



ICVA at 60 Interview Transcript

Steven Muncy

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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 While, a consultant for the ICVA at 60 project, talk to Steven Muncy who served on the ICVA board from 2009-2015 as the representative of CFSI, Philippines. Steven is the founder and executive director of CFSI.

Their conversation begins with a discussion around the ICVA at 60 history paper, the final version can found on the ICVA website.

Steven talks about how ICVA's diverse membership base, the need and challenge of involving local NGOs, how ICVA has been a catalyst for change, and that the need for coordination is even greater with increasing humanitarian needs and complexity.

Enjoy

SM: Hi, Bob.

RW: Hi, Steve. Good morning to you.

SM: How are you?

RW: Ok. How are you doing?

SM : I'm alright.

RW: Ok, yeah. Good to see you again, even from far away.

SM: Yeah, same here. Wow. Really happy to be in touch with you again.

RW : Yeah. How long have you been with CFSI?

SM: Forty years.

RW: Yeah. That's quite a while. Yeah, yeah,

SM: [Yeah, yeah.

RW : You've been living in the Philippines all this time.

SM: No, I came forty one years ago and to live and work in a refugee camp and then that camp, owing to the needs of the population in that camp, we created this organization known as CSFI.

RW : Oh yeah, right

Yeah. Yeah. Ok, let me tell you what I'm doing, you probably have some idea, but just why I wanted to speak with you. Ignacio and Fiona asked me to help out with some of the preparations for the 60th anniversary commemoration of which would be next year because they started in 1962. The the first thing I did was write that paper, which I think I sent to you probably would have seen it the 13 page paper giving a decade by decade summary of how it has transitioned, how they've evolved in the last 60 years. And now I'm in the process of interviewing a number of former board members, former chairs, former staff to get their ideas on a couple of questions that I'm asking. So and then they'll be planning, and maybe I'll be helping them, I'm not sure some kind of commemoration or celebration next year, whether it's an in-house meeting or a gathering or a panel, we're not really sure one day event or maybe linked to the annual meeting. That's all it would be decided. But the interviews are part of what I'm doing just to to help out Ignacio and Fiona. It's why I wanted to speak with you.

SM: Yes. And I appreciate it your paper.

RW: Yeah, that's my first question. Do you have any comments on the paper, were there any gaps or things? I should have emphasized more or things that I left out that you're aware of from your experience? Was it a read for yourself?

SM: It reads well, and I think it's an encouraging document, and it reflects very well, I think the evolution of the organization and to a certain extent, the evolution of the environment in which we were. There are some things that are not mentioned in the report, but they probably, and I would say, should not be mentioned in the report because not everything is wonderful all the time, right? And sometimes there are some crises or difficulties that you have to go through that can either make the organization stronger or or not as strong. And I think if it went through quite a few things and it made the organization stronger, but you wouldn't put that in this kind of paper.

RW: Yeah, right, yeah. The one thing I did refer to was the when was it in the mid 90s, I guess, when it was kind of falling apart and they had serious financial problems and just before EdShenckenberg took over in the late nineties, I think it was. That was a real crisis. That was the biggest crisis that I read through in all the decades of all the papers that I saw.

SM: Yeah, I think that was the biggest, it was a little bit before my time, but I think it led to questions about integrity and sustainability, and it got rather messy for a while. And I think Ed gets a lot of credit for saving the organization. I think he did. By the time I was on the Board, there was another crisis, but of a different nature. And that got resolved and subsequently ICVA grew at a great pace.

RW: Just tell me, Steve, when were the years that you were active with ICVA and on the Board?

SM: The first question I am not sure I'd have to check again, it's a long time ago. It goes all the way back, I think, before the PARinAC process. But but I was definitely part of the PARinAC process, which I think was about 94 I'm not mistaken.

RW :Yeah, right. Yeah.

SM [I appreciated you picking that up in that paper. I'll check and send you a note. I would say maybe about 94 and then I was on or we we and me representing CFIS was on the board from 2009 to 2015, where I represented CFSI and then my colleague who you know, Vladimir, he served the third term on behalf of CFIS. So we were on the board in 2009 to 2018.

