



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

CASE STUDY

Empowering Local Women Leaders in Humanitarian Action: ICVA's Women Humanitarian Leadership Training Programme

2024

Context

Globally, women are under-represented in decision-making and leadership, due to gender norms and attitudes that entrench gender inequality and discrimination. This is also the case in humanitarian decision-making and leadership, particularly at local and national level. While more attention has been paid in recent decades to the meaningful engagement of women in general and local women in particular in humanitarian decision-making and leadership within the humanitarian system, significant structural, socio-cultural, and capacity barriers remain as obstacles to local women exercising their agency and leadership in humanitarian processes.¹

Through its work, ICVA supports local and national actors to influence the humanitarian architecture in order to create an enabling environment towards inclusive humanitarian leadership.² Over recent years, ICVA identified leadership development and capacity strengthening of local women leaders as an unmet need across the humanitarian system. In 2022 and 2023, ICVA implemented a humanitarian leadership training programme for local and national Women-Led Organisations (WLOs) in the Asia-Pacific (AP), East and Southern Africa (ESA), and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions, to strengthen local women's leadership, collective advocacy, engagement with donors and partners, and policy influencing. The programme was developed with funding from the German Federal Foreign Office.

What ICVA and Partners did



Women Humanitarian Leadership Training in the AP Region

Between October 2022 and May 2023, ICVA, with support from a consultancy team conducted a training programme for 49 local women leaders representing 19 countries across East Africa, Asia and MENA region.³

The training focused on three thematic topics: women's leadership, resource mobilisation and partner relationships, and policy influencing. In the AP region, ICVA collaborated with UN Women through the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, to coorganise the training,

strengthening collaboration on shared interests.⁴

¹ See for example

https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/actionaid_policy_report_on_the_frontline_catalysing_womens_leadership_in_humanitarian_action.pdf.

² See [ICVA's 2030 Strategy](#).

³ There were 12 participants in the ESA training from Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda in Africa. There were 17 participants in the AP training from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. There were 20 participants in the MENA training from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), Syria, and Turkey.

⁴ Training programme report

ICVA carefully selected participants based on their organizations' commitment to support women, girls, and marginalized groups, their relevant humanitarian experience, affiliation with NGO networks, self-identified leadership training needs, and ability to share learning with peers. The diverse composition of the training cohorts, encompassed various demographics including country of origin, age, role and experience, facilitated inter-generational exchanges as well as cross-organizational, cross-departmental, and peer-to-peer learning from humanitarian experiences in different contexts.

“There were many learnings from other women leaders, especially the way they are coping amidst extreme, sometimes life-threatening situations”. **Vincika De Saram, AP Training participant from Sri Lanka**



Women Humanitarian Leadership Training in the ESA Region

The training methodology employed a participatory, learner-centred pedagogy and experiential peer-to-peer learning. Prior to the training, participants completed a needs assessment and received pre-reading materials to prepare for the sessions. Throughout the training, interactive exercises and guest speakers⁵ addressed specific topics, prioritising peer-to-peer learning.

Participants were encouraged to develop individual or collective action plans and utilise collective sharing platforms, empowering them as co-

responsible learners⁶ and motivating them to apply the acquired knowledge and skills to their day-to-day work.

Following the completion of all the trainings, ICVA's AP, ESA and MENA teams organised a cross-regional follow-up webinar in September 2023. This webinar aimed to provide additional assistance, foster networking, and strengthen the Community of Practice (CoP) established for local women leaders. Discussions during the webinar focused on sharing successes and challenges encountered in applying the training learning, further enhancing the impact of the programme.

⁵ For example, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Deputy Head of Office, Regional Office for the Syria Crisis, addressed MENA training participants on Localization: Funding and Participation.

⁶ AP training participants acknowledged that the training methodology was engaging and made them feel like they were experts based on their lived experiences.

