



ICVA at 60 Interview Transcript

Wossen Tesfaye

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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 Wossen Tesfaye, who has been an ICVA Board member since 2018, representing African Humanitarian Action.

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

Wossen talks about the benefits for an African NGO to be part of ICVA, the added value of the regional hubs, and the increasing relevance of organisations like ICVA to help find global solutions to problems that are local in nature.

Robert White / RW

Wossen Tesfaye /WT

RW: Wossen,hello this is Bob. Yeah, nice to meet you. And I guess you're in Uganda.

WT: Yes, I'm in Kampala.

RW: Oh, yeah. So how have you been?

WT: Not too bad. We are in a lockdown?

RW: How's the the pandemic situation in Uganda?

WT: Um, it has come down in the past two weeks or so, but it was pretty bad before. That's why they instituted a lockdown, and we are still in a lockdown and will remain to be for the next two weeks or so.

RW : So I hope the situation improves for you. Well, thanks for thanks very much for joining this call. And now I'm interviewing about 15 or 16 different people former staff, former board members, former chairs of the board to get their views on where ICVA is moving and how they see the future of ICVA. And that's why I want to talk to you also.

WT: Perfect, perfect. They put me as the focal point for ICVA at 60. And I was reelected as well. Although this idea came about in the previous Board tenure, so happened that I was re-elected and I can push on this process together with you and the rest of the board members as well as the secretary.

RW: So it's good, it's quite exciting for what we'll be planning in connection with the celebrations, but we still have time to work on these things

RW: Yeah. So with your agreement, I could be very happy to ask you a few questions, which I think I sent to you already, but I want to just get your responses. Maybe the first is on the paper itself if you've had a chance to read through the paper. What do you think? And just as a paper, accurately describe the evolution ICVA's transitions where ICVA is today. Are there any gaps or things that should be emphasized more in the paper just to get your ideas on that?

WT: Um, just in summary, I was very happy with the way you constructed the various milestones of ICVA, in which to have captured the main turning points take by ICVA and how its vision and mission and its principles have evolved through time, and I think that gives us a very good understanding to anybody who wants to know about ICVA. The evolution of this global network where it came from and where it stands at the moment. Um, I think in my view, that that's interesting. And it does appear that all the relevant issues you need to include those need to perhaps beefed up with some conclusions. We still have the time to further strengthen. But as it stands now, I'm really happy with it.

RW: Ok. You probably saw in the paper in the last page, I guess patient half. We made some reference to the 2030, ICVA 2030, and the strategy for the next eight or nine years also to move it also into the future. So that was good to not only talk about ICVA for the last 60 years, but how ICVA might be moving in the next nine or 10 years also.

WT: Yes, that's true. Yeah.

RW: My second question is what what makes you proud or satisfied about being associated with ICVA ? How do you see yourself being and now you're a board member for the second second term, I guess. Aren't you at least second term?

WT: That's right.

RW: So what makes you proud and why do you see satisfaction? It takes a lot of your time actually to be involved with ICVA and how do you see this and what makes you proud to be associated with ICVA.

WT: Ok, well, thanks for question. This is a very loaded question, and I will try as much as possible and very briefly to unpack it and give you my feedback. First of all, my organization, Africa Humanitarian Aid, has been a member of this network for more than two decades. And we've made our share of contribution in terms of advocating for humanitarian agencies in the global south in general and in Africa in particular. And therefore, we deeply understand that a united global voice can be heard much more loudly. And it could be more effective than isolated and scattered efforts. In terms of addressing the challenges faced by humanitarian organizations globally, so this this is the whole reason or rationale behind why am satisfied and proud to be part of ICVA. And so there are three points that I look at whenever I consider ICVA's importance. ICVA is a global alliance for effective utilization of global platforms for advocacy. It's also a membership network that attempts to set global standards for humanitarian aid. And in ICVA platforms it is very effective in sharing experiences and best practices amongst various key actors in the humanitarian sphere in the world. So this is from the perspective of ICVA's importance as an institution. Why am I personally proud ? I'm happy to be a board member. At a personal level is a good question, and the first answer I give you is that it has given me the

opportunity to contribute ideas to the network based on my twenty seven years of experience in the humanitarian field. It has also giving me an opportunity to uphold my organization's long standing commitments for advocate for humanitarian entities in the global south mainly and in Africa in particular. And it has also given me the opportunity to learn good and valuable lessons from other members of the network due to my role as a board member. Well, probably these are the three elements that describe my personal satisfaction. That's why I'm enjoying my tenure as a board member.

RW: Ok. That's that's why, so just to help me to get a clearer perspective. When did your organization first become a member of ICVA. Do you know about what year it was?

WT: I joined this organization, I think about 13 years ago. But I know this organization right from the mid-nineties. When it was formed and started operating in Africa. And although I cannot tell you definitely a year in which it became a member of ICVA. But I know for sure that it was around the mid 90s. But since it was formed that it became a member of ICVA, but because I've seen them participating in global consultations. ICVA takes a huge contribution of in Geneva during those years. Although I was working for a different organization then.