RW: Oh, yeah, yeah, it's quite a long time. Mm hmm. But you were never a chair yourself or the vice chair ?

SM: No, you know, it's an interesting story there, but I'm not sure I should tell you, but from 2009 to 2012, I was an active member and loved what I was doing and hope I made at least a small contribution.

SM Okay, so there were two things that developed at that time that were rather interesting but made sense. One was. The first time I was on the board, 2009, the 2011, I guess it was. We were quite a few South based NGOs. And we were pushing that agenda. And we were aiming to have someone from the South as the chair for the 2012 -2015.

And we thought we were making good progress, and then we got several of us got an email from Penny of Oxfam who had never been on the board, but she declared that she wanted to run for chair. So we were kind of in a quandary because our long term objective was to get somebody from the South as the chair and Penny, who has great talent skills, et cetera, et cetera she wasn't from the South.

But I think we quickly concluded, you can't, you could not at that time push too hard against Oxfam. I mean, they had clout, they had recognition. Penny was well established and well known, et cetera, et cetera. So we backed away from that effort to put forward a southern candidate.

And then after the board was elected, the board sits and decides who's going to be vice and who's going to be this or that.

And she was keen on Faisal, and Faisal of Mercy agreed to to be vice chair. And I and I think that was the right move and subsequently he became the chair of the club.

But I share that with you because I think Penny had good intentions, and she took ICVA to a new height, and we needed her at that time and in particular because the crisis did develop, but it kind of shows also how easily the southern agenda got bumped aside. You know, I'm not complaining about it. It's just the recounting to you what happened because you asked me if I was ever vice chair

RW: In fact, I interviewed. I interviewed Penny also last week and she did tell me she when she became chair, it was on the understanding that she wanted somebody from the global south to succeed her. So it kind of rings very closely to what you what you just said.

SM : Yeah, and to her credit, she consulted various members of the club before running, and she did say she was thinking global south and we did say global south. I guess we we just didn't interpret global south the same way. But bottom line, it was the right decision that Faizal came in.

Now the other thing that was the other thing that was important was we entered into a crisis with Ed and Manisha. I think they were pretty much, you know, with maybe a four man, five person shop at that time, it was a very small staff. And Ed and Manisha had major difficulties, severe difficulties and Penny was the glue that held everything together, and the person who recognized we had a major problem and had to take action. Specifically, we had to bring in a management consultant who could invest a considerable amount of time in talking to Manisha and Ed and try to sort out possible options for moving forward. And I don't know how many hours and days and weeks and months we spent on that, I do remember lots and lots and lots of tears, tears. But ultimately it got sorted out. I believe Manisha left and then later Ed left, and I have deep respect both of them and they remain friends of mine. But it was a tough time for ICVA and the board in particular who had to kind of manage the situation.

RW: And that was during the time when you were on the Board, I guess, so you were aware of all this. Yes. Yeah. No, you can. You can argue I knew them from far away when I was still with UNHCR and doing consultancies. But there were there, what, 10, 11, 12, 13 years. That's a long time for those two people and maybe, maybe regardless of whatever their internal problems were for maybe, maybe it was time for a change anyway. My personal view.

SM: I think I think you're exactly right, and I think Penny was able to kind of take the bull by the horns and help the organization through that process, I'm not sure anybody else on the board at that time could have managed it as well as she did. And I think she drew a lot of her international experience and that was helpful to ICVA. The other thing was not a crisis, it was a positive, but there was a lot of discussion. One was developing the membership base, so kind of as a concession, I guess, to being vice chair, I was asked to be the chair of the membership committee. So what I did was to draft the strategy and presented it to the board and it was subsequently adopted.

What was decided at that point in time was a we would be rather ambitious, so we would aim for 14 new members by 2014. But in addition, we would target organization and we would track to see what progress we made against those targets. And I don't think prior to that time, or at least if I recall that part of that time ICVA kind of had a very specific strategy about growing the membership base and where they want to grow it from. So in response to your first question, that's one of my responses. I was proud that ICVA as an organization decided we will grow this organization, but we will do it in a Strategic, purposeful way, not in an ad hoc almost reactive way. The other thing that was...

