



ICVA at 60 Interview Transcript

Tanya Wood

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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 White, a consultant for the ICVA at 60 project, talk to Tanya Wood, who was part of the ICVA staff from 2011-2014.

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

Tanya talks about the challenges of establishing the regional hubs, and questions the focus of ICVA.

Enjoy.

TW: Hi, Bob.

RW: Hi Tanya It's been a long time

TW: It's been a very long time.

RW : Yeah, right. Yeah.

TW:Yeah, it's good to see you again, even from far away.

RW : How are things? How are things for the core humanitarian standard?

TW: Yeah, I know very well. Happy. Challenged. Interesting. All that. All the stuff. It's really interesting journey of where it's developing and going with lots of challenges around it as well. But it's definitely got momentum. That's the that's the positive.

RW: Well, that's good. Yeah, yeah. I was involved in the CHS from the beginning with Marianne Casey. When Marianne was there must have been, what, six or eight years ago. Quite quite some time ago now.

TW: It's good. It's good to see like where it'll go and whether we can keep that momentum. There's lots of questions around it, but we're at about 120 organisations now verified against it. Another 30 in the pipeline. So

it's kind of that and that's what we wanted. We wanted to get that kind of that build up of momentum to really commit to the standard rather than it staying an aspirational type of standard. So interesting times.

RW: The idea is to with Ignacio have a kind of a commemoration next year. He's not quite sure what, whether it's going to be a panel or a celebration or a gathering of people. But the paper, I wrote, will be one of the background documents for the commemoration. And now I'm in the process of interviewing 16 or 17, either a former staff or a former board members or former chairs to get their ideas, asking a couple of questions about ICVA and the future of ICVA. And Nan Buzard recommended that I talk to you. So that's why I'm talking to you.

TW: Great. Wow. 60. I think I was there for the 50th time does fly.

RW: You know, it started in 1962, I guess it was a long time ago.

TW: Yeah, I think we did the 50th when it was around coinciding when Ed was leaving.

RW: You know, he told me that actually that's true. Tell me, just so I know, what years were you there. I like the.

TW: Oh, my gosh. I'm really bad with dates, Bob. The I came in as Ed was still there, and Manisha was just leaving. That and hold on, let me.

RW: Well, Ed left in 2012, I think, or 13, something like that. I know Nan came in 2013. Was it around that time ?

TW: I was probably like 2011 to 2014. So I just as I did time with Ed and then with Nan.

RW: Ok, that's good to know. Yeah, yeah.

TW: We'll find out. Ok.

RW: Yeah, so I've got four questions for you. I'm asking the same four questions to everybody. One is if you've had a chance to read the paper, how does it read and does it make sense or are there any gaps things that you would emphasize more in the paper itself?

TW: Can I ask you a question first, Bob, what is the purpose of the paper, is it a sort of the history type overview or what it's meant to be ?

RW: It's a decade by decade summary. That's what I did. I got all the annual reports for the last 20 years and all the previous research documents from Fiona and working papers. I read hundreds and hundreds of pages of documents and trying to compress it into a summary. So I made this decade by decade summary to try to show these transitions or the evolution or the changes over the last 60 years. I ended with a new page that Ignacio suggested called Looking Ahead, which is the last part, which looks more at the 2030 strategy and more looking forward. So it's kind of a look back, a look present but also a looking forward. Just a background paper, basically.

TW:Ok. There's nothing that I can think that is missing.

RW: Ok.

