

Proposal¹: INTRAC NGO Research Programme 2010-13

1. Why the INTRAC NGO Research Programme?

In a rapidly changing environment, with challenges to aid budgets and contestation over the roles of NGOs in international development, it is essential to engage with changes in the external environment to stay ahead of the game. Often INGOs are under pressure and find it difficult to justify spending dedicated time on analysing the external environment, understanding changes within the civil society sector, and linking up with others: but a failure to do so can lead to isolation and have serious organisational consequences.

The INTRAC NGO Research Programme offers INGOs the opportunity to benefit from responsive research about the issues in the wider environment and within the sector which most concern them. It also carves out a space for regular interaction where peers can share their diverse perspectives and gain a more profound overview of the key issues facing the sector at large.

The programme allows members to assess strategic NGO issues from a broader perspective than would be possible from within any one NGO. Because the analysis is carried out from within the sector it remains rooted in actual development experience, highlighting common challenges and choices that many NGOs are facing. In particular, the NGO forum meetings provide a unique opportunity for researchers, practitioners and policy makers from NGOs to openly exchange ideas and experience with colleagues from other NGOs in an informal, productively critical and collaborative environment.

2. What the INTRAC NGO Research Programme offers members

The NGO Research Programme aims to provide NGOs with a permanent and consistent research capacity to monitor trends in international development and civil society, and to assess the management implications for NGO policy and practice. Members pay an annual fee and benefit from:

1. NGO forum meetings and other events
2. Opportunities to shape and be involved in joint research with international partners
3. Research publications and sharing of resources
4. In-house seminars and visits to member organisations by INTRAC staff.

2.1. NGO forum meetings and other events

NGO forum meetings are held twice a year, and provide an opportunity to meet NGO staff from other countries and to keep up-to-date with trends, debates and learning within the NGO world. A wide range of external experts and INTRAC researchers present and facilitate discussions on topics identified as important and pressing by members. The forum provides an invaluable independent arena for its members to discuss the critical research issues with

¹ This proposal has been designed through the presentation of, and feedback on, an initial draft proposal at the May 2010 forum meeting. Comments from NGO Forum members and INTRAC staff have been taken into account, as have findings from and discussion of the Strategic Review of INTRAC Research by Vicky Brehm.

which they are grappling. It offers an opportunity to raise sensitive questions and test ideas in an informal and confidential setting. Past forum meetings have covered a great range of themes². The forum also plays a key role in influencing and determining research topics for INTRAC as a whole.

It is likely that one forum meeting per year will double up with a one-day open seminar, as happened with the November 2009 meeting, where staff from a wide range of INGOs came to discuss changing INGO management structures. These seminars will enliven our discussions with new participants and provide networking opportunities. This year we are already working on a one-day open seminar to look at **'The challenges of assessing impact in a donor climate which is driven by financial accountability'**. In addition, INTRAC is currently in the early stages of planning two other major events. One will be an International Conference on Monitoring and Evaluation, provisionally planned for April 2011. The other will be an INTRAC 20th Anniversary Conference, which will look at the future of aid, with a more closely defined theme to be finalised later this year. This is provisionally planned for the end of 2011. Further events may also occur later in this cycle depending on the opportunities that arise to facilitate research on emerging issues.

Members will be invited to participate in steering groups for conferences and other events, to develop the programme and review abstracts from speakers. Members will also receive updates from INTRAC on meetings we participate in, such as the CIVICUS World Assembly, and other meetings we access through our extensive networks, such as the joint Development Studies Association and EADI (European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes) conference, planned for 2011 in the UK.

2.2. Opportunities to shape and be involved in joint research with international partners

The overarching research themes that INTRAC will continue to explore during the next three years are detailed further in the next section. Experience from the last 10 years of the programme has demonstrated that its research agenda is best set by a process that jointly refers to the issues and concerns raised by its NGO members and those highlighted by INTRAC as new questions and challenges arise from its overview of the development sector.

In response to feedback from members, it is intended to involve members more in research, not just in setting the research direction but also directly involving members and their partners in carrying out research where there is the willingness and capacity. This aims to ensure that INTRAC research is responsive and relevant to member organisations, whilst providing a broad analysis based on input from NGOs across the major NGO families and faiths. We will seek members' perspectives on the particular topics which forum meetings, briefing papers or conferences will address, either through drawing on their experience to provide case studies, or undertaking small pieces of action research in their organisations.