RW: Let me just respond, respond briefly, if you go, if you have this document in front of you on Page 11, I have a number of members from 2010 all the way to the last year. And I think what you're saying really bears out just for the progress of number of members. 2010 was 71, 69, 75, 68, but then it grew exponentially, not exponentially, greatly over the last five, six, seven years. And I guess that's a legacy of what you were doing. That's my impression.

SM: I you probably give me too much credit, but I think we did set in place an intent to grow the membership, but in a strategic manner, maybe I, you know, I just drafted the document, maybe many other people had done work beforehand or afterwards. But I think that is what we did. It needed to be decided that you were going to grow the membership and you had to do it strategically. I.e., diverse membership.

RW: And my assumption there is that many of the new members were from the global south. Is that correct?

SM: Absolutely. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

RW: Although the although the the gap seems to be still from what little I know Latin America and Western Central Africa, the Francophone Africa, where there is probably fewer members but also no hub located, as you know, because the hubs are two in East Africa, Amman and Bangkok. So it's a question I'm asking other people too. Not a question, but more an observation about the, maybe the need for a more of a global reach, even as far as hubs, if the finances were available. I'm not sure how you see that.

SM: No, absolutely. I think that the the hubs was something I was going to speak about, so I'm glad you raised it already. But in terms of the location of the hub, absolutely critical. I don't remember why the decision was taken on the two hubs of Africa. It normally linked to the broader humanitarian organization of architecture, but definitely in terms of South and Central America there was no presence and no. I think while I was, there was kind of like, we can't do anything. And to me, it was a little bit odd because that's part of the world has had at that time, a very strong civil society. I remember the yeah. Oh, I forget what he called

RW: And Karl Carson, who was maybe Carson,

SM: Yeah, yeah. Thank you. And there were issues about language, but you can find Spanish speakers. Virtually everywhere, if you make an effort, right? Yeah, yeah. So it was a failure on their side on the subject of the hubs. I think that was one of the things that developed during my time on the board, not because of me, which I think Ed was the one pushing first. I believe Bangkok was the first hub, if I'm not mistaken. And then there was a lot of enthusiasm about having many hubs, including New York. We spent a lot of time on New York, and I'm glad you picked up on the report that it was there and then it rather quickly died.

RW: Yeah.

SM: But the hubs were important, and I think that's been a wonderful driver for ICVA. I mean, it's brought it to life all around the world. I will say that there was some debate about the hub in Asia. Bangkok is a natural place because the logistics and regional offices, et cetera, et cetera. But there was a lot of discussion, and I happened to be on the wrong side of it, about putting the hub in Jakarta so that we can influence the ASEAN secretariat. Everything that relates to that. So initially, at least on my part, we gave in and said, OK, Bangkok makes sense. But please put in the budget a lot of trips to Jakarta because if you really want to influence the ASEAN, you have to be there, you really have to be in person in Jakarta. I think that's been picked up lately.

RW: Yeah, I never, never read, you know, I read all the annual reports and all the documents and didn't hear much about that, actually.

SM: No. Well, that's partly ASEANs fault. It's a lot of talk and not much action, but it was also maybe, maybe it's a strategic opportunity to explore because in Asia, as you well know, personal relationships and frequency of of coming together means everything.

RW: Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, for sure. Yeah.

Anything else you want to say about the paper before I move to my, I have three questions for you otherwise.

SM: And just just one more, and again, it's not something you can put in the report, but it's maybe interesting to take up because it is a policy issue. While I was on the board, I think the first time the first three years. We had a member organization put on the U.N. sanctions list, IIROSA, I think it's Islamic relief organization of Saudi Arabia. And it had the misfortune of having a name similar to other organizations, and it seemed to have links to IROSA and other countries that misbehave. Anyway, it ended up on the U.N. sanction list, and the ICVA board had to say to IIROSA You can't be with us anymore and they have a representative in Geneva. He had been very active. And she and her bosses were extremely distraught, angry, disturbed, et cetera, et cetera.