TW: Yeah, I sort of I think it's got all the pieces there, it's an information, you know, there's pieces that. It's just how high level you take these and how much do you? And, you know, the work on quality. There are some pieces that have been very core to ICVA, like refugees and the coordination mechanisms they've sort of ran throughout. Um, and then there's been pieces that have kind of come in and come out of ICVA, which is the whole sort of, these sort of interesting pieces like the whole sort of PSEA has kind of been quite central at ICVA at times and other times it's not been as much. And then the it's role and voice in the whole Q&A, the quality and accountability like, you've got this Sphere standards there and you've got Q&A. They've always taken again this what was their role with the quality and accountability? Sometimes they got quite close to it with the sphere standard when they hosted Sphere and Nan's role in the whole sort of CHS piece is quite an interesting perspective. And now, you know, there's pieces in there that I think are really kind of core to ICVA which you've captured there in terms of the coordination pieces, the piece around where, have you put it here, I just saw it, maybe the whole NGO coordination, actually, that is missing the NGO coordination, maybe humanitarian reform in the HC function.

RW: Oh, yeah, You know, its there I'm pretty sure.

TW: Yeah, there was a big project they did there, which was an interesting one, which was kind of the start of the hubs. So this sort of coordination, refugees are kind of like always stayed core. Then you've had these pieces that have kind of come in and come out of it ICVA. And then an interesting just looking at your table on the then the sort of humanitarian financing and the space that that took. I remember when we developed the strategy, the 2015, you've got the dates there. That was helpful. The 2015-2018, that was the first time humanitarian financing had been put as a kind of core area of ICVA. And I think that's important because it's actually taken a big space ICVA in the humanitarian financing. It's probably one of its most active areas now. So it's all there. I think it's just sort of how that's why I sort of asking about the framing of the paper. I think it's there. It's sort of this, and I'm sort of reflecting back just sort of reading on on sort of what ICVA's done. And that's a hard thing for ICVA. Or I think is sort of what is its real core areas, the first two for the strategy, which have maintained force migration and coordination.

RW: Okay. Well, that's good.

TW: More sort of broad reflections of sort of looking at kind of thinking about the the evolution of this paper and the activities ICVA's done.

RW: One thing I wanted to mention because people have raised it with me, actually, is the the value and importance of the regional hubs. And it was more than I think it was Nan that told me that you were really instrumental in getting them started from the beginning. Can you just give me a very briefly a little background as to. What was the thinking was then how it came about and and how you've seen them evolve in the last five, six, seven years.

TW: So I think when I started with ICVA, the idea of a regional presence, there'd been actually there'd been different discussions within ICVA at the time and with Manisha particularly looking at this sort of conundrum that every membership organisation faces, which is how do they coordinate and get closer to the membership and move away from a Geneva space? And that recognition that ICVAs requires a real kind of *raison d'etre* was to have more of the local and be able to outreach more to the local NGOs, and it can't couldn't do that from a pure Geneva base. And how could it do that? So we did, you know, then it was a sort of a long process of discussion around. Around that time, actually, and this I don't know if it comes up in the paper, sorry if I've missed it, was the New York hub. That was an interesting yeah.

RW: I mentioned it briefly that it started, but it didn't last very long.

TW: Yeah, exactly. So Ed had formed the New York hub, which then even created a starker challenge for us that we were then a kind of Geneva with an outreach to New York. And yet we're all trying to really push the local engagement. So we started a series of consultations really with the board on what kind of greater outreach could look like. Everything from similar conundrums where we have now in the CHS Alliance, do we do we rely on the members to kind of where member hat and ICVA hat and and how would that work. Do we look at what Sphere have done with focal points, But I think at that point, it was sort of felt like we had to be more bold if we were really going to try and get closer, do something more purposeful, though. And because and that's why I was linking to that NGO coordination work we'd done, we did actually have people based at country level for a while, consultants working with national NGOs, and that momentum had started to kind of take get the ball rolling in a way that it felt we couldn't stop that momentum of having people actually out posted who were actually wearing full time ICVA hat. So we got the approval to go for regional hubs, and we managed to get the funding in from ECHO, and it was basically the evolution. It was an Echo funded project, NGO Local Coordination Project, helped us, I think, to be able to be able to launch the regional hubs. With that funding and they were membership hosted. I think the big challenges with getting the hubs off the ground at that time were, it was though Echo funding which is very prescriptive, very

