Partnership Team, and Interagency Working Group were critical to support advocacy work to spotlight the operational and political issues that NGOs face in one country context at the regional level. As a result, the regional humanitarian coordinator established a task team to identify the bureaucratic challenges and look at innovative solutions to address those challenges. ICVA also supported the analysis of the political situation in this country: "[The] idea is to ensure that we are having analysis that looks at the situation, but also try to provoke change of attitude and improvement in tactics of humanitarian community e.g. UN agencies donors. Helps outsiders understand challenges and issues."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Across NGO fora the majority think there are ways that ICVA can improve its engagement. For most, these changes represent small tweaks in the approach whilst maintaining the strong elements of existing programming. This is reflected in the forum representative responses to the question 'Do you think ICVA needs to change the way it engages with NGO fora?' detailed in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8: Do you think ICVA needs to change the way it engages with NGO fora?

	N	%
Yes, a lot	3	25%
Maybe a little	5	42%
No not at all	4	33%

The recommendations build on the enablers and seek to mitigate against barriers articulated in Table 1 in the Effectiveness section of the report.

Recommendation 1

Establish clear, shared expectations by agreeing on objectives and processes for ICVA's support for NGO fora, including:

- Needs and capacity assessment process (including an understanding of external issues and context that affect NGO forum operations)
- Shared 'menu' of options as the basis for discussion and agreement
- Agreed activity plans and ways of tracking intended impact

This recommendation seeks to mitigate against barriers to effectiveness articulated in Findings 5 and 6 (lack of clarity on ICVA's role and support they could provide). It further supports some of the key enablers identified in this review including building strong relationships and tailoring support to country needs. This recommendation will also support ICVA's efforts to provide fit for purpose support that can be adapted to context including for example what is relevant to phase of crisis or number of NGOs in context.

Recommendation 2

Leverage hybrid communication, ensuring that in-country face to face interaction still has an important role to play in relationship building. ICVA and NGO fora should establish:

- Agreed frequency of communication
- Optimum frequency of in-person meetings, balancing partnership benefits, feasibility, and environmental costs
- What support is required for effective remote communication

This recommendation aims to institutionalise regular and predictable communication. Adopting this recommendation would overcome some of the identified barriers that relate to lack of clarity and the impacts of inconsistent or irregular communication.

Recommendation 3

Ensure accountability is built into the agreements on activity planning

- Agree on approaches to define and track intended impact
- Support regular feedback to NGO fora on how information is used and with what outcomes at the global level

This recommendation specifically focuses in on two-way accountability as an enabler. It addresses an important barrier to effectiveness when NGO fora don't understand why information is being sought, what it is used for, or receive feedback on outcomes of processes. Acting on this recommendation will help to make sure that the gains from having clear expectations (recommendation 1) are carried through in ongoing work.

Recommendation 4

Be explicit about the reciprocal nature of the relationship and articulate as part of an expectations process the following areas:

- What support ICVA can provide to locally identified issues and priorities
- What support ICVA seeks in understanding and informing global sector priorities
- The difference in scope and complementarity of NGO fora support between ICVA and InterAction
- How learnings from ICVA and NGO fora experiences across national, regional and global levels will be captured and shared (see also recommendations 2 and 3)

This recommendation recognises that, for partnerships to be transparent and effective, the benefits and scope of ICVA's unique role must also be clear – even though ICVA seeks to tailor its support to each NGO forum. This recommendation seeks to leverage the enabler of supporting locally relevant issues, whilst balancing the reality of ICVA's role needing to address and work on global issues concurrently. The key seems to be clarity of intentions and relationship.

Recommendation 5

Continue and make more explicit a stream of work focused on supporting national NGO fora as their needs are quite specific and different to those of INGO fora.

This recommendation draws on the enabling shift across the humanitarian sector that has increased the space of action for local and national organisations, recognising the importance of their roles and creating more funding opportunities. This will be important to supporting in-country progress for localisation and can build on the strong examples of how this has worked in some country contexts (e.g., Myanmar). It further seeks to address the identified diversity of needs, priorities and expectations of different NGO fora.