There was even talk at one point about maybe there would be a lawsuit for ICVA in terms of the way we managed it. So ultimately it was resolved and IIROSA came back years later. But I think the policy issue that came up is how does the ICVA community manage a member that gets in trouble with the broader system or is suspected of doing things that the broader system cannot tolerate. Specifically, the Islamic organizations or those in the Middle East, they think they're the ones most often perceived to be on the edge or actually crossing a line, right?

RW: Oh, yeah. And there's no policy or guidelines on that, as far as you know, within ICVA.

SM: It was very straight. If you're on the U.N. sanctions list, you cannot be a member of ICVA. Full stop. But there was no process at that time in the U.N. system on how do you get off the list.

RW : Oh, yeah. I remember when I was with , I spent a couple of years with the the ACT Alliance before it merged with Act Development, and we did a whole set of guidelines on criteria and suspension of agencies if there is any wrongdoing and putting them back when when the issue is resolved, that there was a whole guideline on that with ACT, I wonder whether ICVA has anything similar to that.

SM : They did not at the time.

RW: Maybe it's something to pursue. I can talk to Ignacio about that.

SM: That would be great, Bob.

RW:Ok. Go ahead. Yeah, sorry. I was going to get some of my three questions for you, but go ahead.

SM: Well, your first one, what made me proud as a board member, right?

RW : Yeah, right. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SM: Well, there are several things. One was the commitment to learn from listening, to engage with respect, support the party with other actors, particularly NGOs, of course, but regardless of size and budget, et cetera, et cetera it was, every effort was made to make us all feel equal, even though in the grand scheme of things were not actually equal, right? But every effort was made to make us feel that way, and a concrete example of that is ICVA would cover the airfare and give a very small allowance to NGOs from the global south or small NGOs that just simply could not afford the trip to Geneva. And that was helpful to us. We would not have participated otherwise. We're not allowed to spend our resources that way. So it was very helpful that ICVA covered the airfare. And then there was, if I remember correctly, Bob. The allowance was like 50 Swiss francs for the days you were in Geneva and the hotel was covered, so that was enough to get food for the day. And the hotel was very comfortable. I forgot the name it's across from the Balexert shopping mall.

SM : But that was really important for the participation of smaller global south based NGOs, and because we were in the hotel that created opportunity for us to talk and to compare notes. So there was a lot of southern NGO brewing, not brewery, but brewing in the coffee shop of that hotel. We could compare notes and think about this and agree on ways forward. And some of that has been sustained like Mamadou, Misikir, Judy Lucy, many of us, we obviously find what many of us, we stay in touch and we've worked on other issues together. So again, the point is that ICVA made every effort to allow NGOs to participate big or small, rich or not rich.

A second thing that made me proud is that ICVA was willing to tackle tough issues, be they internal or external. And there were many times when I'm sure people in UNHCR thought, Oh, lock the door and don't let ICVA in.

But there were many other times where ICVA were making noise turned out to be helpful for UNHCR as well as its partner.

RW: Yeah, I think that's true. Particularly a lot of people talks about are the ones I've interviewed when Ed Schenkeberg was there, he was kind of aggressive, maybe over aggressive sometimes, but very honest and to the point and and very challenging he would challenge the U.N. system and a positive sort of way.

SM:] Yeah, you know, that's that's funny. There was Ed did that and I think he did a good job and maybe sometimes too aggressive. But generally I felt he did a good job. But there was something that kind of culture. I'll just share with you. You probably got the issue. Geneva's fond of the word debate. And Ed, in particular, was fond of the word debate. In the part of the world where I live. Of course, I grew up in the U.S., but in this part of the world you want for smooth relationship and debate, sounds like you have a problem or a difficulty, you disagree, you cannot reach consensus. So for some of us, it made us uncomfortable that every other word was, Let's have a debate about this topic or let's debate it.

RW : Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Maybe in that connection, I'll ask you a question, because because you go back in time in a good way, a number of years being associated with ICVA, you were probably there in the beginning when they started talking about localization also and the local and national NGOs. And that and the evolution of that, which has really become, as you know, one of the main strategic areas of ICVA. Do you want to say a word about that? When was your recollection when all that began and how it evolved briefly?