RW: True, very

TW: Projectized. So we had to be quite prescriptive about what those hubs were going to do before we'd even kind of given birth to them. So we're already sort of planning out their first two years when they haven't even really consulted with the membership, and that was a real tension. For the first two years, they had all these deliverables. And yet at the same time, they were trying to make sense of those in three very different regions. So that was a big tension we had with them. The other tension, I think, was just the sort of logistics of the hosting arrangements and and and kind of that challenge when you don't have legal status and you're trying to get people visas and such like. So I think it was a good heavy lift that was definitely the biggest challenge to starting them. But in terms of each of them creating their impact, I think they all did it in a very different way. I was only there for the first two years of the hubs, so really that kind of the sort of painful growing pains. But it's great to see they've tested the test of time. I'm sure it's still, I think what I hear, but this is hearsay rather than obviously knowing. But you still have this challenge of how much autonomy do they have to be reactive to what makes the most sense in the region versus a holistic global piece of work. Keeping them, you know, it was a huge lift on ICVA's budget. Almost double the budget and then you've got to try and keep them sustained. Trying to position, I think like the Bangkok and Jordan, are obviously the ones that have kind of been the obvious. And then we've had this because we set it up in West Africa. And then there was always the gap in Nairobi Then it was Nairobi. So I think that's always had a harder time of of what do you do with which a lot of organizations do the sort of Africa continent.

RW: Yeah, yeah.

TW: See, I think it's an interesting one for where it goes to, I think. And again, only sort of keeping of a sort of peripheral look to it, it's great that they've continued and yet I'm not sure whether they've kind of grown or developed or kind of maximized that potential. I don't know if you took them away tomorrow, what the impact of that would be for ICVA.

RW: That's a good point, actually. You know, one thing I noticed and people have told me also is, I should say Senegal was moved to Nairobi, but it left wide open the whole west and central Africa, the whole Francophone Africa, which had been, I assume, under Dakar, but then got lost, I guess, when Nairobi focused more on the Anglophone East in the Horn of Africa. And the other issue would be Latin America, South America, Central America, where it seems like it has been struggling for probably decades, almost getting a more of a footprint

in the Spanish speaking in the Americas. Frankly, there are the two gaps that I say and when I think about the hubs, actually.

TW: Yeah. I think the Latin America one we kept toying with. But I, you know, I see it in all networks look like it's just the Latin America always gets. We have the same now for the CHS. We don't have American members, and as much as we say we want to, it's trying to get the foot in.

RW: Yeah, I spent a couple of years with the Act Alliance also and Act also had the same problem. And so it's pretty much all these consortia. ICVA's not only one, it's really probably endemic with several of them. Let me go to my three other questions that I have. The first is and these are the questions I'm asking to everybody to get your your reply when you were there for those several years. What gave you a sense of pride or what made you proud of being part of ICVA when you were on the staff?

TW: Oh. I think probably three things are coming to mind. And they're different in different ways, but if you think of the time that I came in, which was. The sort of the winding down of the Ed and Manisha phase, I was very aware of coming into something that had huge credibility. And it also rested quite a bit on, and I mean in a positive sense, on what Ed and Manisha were able to create. And there really was this sense around what they had managed to kind of build up. And a lot of the credibility was very much down to their their work and this very clever way, I think that the two of them had managed to be challenging enough to the system, and yet still create a movement that people were proud to be part of. And I think that's something coming in, especially coming from a Red Cross world, but coming into something that was trying to balance a being slightly challenging to the system. And yet constructive, I think, was certainly made me, you know, I came into something feeling very proud of that type of culture and persona that ICVA had.

