

Newsletter

February 2021



Welcome to our February 2021 newsletter.

This is our first newsletter of 2021, and we've all grown rather tired of saying that we hope this year brings better things than 2020. The situation seems pretty bleak in many parts of the world, not just as we continue to battle with the COVID-19 pandemic, but also as human rights are violated again and again in Yemen, Myanmar and Uganda, to name just a few.

Yet civil society is as active as ever and people are finding new and creative ways to make their voices heard as they strive for social justice, as our guest viewpoint from consultant Isabela Souza shows. The small part that INTRAC plays in supporting these efforts continues to make us proud. This month we showcase our new programme in support of very small UK-based organisations working internationally, recent research into civil society support organisations on behalf of the Ford Foundation, exchanges with Greek CSOs through HIGGS, and the latest from The Development Alternative. There are endings too – with completion of work on Bridging the Gaps and our support to the AMiRA migration programme coming to a close.

On the new beginnings front, we also welcome Peter Sargent as our interim Chief Executive (read his Viewpoint on his thoughts as he joins the INTRAC team), Alastair Spray to the staff team and Alexander Knapp to our Board.

Finally, you can find out about our latest training offers and publications. Here's to an active and successful 2021!

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Reflecting on trust and INTRAC's role in positive change

I am delighted to have just joined the team at INTRAC. Through my initial conversations with people so far, I have been very impressed by the outstanding way staff and associates are all continuing to pull together through the pandemic, and the recently extended lockdown situation we are experiencing here in the UK.

Amidst the stresses and strains that this inevitably puts on the organisation and the whole team, two things have especially inspired me during my first few weeks. Firstly, INTRAC's capacity to deliver services in a new way in response to the changing circumstances. Secondly, the strong commitment that everyone clearly demonstrates to INTRAC's work and mission to strengthen civil society.

It's exciting for me to have the opportunity to work with like-minded people who believe in delivering high quality services that build the capacity of individuals and organisations, so that together we can strive for the ultimate goal of helping people achieve social, economic and environmental justice, wherever they are.

I join INTRAC at a time when there are many other challenges facing civil society, such as expected reductions in institutional funding, how NGOs remain relevant as part of the "shift the power" agenda, achieving climate justice, and also the keen spotlight on addressing equality, diversity and inclusion across the sector.

What has struck me particularly is how central trust is to INTRAC's role in helping to solve these challenges. The organisation is founded on the belief that change starts with people, with citizens coming together to improve the world. If we are to build the skills and knowledge of civil society to be more effective in addressing poverty and inequality, we need to build relationships of trust with all our stakeholders.

INTRAC can be proud of a long history of supporting significant positive change. Trust in this context translates into a continual focus on delivering quality services and acting as a strategic partner that our clients see as an asset to reaching their goals. Indeed, these would be our shared goals of strengthening civil society across a wide variety of thematic areas. In my experience there are three key ingredients to building trust in an advisory role:

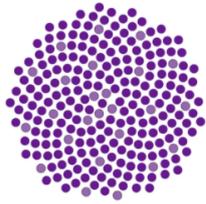
- 1) Demonstrate understanding.** Ensure that you are properly listening to everyone in the project or organisation, and then translate that into an achievable, evidence-based response that will enable the client to feel that the welfare of the project or whole organisation is important to you.
- 2) Be accountable.** Assume responsibility for the advice provided, in terms of the decision-areas recommended or actions proposed. Demonstrating accountability in this way towards your client will stand you in good stead in building a relationship based on trust and reliability.
- 3) Show integrity.** If your client knows that what you're sharing with them is delivered with integrity and truth, no matter how hard the message may be, they will realise that you are there to support them. Being able to have difficult conversations, address difficult subject matters and most of all, demonstrate your integrity through the way you conduct yourself will build a high-quality relationship.

Organisational development, evaluation and learning is absolutely central to the excellent reputation and trust INTRAC has built over many years. This is a huge asset to recognise as we work together with staff, consultants and all stakeholders to recognise the ongoing challenges in the current context and spark even more positive change for INTRAC and our partners in the future.

Peter Sargent became interim Chief Executive of INTRAC in January 2021. Much of his 20+ years of experience in the international development sector has been in senior leadership roles. He was previously Chief Operating Officer at United Purpose, and has also worked as a consultant.



Learning from Women to Reimagine the Future



**LEARNING
FROM
WOMEN**
to reimagine the future

What I like most about my work in international development is to travel, to experience different places, to meet new people, to hear their stories, to taste the food they eat, to try the clothes they wear and to bring a sense of what is happening there back to the UK. When we entered our first lockdown last March, I found myself stuck here.