SM: it's a good question, I don't remember when it started. I do remember that we did not initially use the word localization, which is loaded in many schools. What I what I remember was we wanted to increase the engagement of local actors. We wanted to ensure that they had capacities, which is sometimes only finance, sometimes it's information. Sometimes it's more than that. And we wanted to make sure that the resources that were going to the bigger NGOs including the management fee could be similarly directed towards local and national regional NGOs. It was always a less than comfortable discussion, and I believe it. I believe the term localisation came up about the time of the World Humanitarian Summit if it didn't come up at that time. They've got branded at that time « localization ». Now there has been at least in my the community in which I work, there's been a lot of debate about what does localisation mean? Some people say local actors include the government or the state, and that you should make sure that they responsibly carry out their duty of care. You should enable them, enable them. They should be in the driver's seat, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And that's all well and good if it's a government that genuinely concerned about its people. It's not so good in the case of Myanmar at the moment or many other countries around the world.

SM : So for some people, when you say localisation, the first question is what do you mean localisation? If you're talking government, the role of government? Let's hold on a second. Then another is if you're talking NGOs, how local are local? Is it local as in the community, in the Canton or the or the town or the province? Or is it all the country is local because they're there from that particular country. This has not been resolved either. And then the third thing that developed recently and this is good business strategy on the part of the big one, but it is a little contentious. And that is the large, large, large INGOs are creating country versions of themselves. And then marketing that as local. Well, I'm sure you're familiar with this. This is not a surprise to you, but we see more and more of that. And I was a participant in a research recently here in the Philippines, and one of the questions was, do you consider those groups local? You know. that kind of discussion continues. Um, and lastly, I would say for far too many people, localization was boiled down to the 25 percent, the amount of the budget, the twenty five percent. And I said, that's not what it's supposed to be about one of the indicators.

RW : Yeah, that's the figure UNHCR has always used going back three or four years, the percentage of operational funds going to a local and national NGOs.

SM : Now. I think the target was 25 percent, was it?

RW : I know UNHCR for sure they picked it up. So yeah, you're right about that. Yeah. Let me move on to the next question, which is more perspective, looking to the future, looking at ICVA today, and I'm sure you're so quite associated with them, even though you're no longer on the board, there are 2030 strategy and their three year strategy that just got approved in the last annual meeting. Why do you think ICVA is important today and how would you see it moving into the future as far as priorities from your personal point of view?

SM : Good question, and I do we do remain involved, and I personally participated in the last annual meeting and we contributed a little bit comment on the strategy. Definitely, it's important. I think the regional hubs, or at least in the case of Asia, have grown in their importance, their scope, their impact. I see particularly now in the context of Myanmar, which is very, very complicated, as you well know. So the the regional hubs, Well, let me just speak of Asia, because that's the one I know best. The hubs have greater impact, influence, et cetera, et cetera. ICVA remains important because it has access to the gods. It has the possibility of influencing decision. It does an excellent job of getting information out to people. It's a lot of information, but if you take time to review it, it's all almost always helpful. And a lot of it is extremely interesting and. You can you can move on it. In terms of the future, I like the strategy that's been adopted, I must say that the timing was a little bit off because it was coming to most of us during the pandemic and to plan to 2030 seems rather ambitious. You know, under the present circumstances. But I think there's enough flexibility, we're old enough, that that maybe by 2030, it's still completely relevant. Certainly, it would be mostly relevant. There is a question that comes up from time to time, and that is for those smaller NGOs and CFSI one of them, and we're working only in one region.