TW: That's something that I, you know, the sort of the personality all of these networks have a personality and I think the sort of personality of ICVA at that time was was very cleverly positioned. How it could have quite robust debates, it was very much it felt like you were in the middle of a debate. You were at the sort of heart of issues that were, you know, I think at that time. Kind of the Q&A world, ICVA took a stand on being sort of provocative to the whole. At that time, the sort of CHS and JSI it was provocative on on the clusters it was. But in a questioning questioning manner. So that as the personality of ICVA. The other one, I think, you know, there was something about the. And, you know, initially I worked on the UNHCR for a short time UNHCR NGO dialogues, and I think they I think that's given ICVA for a lot of credibility for where it needed to be holding the position with UNHCR for the NGO dialogues and. And that sort of, I suppose, played out from that, they you know. You always had a seat at the table as ICVA, you were always had a seat and it was a respected seat.

TW: So on the IASC, obviously at the UNHCR dialogues, there was always that seat at the table, which is a very privileged position to be in. The one that we felt the weight of as well. The third one would be this at the time, and I think still very credible is the sort of the real drive around localization before localization was being the term that we were all using, but the fact that ICVA had always really invested in it in its southern membership, and I think had there was real ownership by the southern members there. You know, the Faizal's and I think there's like sort of four or five of them who incredibly really owned ICVA. And I think. Being very, very cognizant all the time of its of its role with the the national NGOs. So those those are sort of three things that kind of thing, feet the table the sort of personality of ICVA that it didn't really feel like it was just the machine. It had that kind of edge to it. And and kind of always with a view to this sort of localization globalization piece. The three things that summarize.

RW: As that's good, I appreciate your comments. Yeah. And even since you left, I think the localization emphasis has even increased at ICVA. And it's my impression, at least anyway. And now we're getting some of the the. So members onto the various IASC committees, things like that in the last three or four years. So give

them a more prominent role. That's only one one example. My next question, I have two more. This is more looking at ICVA today and into the future. How do you see ICVA today? And you're probably still have quite a lot of contacts with them and know what they're doing. How do you see them moving today and moving into the future in the next few years? What kind of direction or emphasis will you ICVA playing?

TW: I'm really torn on this one, Bob. I think. You know, we're a member of ICVA, we engage, we follow the new strategy. I think it's still got that inherent question. You know, when I'm with you, I'm asking about the hubs. What is ICVA's focus? Geneva, and there's huge value in it, having a Geneva focus is, and I think, even more so now as I think the whole sort of Geneva humanitarian hub is going to get really questioned in the next few years after COVID. What really is its convening role in Geneva? Versus how much can it really leverage its hubs and have more of that global outreach. If it goes global I think it has to come out far stronger on what it is doing. What I've seen. just take it through the sort of what I've seen. So Ed had a very, you know, it's very much Ed's baby and that that worked, but it couldn't work when Nan came in, she had to kind of recreate the baby, and she did that in a way of kind of being very strong on strategy. These three focal areas very clear on what the organization was going to do and what it wasn't going to do and kind of brought that structure around it for. Ignacio seems to have kept those same areas like there's no change in those that strategy piece. And yet I also see now ICVA doing a whole lot more. I've had these questions with Ignacio. Like, for instance, on PSEAH, what do you want ICVA to be involved and if so, what are you wanting it to do on PSEAH? And obviously, I'm asking that because that's one of our focal areas, so where do we collaborate with you and to trying to just get a sense of it. If they're global, I think they need to be global, they need to have a much more solid focus.

TW: Thematic focus of what you go to ICVA for. Or they really use we're a Geneva based organization, and we really use the right focus on it, on its linkages here and the representation here and what it can add value to here in Geneva. And then it could be much more, much more things. But I don't have an answer because I'm questioning that I don't have a sense of where they're going. And I think for membership organizations the landscape has changed hugely since Ed and Manisha were in terms of the membership bodies like, it's much more competitive now than it's ever been, even when Nan was there. You've got the Start network, you've got the Alliance, you've got Sphere going for membership, you've got ICVA, you've got all of these sort of membership bodies now and we're all going after the same. There's a lot of overlap there and that's. It's going to be interesting how much more that can play out, so. We need ICVA But I'm not quite sure what we need. I need ICVA as obviously I think it has a real role of being really influential on the, IASC really influential with the UN body's really influential on that kind of the coordination. All the pieces that form it around the kind of NGO to UN. But I think it needs to be more purposeful. And it's definitely seems to have gone seems to be spreading again, but that's just my perception.