Not only that, I also saw myself having to deal with the ‘we know better’ mindset, which is one of the things I dislike most about my work. It drives me crazy to be part of conversations that propagate the colonialism mindset - the notion that ‘we can teach them how to do better’ and that ‘we have nothing to learn from them’. The thing is, I represent both the ‘we’ and the ‘them’. I’m a British woman working in international development and, at the same time, I am also a Brazilian who wants her country and others in a similar situation to do better.

As people say ‘necessity is the mother of invention.’ After recording a webinar with Laura Somoggi, a gender expert who is a fellow Brazilian and a dear friend of mine also living in London, we had an idea. What if we turned this lockdown constraint into an opportunity to reach out online to other women around the world? We could hear their stories and be inspired by their work to make the world a better place for people and the planet. This would also give us a chance to demonstrate that we can learn from women in countries without a very high human-development index adjusted for inequality, rather than just learn about them. Voilà, [Learning from Women to Reimagine the Future](#) was born.

In our [first video series](#), we talked with five women from different sectors in five different countries: an agronomist who owns an organic dairy family business and works with a cooperative of farmers in the Andean mountains in Peru; a teacher in a rural Afro-descendants’ area ([Quilombolas communities](#)) in Brazil teaching philosophy through spoken stories of the students’ grandmothers; a deaf human rights and gender activist who became a lawyer and joined a political party to be the voice of disabled people in Kenya; a photographer, video-maker and adventurer who was the first woman to cycle solo in Egypt; and in India, an architect and the vice-president of an NGO developing housing and habitat projects that are people and nature-centric.

Each of these women had amazing stories and very different experiences. A common thread of their messages is the importance of decolonising knowledge and looking at the direction of development from inside/out, rather than outside/in. For example, in Peru, [María Isabel Quiroz Cisneros](#) told us of growing up farming 15 crops in the same area, like the Incas, and her shock when she got to University and was taught about monocultures and the use of chemicals. Now she says academics are studying about multi-crop plantations, but she does not need to study it, because she knows how to do it, she has already experienced it.

Another common element of their messages is the respect for the connection between the ‘I - We - All of Us’ which exists across civilisations and cultures around the world. For instance, [Maria Isabel Gonçalves](#) - the teacher from Brazil - shared with us the Ubuntu African Philosophy: ‘I am because you are.’ I hope these videos provide an opportunity for all of us to reconsider what we understand as knowledge, and to recognize that there is no ‘we’ or ‘them’. In essence, we are all the same. We are all human beings.



Isabela Souza is part of INTRAC’s pool of independent consultants. She helps organizations put learning into action, throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of their programmes. With a focus on the interface between environment and international development, Isabela has a 20-year portfolio career spanning the oil sector, consultancies, academia and NGOs. She is passionate about creating new ways of working for an equitable and just planet.

Our work



Strengthening Small Organisations with Big Ambitions - Capacity Development for Sustained Impact



INTRAC has been awarded a Capacity Development Grant to strengthen the capacity of small British charities working in international development. This programme is funded by UK aid from the British people, and forms a part of the **Small Charities Challenge Fund (SCCF)**, run by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

The INTRAC project, [Strengthening Small Organisations with Big Ambitions](#), aims to support small UK charities working internationally. Its goal is to improve their resilience and make them better able to provide effective support to their partner organisations and communities overseas.

The project takes the form of a sponsored programme of online training, mentoring, and open-access resources. Based on INTRAC's 30 years of experience of working with small NGOs the areas are likely to focus on:

- Partner Capacity Strengthening
- Monitoring Evaluation and Learning
- Advocacy Strategy and Influencing Skills
- Theory of change and Adaptive Management



Participants in the Big Ambitions programme will receive free **online training**



Staff from participating organisations will be able to benefit from INTRAC mentoring



A set of **toolkits** specifically for small organisations will be produced and made available to all

INTRAC is currently shortlisting 16 small UK-based charities working in international development that will form the core audience for this programme by participating in a co-creation meeting this month and by providing regular feedback throughout the programme. This process will ensure that the programme activities are suited to the needs and preferences of its participants as well as guiding the content design.

In addition, other small organisations with big ambitions will also have the chance to learn from this programme by downloading and using the toolkits that (as other INTRAC resources) will be made available to the general public

We look forward to sharing more details from this exciting programme of work as it progresses during 2021.