What, then, is the relevance of Geneva, the secretary in Geneva and vice versa. And there's also some risk of duplication, so let me just give you an example. So the strategy document was circulated from Geneva. We went through it, the discussion about it, and then shortly thereafter we got the same document from Bangkok and we kind of scratched their head and said, Okay, should we give comments to Bangkok or should we give comments to Geneva? Or does it make any difference? And that can be multiplied many times over. So it's a small issue, and I think maybe it just shows we haven't sorted it out. Did we just assume that all of our engagement with the regional hub and no more Geneva or should we try to engage with both Geneva and the hub? And what are the what are the polls if we don't engage with both? So, for example, if we don't engage the Geneva I think and this has been a criticism, I think that. Geneva consults with the NGOs in the neighborhood, and it tends to be a northern voice. You know, it's from Geneva. However, if we participate just in Asia, Asia's then competing against the other hub And we're not sure if and when our voices are heard at the Geneva or New York level, it's probably more a CFSI problem than an ICVA problem. Maybe it's no problem for other NGOs, maybe the regional hub is enough.

RW : But how would you see, Steve, the line of reporting or line of contact, would you say, depending on the issue? Or would you see it always going through Bangkok or a mixture between Bangkok and Geneva? How would you say it?

SM : Yeah. Our approach so far has been issue specific, and so far that has not ruffled any feathers. Um, sometimes we're careful to copy the other, but it's issue driven, I'll give you one example, I think January 2020 I was in Geneva and I it was a meeting organized by Rob, you might have been there actually Rob Hurt, UNHCR brought together a lot of NGOs,

RW : And yeah, yeah, I was there. Yeah, yeah,

SM : You were there, right?

RW : Yeah. 50 or 60 NGOs. Yeah, yeah, that's right.

SM : So I met for the first time, somebody on the staff in Geneva. I can't remember his name, I think he's French, but he was going to be studying Islamic finance. And someone said, Oh, Steve is based in the Philippines and they have lots of Muslims there and Islamic banks. And so we exchanged cards and we both quite excited that we could learn from each other. And I was excited because in the conflict affected areas of the Philippines, Islamic banking was becoming a way towards peace building or a new reality. So I was kind of excited. It just kind of fizzled out. So I then wondered if maybe I should have taken it up with the Asia hub or if I should have pushed more with Geneva or if there's kind of, you know. I don't know to what extent those based in Geneva feel like they can deal directly with an NGO in one region. Jeremy Rempel, he deals with everybody. He has a great way of sorting it out.

RW : Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, he's a person who I would definitely go to on these kinds of issues. I have a lot of respect for him and especially his portfolio with ICVA. Also also on the SCHR subcommittees. Yeah. So I agree. Yeah. Any further comments on looking to the future? Already, you give me a lot of good information.

SM : And thank you, Bob, you're very kind. We will remain a member of ICVA. We will we're increasing our engagement with the new person in the Asia bureau. She's quite sharp. I'm very pleased with her. Can I say everything now is done? Oh, I got to the General Assembly. Because everything had to be done virtually, right,

RW : Yeah, right. Yeah.

SM: And that was number one, I mean, that was managed so well. And hats off to Roger, who seem to be like he was born to be on video or television or something, It was an excellent General Assembly. And what I heard from many people and what we also experienced was that it allowed many more members to be involved and to understand than would have happened if it was a meeting in Geneva or Bangkok. Oh yeah. So going forward into the future and they did do a survey, and I don't remember the results. But going into the future, if you if we do, if we are able to do blend it fine, but if we're not, if we can only do virtual, that's not a negative. It does allow for much more diverse participation.

RW : Yeah, I agree I went very well, I was surprised with a number of people on that call. It was probably 120 - 130 people at least, and a very good interaction all the way through. It was well organized. Yeah. Yeah. One final question, and that is I'm not sure it was on my list, but I'll ask you anyway. I'm asking people, if you have one anecdote, something that's more personal about your experience. With that, you like to share something that stayed with you all these years or maybe a good sound bite or something like that that you like to share with me?

SM: I'll give you two one. One is a sound bite, and one is just maybe an interesting story. Soundbite is Manisha came to the Philippines. To Mindanao to see our work and in particular to see how we were applying the then recently adopted Principles of Partnership. And it was absolutely life changing for my colleagues in Mindanao. Who had probably at that point in time, not met anyone from ICVA Geneva, Manisha, as you know, the very engaging, positive kind of person, energetic person.

RW : That's an understatement.