RW: So ICVA needs to be more clear as to the direction they're taking in the future. It sounds like where they are going, whether to keep the Geneva focus or the field focus or. And there's also a question of what with such a limited staff, they only have about 12 or 13 staff in Geneva. It's really a small office how much they can actually do. That's always been a question to, I think.

TW: Do you do a few things really well or do you serve a very or are you more like you're serving a constituency? But if you look at the sort of landscape of the membership orgs, you've got the ones like Bond and Interaction who are serving a dedicated sort of geographical constituency of the British and American NGOs or the NGO coordination bodies. And then you've got thematic, more kind of thematic networks. And ICVA still, is bridging that, that they are kind of thematic or are they a kind of a constituency for Geneva? And it's why the sense of kind of that that UN sort of, you know, the sort of global UN international fora. And that was a question when we were producing the strategy with Nan at that time, sort of, and that's why we kind of

focused it down on these three, four at that time, thematic and that would be the tie in with the hubs, but it was still this tension and the tension played out.

RW: Oh yeah,

TW: Yeah. I think it's still playing out.

RW: Which, as you're saying, Ignacio has kind of continued. Maybe some of the wording is different, but they still have these three or four, whatever they call them, priority areas or strategy areas, even even in the 2030 document. Last question. It's more personal. And that is, could you share with me one anecdote that you can think of something that really comes to your mind. I guess when you were on the staff, something that a little more personal, a bit of a soundbite in some ways or something that meant a lot to you that has been saying with you all these years.

TW: So I'll try it just because I think there is something about you making me reflect on a few different kind of very personal pieces, but they're all to do with that like, I think ICVA. If I look at it through the time, that sort of time frame, which was a lot of different people at the time I was, there was a lot of people leaving and a lot of new people coming in. It was really this sort of moving from the Ed and Manisha team to suddenly, like all sorts of people coming through because we had all the hub people as well who all created this different dynamic. It would be nice to kind of capture some of how that kind of actually felt as that sort of change of a new sort of family moving in and how they kind of tried to rebuild the next round of ICVA.

RW: You know, that must have been a challenge by itself, I would think, with all the staff turnover and changes.

TW: Yeah, but it is interesting and I think ICVA as well. It's like if I reflect on it now there is there's a sort of whole community of people who are very fond of ICVA after they've moved on, but ICVA holds a very, it's all something we're very passionate about about ICVA. And yet at the same time, because it is, it also everyone has an opinion on ICVA. You know, like it's one of those organizations that we all want it to be something. Really, it's one of those we all want it to be something we're very passionate about it and everyone has a very different idea about what it should or could be, which is great in and of itself because it's not something that people are kind of putting to bed. They're still passionate about it and engaging with it and wanting to see

RW: What you most might say the same thing about the core humanitarian standard, at least by my experience.

TW: Exactly, exactly. Yeah.

RW: Everybody has an opinion, that's for sure.

TW: Oh, definitely. Yes.

RW: I'm just helping out as a volunteer, pretty much trying to keep busy, keep busy in my old age. So nice to have a chance to meet a lot of people that I've known in the past, but kind of lost contact with like yourself and happy to have this chance to talk to you.

TW : Nice. Very nice to see you Bob. And hopefully we'll see lots more of you. Excellent. Very, very happy on that. Lovely to speak to you Bob. Good luck with this. That was a nice trip down memory lane, ICVA

RW: That was great. And thanks for your frankness and your your good comments. I really appreciate.

TW: Take care Bob. Bye

RW : Nice talking to you. Thanks. Bye bye.

This conversation between Tanya Wood 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).