Working with the Ford Foundation on a landscape analysis of CSO capacity strengthening in the global South



Since December 2020 INTRAC has been working with a team of researchers on a landscape analysis of efforts and resource organisations that have been strengthening CSOs and community-based organisations in the global South. This analysis has been commissioned by the Ford Foundation. The study focuses on initiatives designed and led by southern-based organisations over the past ten years in 13 of the countries where the Ford Foundation operates in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The study looks at different types of capacity strengthening organisations such as not for profit and for profit training and research centres or consultancies, groups or umbrella organisations, operating at national and/or regional level. It considers ten different types of capacities including financial resilience, legal and administrative compliance, strategic thinking and adaptation to changing environments, evaluation and learning, advocacy, leadership and many more.

The aim of the report, [which is available now via the INTRAC website](#), is to inform the thinking of the Ford Foundation about whether and how to invest in southern capacity strengthening organisations in the future.

The research team is led by Dr Emmanuel Kumi, a research fellow at the University of Ghana and author of several academic articles on civil society. It also includes Dr Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay, the director of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), an Indian centre for participatory research and training, and Pablo Collada, a Mexican sociologist and consultant with experience in social development in civil society and the public sector. Dr Floresca Karanàsou, INTRAC's MENA principal consultant, is managing and supporting the research.

INTRAC supports civil society organisations in the UK and Greece to share their learning about adaptation to COVID-19



On Friday 12 February, a group of civil society organisations based in the UK and Greece took part in an online workshop to share the lessons they have learned about adapting their work to COVID-19.

The event, titled “Best-to-Share”, was organised by INTRAC in partnership with [HIGGS](#) and with the support of the British Embassy in Athens. Since early 2020, the impact of the pandemic has placed unprecedented pressures on CSOs around the world. This online event was an opportunity to exchange learning, and to foster links between civil society ecosystems in the UK and Greece. The 12 organisations involved represented a range of sectors including education, women’s empowerment and environmental protection.

The event formed a part of a wider collaboration between INTRAC and HIGGS, an organisation which works to strengthen CSOs in Greece. The collaboration, “empowering the Greek not-for-profit ecosystem during COVID-19”, is supported by the British Embassy in Athens and has seen INTRAC deliver online training to Greek CSOs on adaptive programming and management.

Completing the final evaluation of the Bridging the Gaps programme

In December 2020, INTRAC completed the final evaluation of the [Bridging the Gaps \(BtG\) programme](#), which has now come to an end after 10 years of implementation. Funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bridging the Gaps was working with three key population communities - sex workers, people who use drugs and men who have sex with men, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people – to advocate for their rights to access quality HIV prevention, treatment and care, and other services. The programme was implemented by a consortium of nine international partners (led by the Dutch NGO, [Aidsfonds](#)) with more than 80 local and regional partner organisations across sixteen countries.

INTRAC's approach included an outcome harvesting process, which was done virtually with partners in four countries - Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia and Ukraine. Partners were asked to send in stories of change that they felt illustrated the impact of their work through Bridging the Gaps.

The INTRAC team then selected a short list of stories that INTRAC would further explore through interviews with external, independent stakeholders. We asked the interviewees to verify the change story and explain whether and how Bridging the Gaps had contributed to this change. We also asked them about other actors or factors, not related to Bridging the Gaps, that may have influenced the change. At the same time, INTRAC also gathered other data and evidence about the change story from the organisations involved.

Positive change stories that emerged included:

- Bridging the Gaps has piloted peer led health services that have improved access for key population groups that are usually stigmatized, and often criminalized in their countries;
- the programme has created new and strengthened existing networks of key population communities that has increased their capacity to advocate for their rights and influence policy spaces;
- the programme has created partnerships between civil society organisations, donors and governments at different levels, that have been pivotal in influencing positive change.

The few stories of negative change that emerged were mainly related to a backlash in the media or among politicians, against key populations, as a result of their greater visibility and activism through the programme.

The experience of conducting the evaluation online instead of via the country visits originally planned pre COVID-19, was challenging but provided a lot of learning for the team.

INTRAC is planning to use the lessons from this, and other evaluations conducted over the past year, to develop some good practice protocols for conducting remote M&E.

Reaching the end of the AMiRA journey

Over the past three years, we've regularly provided updates on INTRAC's support as a learning partner to the Action for Migrants: Route-based Assistance Programme ([AMiRA](#)). The programme – led by the British Red Cross – began in April 2018 with the aim of providing support to vulnerable migrants across Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Sudan and Egypt). AMiRA comes to an end in March 2021.