Recommendation 6

Continue and expand exchange and peer-to-peer learning opportunities within and between regions. This includes creating more opportunities for NGO fora to share experiences with each other through learning events and sustained engagements, especially when they are working on similar issues or challenges.

This recommendation builds on the enabler of cross learning and exchange opportunities that has benefitted NGO fora to date. It seeks to take advantage of expertise across different NGO fora as well as the jointly accrued experience of ICVA and NGO fora of support programs from 2017 onwards. This can not only facilitate sharing of good practice and troubleshooting, but creates an ongoing sustainable network of fora members who can support each other into the future.

ANNEX A: TOOLS

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR REGIONAL REPS

Prior to the discussion, the team will try to map NGO fora engagement per region. This could be drawn from the document review or requested via email. If the information is not available in the document review the regional reps may be sent a simple template in advance of the group discussion to complete and send back to the research team. The group discussion should start with sharing the mapping and checking accuracy.

Theme	Key question	Probing questions
Profile (Showing map)	Where do you provide support to NGO fora? Which types of NGO fora (INGO / NNGO) are supported?	Are these all captured on the map?
Engagement with NGO Fora (Descriptive)	Please can you describe how you engage with NGO Fora?	What work/ programs / projects have you collaborated with NGO fora on (coordination / advocacy / engagement)? Are there any specific topics that you have worked on? What topics?
Right issues and stakeholders (Relevance)	In your experience does ICVA work on the right issues / projects / initiatives with NGO fora? Do ICVA's priorities align with NGO fora priorities and needs? In your experience does ICVA work with the right people / fora?	Can you give specific examples of when ICVA did or didn't work on the right issue / project? How could ICVA allocate time/resources better to support NGO fora? Are there other stakeholders that ICVA should have engaged with more?
Positive engagement (Effectiveness)	What support provided by ICVA to NGO fora has been the MOST helpful? Please provide a specific examples.	Why was it helpful? What did you achieve as a result? With what impact?
Barriers to positive engagement	Have you had any difficult experiences working with NGO fora?	Why was it difficult? What was the result/ impact?

(Effectiveness)	Please provide a specific example.	
Opportunities	In what ways could ICVA improve support to NGO fora?	Do you have examples of other initiatives that have supported NGO fora well and that ICVA can learn from?
Key stakeholders to interview	Which stakeholders in your region should we interview?	(Geographic spread / level of engagement / type of forum – international / national)

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

NGO Fora rep question guide

Prior to the interview some of the profile questions may already be known in which case they can be documented / checked at the start of the interview.

Theme	Key question	Probing questions
Profile	Country context Type of NGO forum (INGO / NNGO) in context?	What other NGO fora exist in country? What role does your forum play vis a vis other?
Engagement with ICVA (Descriptive)	Please can you describe the engagement you have with ICVA? What work/ programs / projects have you and ICVA collaborated on (coordination / advocacy / engagement)? Are there any specific topics that you have worked with ICVA on? What topics?	When did you start working with ICVA? How did engagement start?
Right issues and stakeholders	In your experience does ICVA work on the right issues / projects / initiatives?	Can you give specific examples of when they did or didn't work on the right issue / project?

(Relevance)	Do ICVA's priorities align with your priorities and needs? In your experience does ICVA work with the right people / fora?	How could they have allocated time/resources better? Are there other stakeholders that ICVA should have engaged with more?
Positive engagement (Effectiveness)	What support provided by ICVA has been the MOST helpful? Please provide a specific example.	Why was it helpful? What did you achieve as a result? With what impact?
Barriers to positive engagement (Effectiveness)	Have you had any difficult experiences working with ICVA? Please provide a specific example.	Why was it difficult? What was the result/ impact?
Opportunities	In what ways could ICVA improve support to NGO fora?	Do you have examples of other initiatives that have supported NGO fora well and that ICVA can learn from?

Explain that to end the interview you have a couple of quick-fire questions that only require one / two-word response. Paste into chat function as well as reading out.