Results and impact



Women Humanitarian Leadership Training in the MENA Region

The Women Humanitarian Leadership Training Programme, conducted across MENA, ESA and AP regions, utilised a comprehensive methodology and participant selection process to foster peer-to-peer learning and networking, aiming for long-term behavioural change among local women leaders.⁷

Before the cross-regional follow-up webinar, a survey found that 86% (22 out of 26) respondents thought the training was helpful, citing examples of its benefits.⁸

Participants gained enhanced knowledge and competencies in humanitarian leadership skills, joint humanitarian coordination, collective advocacy strategies and actions. The programme also challenged biases and stereotypes regarding women's leadership, leading to transformative experiences and renewed approaches among participants.

“The training introduced me to the power analysis tool, and that really helped me a lot. I have introduced it to my team to analyse power with[in] the community”. Hnuni, AP Training

"The information and experience shared during the training was eye opening for me [...]. Several parts of the training were a transformative experience that opened my eyes to the multifaceted hurdles faced by women leaders. It served as a catalyst for me to reevaluate my approach, not only within my professional role but also in my community involvement". Duaa Quarie, MENA Training

Evidence of the programme's impact is seen in the changed work practices by trainees⁹ such as the power analysis tool, increased advocacy for women's participation in decision-making, and improved leadership practices.¹⁰

“After the training, I engaged the women leaders [in] the local counties to build their capacity in the legislative process and show them how they could participate in policymaking at the state level. After the capacity building we provided, the women leaders have started to discuss [women's engagement in the legislative process and gender-based issues] at the county level, and we have started engagement with the members of the Parliament”. Leila, ESA Training participant from Kenya

In Somalia, the Somali NGO Consortium's (SNC) Coordinator has been pursuing opportunities for more engagement in relevant humanitarian fora since the training. For instance, she requested participation - and subsequently took part - in a forum organised by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Nairobi aimed notably at elevating the voice and leadership of women as part of food crisis discussions.¹¹

⁷ Training programme reports.

⁸ Areas mentioned include self-care, strategic planning, information and communication, and networking and developing partnerships.

⁹ Training follow up report.

¹⁰ Training follow up report.

¹¹ From internal document.

She also advocated for more focus on women's leadership with SNC members. As a result of her advocacy, she was able to hire ICVA's consultancy team to train 17 Somali women leaders to become trainers on women's humanitarian leadership.

"From the day I had the women leadership training organised by ICVA, the workshop encouraged me to look for more opportunities on how my organisation can support WLOs in Somalia, and I make it one of my priority interventions" **Halimo, ESA Training participant for Somali NGO Consortium**

Moreover, the programme facilitated the creation of a Community of Practice (CoP) among local women leaders, providing a platform for ongoing learning, peer support, and solidarity during crises like the 2023 earthquake emergency in Turkey and Syria.

Lessons learned

Lessons learned from the programme implementation include the importance of careful participant selection to ensure diversity and cohesion within the training cohorts. Additionally, the adaption of training content to regional contexts proved invaluable, enhancing relevance and encouraging active participation among trainees. The programme, delivered by a core team of facilitators across three regions within an eight-month timeframe facilitated highly adaptive training delivery. Insights drawn from each session were swiftly implemented to enhance subsequent sessions, thus improving overall training quality and outcomes.

Facilitation played a crucial role in creating a safe and respectful learning environment, fostering trust, and enabling meaningful connections among participants both during and outside of formal training sessions.

Several key lessons from the training methodology have been integrated into subsequent trainings. These include the importance of careful and purposeful recruitment of participants to ensure group diversity (country of origin, age, function, and experience), and cohesion, as well as the utilization of smaller trainee cohorts to bolster individual learning transfer. Another crucial lesson learned pertains to the necessity of leveraging contextually relevant expertise and experience to enrich the learning process, achieved through the inclusion of external guest speakers.

The carefully curated training session, coupled with adept facilitation, fostered trust-building among the trainees and provided ample opportunities for networking and connection building, both within and outside formal training sessions. Activities such as themed dinners served as catalysts for forging bonds and nurturing a supporting learning community among participants.



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Regional Hubs

Africa

Nairobi, Kenya
Dakar, Senegal

Asia-Pacific

Bangkok, Thailand
Islamabad, Pakistan

MENA

Amman, Jordan

Latin America

Guadalajara, Mexico
(Coordination)

Geneva Office

Humanitarian Hub, La Voie-Creuse 16, 1202 Geneva
secretariat@icvanetwork.org
www.icvanetwork.org