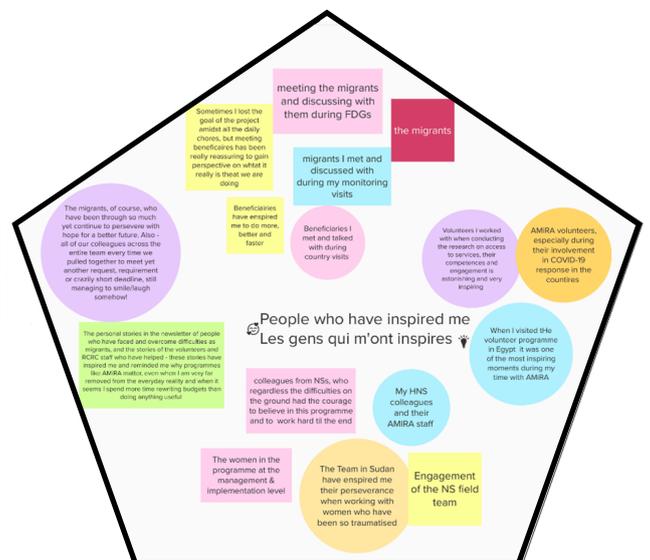
This programme has supported tens of thousands of children, women and men with basic services such as access to information about their rights, assistance in the form of food or cash, transport, emergency healthcare, help to reconnect with families, activities to integrate them into society, and psycho-social support (PSS) and safe spaces in which to face up to trauma. It has helped National Societies of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in these countries to become key actors in the field of migration, and expanded their technical capacities in areas such as PSS, community engagement and accountability, protection and anti-trafficking, cash and voucher assistance, and monitoring, evaluation and learning.

The INTRAC team is helping to pull together the lessons learned from this amazing programme. In December 2020 we facilitated the final Regional Learning Event, this time all virtual. We took time to explore the personal highs and lows of the programme, as well as the people and activities that inspired us. Discussions focused a lot on what we had learned about designing and implementing a complex, multi-country programme for migrants on the move; a multi-faceted programme that not only caters for the needs of migrants themselves, but also strengthens the eco-system around the migrants. This eco-system includes front-line volunteers and providers of social services, communities that provide a temporary or long-term home for migrants, transport providers who can smooth or hinder the journeys, and local, national and international institutions that develop migration policies. This learning from AMiRA is feeding into the development of the [humanitarian service point model](#).

Over the years the teams have overcome numerous challenges, adapting their activities and ways of working to deal with border tensions, violence and break-downs in security, public health crises (not just COVID), and budget cuts. It is great to know that the Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies involved in AMiRA will be continuing to support migrants through other funding channels and by integrating new knowledge and expertise into their daily practices. Because people on the move along the old and new migrant routes will still need help when they face trauma and crisis.

In the remaining weeks of the programme, we will be producing final learning outputs to share these lessons more widely. These will be available on the [IFRC migration website](#).

It has been an honour to work with the staff and volunteers of the RCRC Movement over the past three years. We wish them every success with their work going forward.



Reviewing the Strategy of the Development Alternative



[The Development Alternative \(TDA\)](#) programme is piloting new approaches to strengthening the role of young people in development processes. It does this through a youth-led accountability model, as well as support to youth civil society organisations. The programme has established teams of volunteers in Uganda and Madagascar who use the [DevelopmentCheck](#) platform to monitor local development projects, engage with development partners, and survey the community. It has also established a Youth Collective to bring together youth civil society organisations (CSOs) from around the world. This provides a space for youth CSOs to collaborate, expand their networks and address common challenges.

As part of a wider monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) strategy, INTRAC has led a bi-annual strategy review process that provides a space to consolidate programme learning and adapt approaches. Over the course of two weeks in mid-January, INTRAC facilitated a series of online strategy review workshops with the consortium partners and country teams. The focus on the strategy review is to reflect on our strategy for change: to establish if we are doing the right things, and if we are making a difference.