We would also like to create stronger links between members' practical experiences and other INTRAC work. The Praxis Learning Programme is particularly complementary to the NGO Research Programme, as it produces papers based on action research with practitioners. We hope that some Praxis papers on the key themes concerning the NGO Research Programme will be produced in the next cycle with input from members.

² Themes of the forum meetings in the last cycle were: Monitoring and Evaluation/Corporate Social Responsibility and International Development, (May 2010) Future Directions in INGO Structures/Accountability Issues (November 2009), Responses to Recession/Transnational Advocacy Partnerships (May 2009), Working with Civil Society in Complex Contexts (November 2008), Aspects of Accountability in the Aid Chain (May 2008), The Future of Northern Civil Society: Between Shaping and Adapting/Monitoring and Evaluation and the New Managerialism: Key issues and reflections (November 2007)

2.3. Research publications and sharing of resources

Briefing papers on the themes of the research programme, produced through the 'joint research with members' approach, either on forum meeting themes or on other topics determined by INTRAC's wider research agenda, will be produced at the rate of approximately four per year. These, and many other specialist resources about the international development sector, can be downloaded by any member of the public via the easily searchable and comprehensive database on our recently upgraded website. Members receive free individual print copies of all INTRAC's new publications, including books, and bulk copies of the tri-annual newsletter 'ONTRAC'. In addition, they receive a 50% discount on any further purchases of INTRAC publications.

There is a NGO Research Programme members' only section on the website which we would like to develop into a hub where members can exchange views and share further resources with one another. Forum members are also invited to participate in our online Praxis learning groups which share resources around particular themes – HIV/AIDS in the workplace, monitoring and evaluation for capacity building, and capacity building for gender, equality and diversity.

The NGO Research Programme funds the practitioner-oriented publication ONTRAC. ONTRAC is a potentially fantastic resource for local partners of members, as all issues of ONTRAC are available in Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian and Arabic. ONTRAC continues to have a loyal following and wide readership throughout civil society worldwide, with over 5,100 copies of each issue either downloaded or mailed to organisations and individuals each year. The entire translated back catalogue is available to download and its publication three times a year allows us to cover topics in a responsive manner³.

INTRAC has taken over the editorship of the Development in Practice journal in July 2010. This will complement INTRAC's strong overall research and communications, providing links to a wider readership as well as to new material from development practitioners from across the world. We will potentially look to programme members to author some of the articles for the journal. We will offer gratis online subscriptions for member organisations, and will send member organisations a print copy of each issue.

2.4. In-house seminars and visits to member organisations by INTRAC staff

In response to existing members' requests, we intend to put greater emphasis on in-house seminars and visits to member organisations. Whilst in the previous cycle we managed to visit all members at least once⁴, we would like to further ensure, alongside representatives who attend the forum, that the benefits of the research are shared within member organisations through seminars, and that INTRAC's engagement with members should not only be limited to the individual who is our contact point.

INTRAC will provide up to three in-house seminars in each year of the programme, and aim that each member organisation should be able to benefit from at least one of these seminars per year. For instance, if members are located in the same city a seminar held at one organisation should be able to benefit members of multiple organisations. The topics for

³ ONTRAC issues in the last cycle were: 15 Years of INTRAC in Central Asia (May 2010), What Next for INGO Structures? (January 2010), How Will the Global Recession Affect Development? (September 2009), HIV/AIDS in the Workplace (May 2009), This is Civil Society (January 2009), Civil Society and Aid – where now? (September 2008), Control and Effectiveness in Aid Partnerships (May 2008), Rhetoric and Reality in Aid Effectiveness (January 2008), Rethinking M&E (September 2007)

⁴ Visits in the last cycle included: Staff seminars for Concern and Trocaire in Ireland, general meetings with Novib, Cordaid, and ICCO in the Netherlands, Radda Barnen in Sweden, and also DanChurchAid in Denmark, and two staff seminars in Red Barnet in Denmark.

these 'research roadshows' will be decided according to the particular needs of member NGOs. Themes may build upon the material from forum meetings, or draw on other INTRAC research. The seminars in Europe will, as far as possible, be covered within the programme budget. Additionally we will encourage members to ensure their staff know about and can access our products such as ONTRAC, the members' section of the website, Praxis Notes, and Development in Practice.