2 min response	How often do you engage with ICVA in a year?	Every week / Every month / Every 3- 6 months / once a year
	Would you like to engage with ICVA more / less / about the same?	more / less / about the same
	Would you recommend other NGO fora to engage with ICVA?	Yes definitely / yes probably / maybe / no
	Do you think ICVA needs to change the way it engages with NGO fora?	Yes, a lot / maybe a little / no not at all

External stakeholder question guide

Theme	Key question	Probing questions
Engagement with ICVA (Descriptive)	Please can you describe your engagement with ICVA? Have you observed ICVA's engagement with NGO fora? If yes, in which countries? What have you observed?	Specific projects / topics?
Right issues and stakeholders (Relevance)	In your experience does ICVA work on the right issues / projects / initiatives? Do ICVA's priorities align with NGO fora priorities and needs? In your experience does ICVA work with the right people / fora?	Can you give specific examples of when they did or didn't work on the right issue / project? How could they have allocated time/resources better? Are there other stakeholders that ICVA should have engaged with more?
Positive engagement (Effectiveness)	What support provided by ICVA has been the MOST helpful? Please provide a specific example.	Why was it helpful? What was achieved as a result? With what impact?
Barriers to positive engagement (Effectiveness)	Have you had any difficult experiences working with ICVA? Please provide a specific example.	Why was it difficult? What was the result/ impact?
Opportunities	In what ways could ICVA improve support to NGO fora?	Do you have examples of other initiatives that have supported NGO fora well and that ICVA can learn from?

ANNEX B: RESEARCH BRIEF

Date: February 2022

Project: Review of ICVA's support to NGO Fora (2018-21)

Researchers: Kate Sutton, Beth Eggleston and Nathaniel Rose.

Source of Funding: International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)

You are invited to participate in the *Review of ICVA'S support to NGO Fora (2018-21)* through participation in an interview facilitated by a HAG team member.

This research brief contains information about the project. Its purpose is to explain the process so that you can make a fully informed decision as to whether you wish to participate. If you have any questions about the research, please contact one of the research team members. Contact details can be found at the end of the document.

Purpose

The purpose of the review is to understand the impact of ICVA's work with NGO fora with a specific focus on understanding the relevance and effectiveness of approaches to work with NGO fora across contexts between 2018-2021. The review will provide recommendations based on findings.

Methods

The research will use the following methods to generate and gather data:

- A desk review of key regional and country-specific documents
- Key informant interviews with key stakeholders.

What participation will involve

To participate in this research, you must be over the age of 18 years. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to suggest a suitable time for an interview with HAG team members. You will be asked to provide your opinion on

3. *The effectiveness and relevance of ICVA's work with NGO Fora*
4. *Ways in which ICVA could strengthen ongoing support to meet the needs of NGO fora*

Handwritten and typed notes will be the primary means of recording data from the interviews. Interviews may also be audio recorded to ensure your opinions are captured accurately.

Risks and potential benefits to participants

Anticipated benefits of participating in the research include:

- Enhanced understanding of NGO Fora's' collective action in supporting effective NGO coordination and engagement
- Improved relevance of ICVA's support to NGO fora.

It is not expected that you will be exposed to any risk or harm by participating in this research. Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected as detailed below.

How privacy and confidentiality will be protected

Interview notes will be de-identified and used only for HAG's stated purposes. Notes which identify an organisation will not be shared outside the research team. Documents based on this work will not attribute comments or findings to particular individuals.

Participation is voluntary; the participant has the right to withdraw from further participation at any stage

Participation in the research is completely voluntary. Individuals may, without any penalty, decline to take part or withdraw at any time without providing an explanation, and may refuse to answer a question during the interview or via email.

Your decision whether to take part or not, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship with HAG or ICVA.

More information

If you require more information about the research or your involvement in it, please contact Kate Sutton at ksutton@hag.org.au

If you have any complaints or concerns about the research, please contact Beth Eggleston at beggleston@hag.org.au