SM: Exactly. Well, I'm exaggerating a little bit, but there are little monuments to Manisha from that visit. And that must have been, oh what, 20 years ago or something. And people still ask me about Manisha. How's Manisha? so that it's something and it's not so much about Manisha, but it was the willingness of the organization to send somebody out to a member organization and learn from them about a new, in this case, the principles of partnership.

A second one was I was allowed and enabled by ICVA to be in the global humanitarian platform shortly after the adoption of those principles of partnership, and that was, you know, a tremendous experience for me to be able to engage with heads of U.N. agencies, global heads, face to face in a small room, all of us together. That was so absolutely wonderful experience. It never would have happened, were it not, for ICVA.

Lastly, this is kind of a personal thing, but you may get a kick out of it. Ed had this idea that we would have board retreat, and you would know the place, but I can't remember it outside the Geneva and it was some sort of castle type place. And I'm sitting in Manila and Misikir in Ethiopia, and Faizal in KL, and we get this invitation to a board retreat and it's going to be in the castle of somewhere, somewhere. Now you, you would quickly recognize that, oh, that's so interesting. So, you know, it's amazing.

So I was excited and I had to leave without much time for preparation. So I left pretty much with what you would wear to the office. And on the agenda was the first day was we would take a walk. I think some sort of trust building wall or something like that. So to me, that's like, that's like a walk. Okay. But to end it was hike up a mountain. Oh, really? Yeah. And unbeknown to Ed I had had a series of many, many mini strokes. Ok. So I hadn't revealed that to Ed or the Board, and I was not going to tell anybody that that happened to me and I was certainly going to take that walk because solidarity is important. So we walked in and Bob, it was like this. And we were supposed to pair off and talk along the way. And I was having such, I didn't have the proper shoes. My lungs were not working, and I was doing everything I could to be an active listener so that the other person would talk so I could breathe. So I survived. Obviously, I survived it, and then it's something I laugh about. I've never told anyone about it. It's something I laugh about, and it was a wonderful experience of that mountain beautiful view. We all did become closer. But the lesson I learned is you have to really ask what you're getting into when you go into such a situation in the future.

RW : Oh yeah, it sounds like you should be happy to still be alive.

SM : Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

RW : Yeah, yeah, I'm sure that's something you would never forget that that kind of experience. So, yeah. Ok, well, thanks very much. We appreciate all of your comments all the way through. So, yeah. Any final thoughts on your side?

SM: I'm delighted that they asked you to help with this and I'm delighted that you agreed to do it. ICVA is a great organization and has a great future ahead of it, and it has a very proud past.

RW : Yeah. Which really corresponds to really so many of the comments that I've gotten from those I've interviewed probably 10 or 11 already. And nearly everybody has made comments similar, not same kind of comments, but very positive comments about ICVA and very happy to have been associated with the organization and will continue to be. I think, in the future. So yeah, and I hope if they have an ingathering meeting, I hope you're able to come next year, maybe in connection with the the commemoration, whatever they plan,

SM : They'll say, OK, yeah, OK. Just for your information we're going into. We were informed this morning we're going back into lockdown, so. Oh, really? It'll be a while.

RW :Just briefly, how is the pandemic situation in the Philippines and vaccination situation?

SM : Southeast Asia is a mess. The Philippines is now entering into that mess. We've been on quarantine since March 2020. Vaccination is up to a full vaccinations up to about six percent of the population, and there are now looking at maybe mid-2022 of hitting their target.

RW : Oh, really? Yeah. Is it a lack of vaccines or lack of organization or a combination or what is it

SM : For Southeast Asia at the moment? There's a severe insufficiency of vaccine, all of Southeast Asia struggling. Singapore may be not what the rest of Southeast Asia is struggling to get vaccine. Maybe they were slow to organize. Also, some financial issues, but access to vaccine is a major issue this part of the world. And then secondarily, would be the management of it once you get it.

RW : Yeah, yeah. Sorry to end on this less than positive note, but very happy to to see you again. And we'll see. We'll stay in touch for sure.

SM : All right, and good luck with your report, huh?

RW : Yeah. And thanks very much. Yeah. Bye bye. Bye bye.

This conversation between Steven Muncy 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.

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