There will also be a one-off 'research roadshow' before November 2010 which is planned as part of a recruitment drive to encourage new members.

2.5. Sector-wide benefits of the NGO Research Programme

In addition to the specific benefits that members receive from taking part in the programme, members' support has a much wider impact, strengthening the international NGO community as a whole across the world⁵. NGOs taking part in the Programme have made a significant and valued contribution to catalysing INTRAC research over the years, and provided vital seed funds to explore new areas⁶. INTRAC research provides an independent perspective, even when it means disagreeing with NGO orthodoxies, for instance such as our work raising debate around the aid effectiveness agenda and the Paris Declaration, and strives to keep people in the north and south up-to-date with the challenges facing the aid industry and their implications. For example, we ran a seminar and published an ONTRAC on changing INGO management structures, and conducted research with PRIP on local NGOs' responses to climate change in Bangladesh. This work⁷ has been widely disseminated not only through publications and a strong online presence⁸, but also through training and capacity work with other NGOs.

3. Research themes for the NGO Research Programme 2010-13

Over the next three years INTRAC's Research Department will continue to focus its practitioner-oriented research on the broad themes of:

- Understanding and supporting civil society
- Monitoring the changing aid architecture and its impact on civil society
- Capacity development and managing change
- Monitoring and Evaluation

INTRAC's research aims to serve the organisation's role as a civil society analyst a facilitator of debates. Our research provides a bridge between academia and practitioners, theory and practice: providing accessible analysis of civil society trends and cross-cutting interests, and critical thinking to generate ideas on how development can be done differently.

⁵ Visitors to the website came from 199 different countries, with the top 10 countries for visitors including: India, Pakistan, Kenya and Nigeria. Another example of the wider impact of NGO Research Programme funding is ONTRAC, which is translated into five different languages and disseminated worldwide.

⁶ Key research themes over the last cycle have been: the implications of the Paris Declaration and debates on aid effectiveness; the impact of counter-terrorism measures on civil society; social movements; civil society in fragile states; changes in policies towards civil society; M&E; the nature of civil society; the implications of changing aid architecture on NGOs; HIV/AIDS in the workplace; and FBOs in development.

⁷ Over the last cycle of the NGO Research Programme, INTRAC has produced: 15 Briefing Papers, 25 Praxis Notes, 9 issues of ONTRAC, 6 books (with a further book currently in pre-production)

⁸ Our website averages over 5,500 visitors and over 2,000 downloads monthly. We are increasingly looking to facilitate online networks for practitioners, such as the Praxis Programme online learning groups.

INTRAC aims to clearly present the issues facing development practitioners in a way that both reflects and feeds back into practice. To this end, our research on each theme will aim to draw together not only existing sources of theoretical expertise, but also ground this in the experiences and insights of NGO research programme members', other INTRAC contacts in the sector, and INTRAC itself.

3.1. Understanding and supporting civil society

1. **Civil society in post-aid contexts, such as middle income countries.**
What are the implications of donor withdrawal for civil society? What is left behind and are there dangers of some part of civil society disappearing? What are local governments' policies towards civil society? What strategies are adopted by civil society organisations in order to survive? Is there a positive side to donor withdrawal, such as renewed independence of civil society?
Output: Research proposal written, funded and research completed by end 2011. (proposal to DFID July 2010)
2. **The roles and nature of Diaspora organisations in international development.**
Outputs: Praxis note by end of 2011, themed ONTRAC issue by end of 2011
3. Continued scrutiny of the **relationship between and the evolving roles of northern and southern civil society**, and areas where there might be shrinking space for civil society.
Output: Updated briefing paper on civil society and counter-terrorism measures in 2010
4. Continuing to explore the **roles and nature of faith-based organisations in development** and their contribution to civil society
Output: themed ONTRAC issue in September 2010
5. Continuing to explore **civil society in fragile states** and transitional contexts
Output: Updated briefing paper on civil society and fragile states
6. Publication and follow up work on INTRAC's understanding of **the dynamics of civil society**, based on the five key functions.
Output: Book published by October 2010