RW: So my assumption would be that your organization might be the first or one of the first African NGOs to become a member of ICVA. Is that is that correct? Would you say?

WT: And it will be a little bit hard for me to say conclusively that it's the first probably among one of the first.

RW : Yeah, right. Yeah.

WT: Not the first. Because there are very many humanitarian agencies in West Africa and SADEC region, in East Africa. But I think. I can confidently say that it can be one of the few.

RW: Oh yeah, yeah.

WT: Who actively participated in ICVA.

RW: In fact, it's one one of the observations that I came up with when I was doing the the paper I was looking at decade by decade, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, 2000s and the evolution of ICVA from being a to be honest and very frankly kind of a European North American club for so many years, even decades and now really growing and expanding, becoming more diverse. And I, I hope that was able to be reflected in the paper that I wrote.

WT: [00:14:06] I think it's a valid point to state how ICVA has evolved from being a small circle of humanitarians to being a broad based entity with representations from the various corners of the globe.

RW: Yeah. But this is not one of my questions to other people, but just to ask you for your observation. What impact has the regional offices, I know now there's one in Nairobi, one in Addis, for ICVA. What impact the regionalization of ICVA, of their staff has made on the organization? How do you see that, actually?

WT: Um, I think it has made quite a lot of contributions. Because you see that different regions or subregions, have there peculiar problems and issues to deal with which might be similar to other regions or subregions in the world. The problems that our colleagues are facing, particularly, for example, in MENA could be somehow different than the problems that we are facing in the continent of Africa. And it's going to be similar to the colleagues who are operating in the Latin America region. It also applies to Europe, although that is a point of convergence at the global level that can bring us together and united as such. But it is also necessarily and reasonable to constitute a kind of decentralized or devolved system of support and advocacy at the regional

level. For instance, the Africa Region Hub has been in very close contact and working together with global entities such as the African Union and others like it while it has been in connection with networks within the region right from West Africa to East Africa, SADC region and the like. In addressing the particular issues that they're facing, and I think it has been a motivation for the majority of the member organizations. And it does allow ICVA the proximity to understand what the core issues are at the ground level, so these are some of the benefits. Of the regionalization of some of the interventions without undermining the global central role that the global office are playing at the moment.

RW: Yeah, thank you very much. It's very positive, and I would agree with you the little I know about the regional offices. I agree with your perspective on that. My next question, I have two more questions, I won't take too much more of your time, looking at ICVA now, today and into the future. Why do you think ICVA is important today and how do you think ICVA will move into the future.

WT: Yep, a very important question. As humanitarians I believe that we live in, we live and operate in an era where the world is more interconnected. And there is a global dimension to the challenges we are faced with, not first. Um, one can also say that as much as we try to find local solutions to global problems it's also evident that the world needs global solutions to problems that are seemingly local in nature. It makes ICVA's role and importance more relevant. So it's like when you clap alone, it's just a clap, but when you clap with thousands and millions of people, it can definitely be heard quite loudly. And by doing so, you can influence policies, can influence actions at the global level. So since we are living in a more and more globalized world, I think such kind of a global network of membership organizations is more and more relevant and reasonable. So that's my take on the importance of ICVA today and the future.

RW: Ok, one final question, this is more maybe subjective or a more personal, but would you have one anecdote or one personal experience that you'd like to share about your ICVA connection, your ICVA work, something that's even more personal to you that you'd be happy to share it with me and with Fiona and Ignacio?

WT: Yep. Apparently one can have many anecdotes, but just to highlight, what ICVA does managing diversity and inclusiveness in a proper way can distill diverse views and perspectives into a unified strategic vision in a big global network such as ICVA. The case in point of the example to decide here is our recently developed ICVA 2030 strategy, which was overwhelmingly endorsed by nearly all members of our network. A network of members comprising, I think, in total, about 120 organizations. And I'm proud and privileged to have participated in the development of this ICVA 2030 strategy. That's one of the anecdotes. The effectiveness of unified approaches in challenging global debates and hence influencing global policies. And opinions in favor of humanitarians. Which is the way ICVA does its work. I was able to participate in it and witness it first hand. So that's my probably another anecdote. So when you sit in the board you are allowed to see all these things in motion and rolling, and that has been my exciting experience.

RW: Ok. It's really quite good and quite positive. Thanks very much. Any final thoughts on your side that you'd like to share with me before before we finish?

WT: Nothing at the moment.

RW: No, that's really as much or more than I was hoping for, so I really appreciate you for your comments and observations and look forward to working with you in the months to come. With Ignacio and Fiona and the team as we get ready for the celebrations next year. Ok. Well, let me just thank you very much, I appreciate so much our discussion and look forward to sooner or later seeing you face to face also.

WT : All right. Likewise, from my side as well. Ok, thank you.

RW: Thank you very much. Bye, bye bye.

This conversation between Wossen Tesfaye 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).