3.2. Monitoring the changing aid architecture and its impact on civil society

1. Research into the **strategies for the future of European NGOs** and how these fit with changing concepts of civil society, international aid and cooperation.
Output: Research proposal written, funded and research completed by end 2011. (proposal to DFID July 2010)
2. **The impact of official donor policies on civil society in the North and South:**
What are the major funding, management, geographical and thematic changes of official aid policies? What happens to INGOs in the North when the governments stop funding them? What areas of civil society work do governments in the South support? What are the coping strategies of civil society in the view of donor withdrawal? Are there invisible conditionalities imposed by donors on NGOs?
Outputs: Research papers as part of middle income research theme and INGO future strategies research theme, including case studies of civil society in Peru and India completed by end 2011.
3. Ongoing **monitoring of the changing aid architecture.** What are the real on-the-ground implications for civil society organisations of harmonisation and alignment of aid? Who has won and who has lost as a result of this change? Is it possible to monitor the process of harmonisation and alignment?
Output: Regular briefings to members at forum meetings and throughout the year.

3.3. Capacity development and managing change

1. Exploring **theories of change** in relation to both social change and organisational change. What is the thinking behind the theories? What ideas have inspired civil society organisations? What kind of change has been envisioned? Is it possible to unravel these in relation to M&E? How does the application of these theories work in practice?

Output: November 2010 forum meeting, papers called for 2011 M&E conference

2. Research targeted at **strategic management for INGOs**. How are INGOs managing change processes? What is the impact of major changes to international structures on INGO performance – e.g. is programme performance altered when INGOs shift the organisational models to decentralise? INTRAC will look to engage senior managers of INGOs in these debates.

Outputs: Possible theme for research roadshow 2010, workshop and accompanying paper by 2013

3. **Approaches to organisational assessments and development for different parts of civil society**, not just NGOs, but also faith-based groups, and ‘non-aided civil society’, such as social movements, cooperatives, and citizen’s associations.

Outputs: Possible theme for research roadshow 2010, paper by 2013

3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

1. **The practice and theory of M&E.**

Building on our longstanding expertise in this area, we feel that ongoing monitoring of these issues remain highly relevant in light of pressure from politicians, donors, host governments, and from within the sector to improve M&E and to understand better the impact of our work.

Output: continuation of our series of working and briefing papers - (see www.intrac.org/pages/en/monitoring-and-evaluation.html)

2. A one-day open seminar attached to the forum meeting in November 2010 looking at ‘**The Challenges of Assessing Impact in a donor climate which is driven by financial accountability**’

Outputs: Seminar November 2010, dissemination of papers

3. An **international conference planned for April 2011**, with inputs from a range of global actors on the issues of :

- a. M&E of advocacy
- b. M&E of capacity building
- c. M&E of humanitarian work
- d. Developing M&E systems for complex organisations

Outputs: April 2011 International Conference, dissemination of conference papers

4. Costs and staffing

Each NGO member currently contributes £9,000 per year towards the costs of the programme. This is considerably less than it would cost each individual NGO to carry out this volume of research themselves, let alone organise discussion of it with key peer agencies. The new financial year from the NGO Research Programme begins on 1 July 2010. Members’ contributions will remain at £9,000 for Year 1, and then move to £9,250 for Year 2 and £9,500 for Year 3.

It is helpful if each NGO member is able to nominate one member of staff to act as a liaison person. To ensure that you gain maximum benefit from the programme, we recommend that at least one member of your staff attends the NGO Research Forum twice a year. Two additional representatives from each NGO are also welcome to each forum meeting.

Current members and INTRAC agree that expanding the membership of the NGO Research Programme is highly desirable. We plan a recruitment drive over the second half of 2010 (see Appendix), which we hope will bring success in attracting 3-5 new members. We will set a maximum of fifteen members in order to ensure that the benefits of collaboration and informal interaction between members are retained.

INTRAC's Research Department is responsible for implementing the programme's activities, drawing on the time of different members of staff as required. The strategic research review, undertaken by Vicky Brehm, has strongly recommended that a Head of Research should be appointed as soon as possible to strengthen INTRAC's capacity to manage research, scan for emerging trends, and market INTRAC's research services. Recruitment for this post is already in the preparatory stages. INTRAC will be looking for candidates with direct experience in the development sector. Seeking new members and exploring possibilities for additional financial support for the NGO Research Programme and other INTRAC research will be a priority for the post-holder.

The forum will significantly contribute to the costs of this position, as well as making a contribution to the work of Research Assistants, and to the dissemination and communication of research, through contributing funding to our Communications Manager post.

5. Activities and budget for 2010-13

We have set out a provisional outline of activities for 2010 and 2011 and a budget for the whole cycle:

- Appendix: INTRAC NGO Research Programme Activities 2010-2011
- Document attached to email: 'NGO Research Programme Budget 2010-2013'

Amongst the many activities planned, we make a commitment to quarterly communication with members, circulating ideas, seeking member case-studies, reporting on the progress of forthcoming research, and disseminating completed research. We will make similar plans for 2012 and 2013 as the cycle progresses, but at this stage it is difficult to predict what will be the most relevant and responsive research themes.

6. Conclusion

The INTRAC NGO Research Programme responds to the research priorities of members and proactively analyses civil society trends, producing papers and events that bridge theoretical reflection and practitioner experience. The two core elements of programme membership: research produced in collaboration with members, and forum meetings twice a year; underpin the dynamic relationship between INTRAC research and the current and pressing issues that member organisations face.

It has been a pleasure to convene the forum over the past three years and we do hope that you will join us in continuing to explore the opportunities and challenges that will face the development sector in 2010 -2013.

APPENDIX 1: INTRAC NGO RESEARCH PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES 2010–11

	INTRAC internal process		International conferences
	New member recruitment		Additional research
	Forum meetings and related research		Dissemination, reporting and consultation

2010						
Activity	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
INTRAC to recruit new Head of Research						
Recruitment drive for new members of NGO RP - aiming for 3-5 new members by November.						
Event: ‘Research roadshow’ in either Sept or Oct: a one-day INTRAC ‘taster’ seminar will be held in several locations, including the UK. INTRAC and members will invite prospective members to attend.						
Event: Forum meeting ‘Theories of change’ and one-day seminar ‘Challenges of assessing impact in a donor climate driven by financial accountability’.						
Research: Joint research with members into ‘Theories of change’ and ‘Challenges of assessing impact in a donor climate driven by financial accountability’ in the lead up to November meeting.						
Research: submitting proposals to DFID for ‘Civil society in middle income countries’ and ‘Strategies for the future of European INGOs’.						
Research: commencing research on ‘Civil society in middle income countries’ and ‘Strategies for the future of European INGOs.’						
Research: updated briefing paper on ‘The impact of counter-terrorism measures on civil society’.						
Research: ONTRAC 46 on ‘Faith-Based Organisations and international development’.						
Communication: Book ‘Whatever happened to civil society’ published and disseminated.						
Communication: consultation with members about April 2011 M&E conference.						
Communication: INTRAC reporting back to members on progress of forthcoming research, disseminating completed research.						

2011												
Activity	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Event: International Conference: Monitoring and Evaluation. Provisionally planned to be held in The Netherlands.												
Event: INTRAC 20 th Anniversary Conference. Theme TBC.												
Event: Forum meetings, themes TBC												
Research: INTRAC to coordinate joint research on two forum themes by seeking case studies, insights and research input from members.												
Research: M&E papers sought and produced for April conference.												
Research: ONTRAC issue and Praxis Note on 'Diaspora and Development'.												
Research: ongoing research on 'Civil society in middle income countries' and 'Strategies for the future of European INGOs'												
Communication: consultation with members about M&E conference												
Communication: consultation with members about INTRAC 20 th Anniversary Conference												
Communication: INTRAC reporting back to members on progress of forthcoming research, disseminating completed research.												

NB. No 'Research Roadshow' is planned for 2011 due to the fact INTRAC is planning to hold two conferences. After the 2010 Research Roadshow they will commence again in 2012 -2013.