The process comprised two main phases. In the first week we focused on consolidating learning. INTRAC presented early findings from the formal MEL processes (evaluations), and invited country teams to share their informal learning, based on structured sessions they had already run with country teams. To keep things manageable, we split the session according to different workstreams. Within the workstreams, we sought to identify:

- Where we had and had not made change
- What had enabled us to make change
- What barriers to change exist, and what we could do differently

From the learning phase we identified some strategic challenges within each workstream. The adaptation phase in the second week used the [TGROW framework](#) to identify options for addressing these challenges. These sessions were particularly productive, and we were able to identify several synergies between the workstreams and countries. The programme is currently preparing for a second Phase, and the strategy review has provided a structured process for identifying evidence-based adaptations to the programme strategy.

The Development Alternative is funded by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office through the Aid Connect Civil Society Effectiveness stream. The members of the consortium are Restless Development, Accountable Now, dot.Lebanon, Integrity Action, INTRAC, War Child, and Y Care International. INTRAC is leading on the monitoring, evaluation and learning of the programme and providing input into the co-design process.



Peter Sargent, Chief Executive (Interim)

Peter joined INTRAC as our interim Chief Executive in January 2021. He has built a career in the international development sector, focussing on the pursuit of operational excellence to help NGOs succeed. Much of his 20+ years experience has been working as part of senior leadership teams with Concern Worldwide, Oxfam GB and the UN, in Burundi, DRC and Sudan to implement sustainable development programmes. He has also worked extensively as a consultant. Peter has been based in the UK since 2012, and has worked for Humentum (previously Mango) and more recently Chief Operating Officer at United Purpose, overseeing both country programme teams and corporate functions.



Alastair Spray, Research and Programme Coordinator

Alastair joined INTRAC in November 2020 to provide maternity cover for the Research and Programme Coordinator role. He holds an MPhil in Development Studies from the University of Cambridge and a joint honours in Spanish and International Relations from Aberdeen University. Before joining INTRAC, Alastair coordinated the Community Apprentice programme for the UK charity Envision. Alastair is INTRAC's Programme Coordinator for [The Development Alternative](#). In his capacity as researcher, he undertakes in-house research on INTRAC's strategic themes and outreach ideas, and provides support to the consultancy team applying a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods.



Alexander Knapp, Trustee

Alexander Knapp joined INTRAC as a trustee in December 2020. He is the founder and Chief Executive of The AKCGlobal Group (AKCG), a social enterprise based in London and Washington DC, working to bring evidence-driven support to the international development and international business sectors. Alex has worked for twenty-five years in international development policy, planning, fundraising, operations and effectiveness, including fifteen years with the United Nations in eleven peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and humanitarian aid missions around the world.

Publications and blogs

New papers on M&E of capacity strengthening added to the M&E Universe



In January 2021, INTRAC once again expanded the [M&E Universe](#) - our free, online resource for monitoring and evaluation practitioners. The seven new papers focus on various aspects of the monitoring and evaluation of capacity strengthening work, and form a part of the **M&E of Development Approaches** sub-section of the Universe.

Four papers centre specifically on M&E of capacity strengthening and were written by Nigel Simister, Lucy Morris and Rick James. These comprise a core paper, and entries on M&E systems for capacity strengthening, capacity strengthening of portfolios, and M&E tools for capacity strengthening. Three further papers cover the related topics of M&E of partnerships (written by Nigel Simister with contributions from Lucy Morris), M&E of training (written by Nigel Simister and Paula Haddock), and M&E of network development (written by Nigel Simister with contributions from Clare Moberly and Jenny Ross).

Additionally, a new paper on the Qualitative Impact Protocol (or QUIP) was also added. Written by Vera Scholz, this paper forms a part of the **Complex Methods** sub-section of the Universe. With these additions, the M&E Universe now stands at 113 papers, with further entries due later in 2021.

If you are new to the M&E Universe, the [project page on the INTRAC website provides a quick-start guide](#). To find out more about the new papers, [see our full news story](#).

When partnerships go wrong

In January, a meeting of the Bond Partnership Approaches group looked at the issue of partnership failure. Set up and facilitated with help from Lucy Morris from INTRAC, the event featured a presentation from Anne Marie van Bolhuis, a Q&A and a group exercise.

Additional blogs on exit

INTRAC published three additional blogs in its series on responsible exit during December 2020. First, Rizal Malik contributed his second entry in the series, this time focusing on [the localisation agenda in Indonesia](#). Rick James focused on the topic of “ending well” and strategic funerals for his own second contribution to the series. Finally, Lucy Morris drew on [her experience of an exit process from her time working for EveryChild](#), when the CSO decided to exit from all of its programmes.

INTRAC training

Online Partner Capacity Strengthening

Online, 18 May– 22 June 2021

Course fee: £750

Are you involved in capacity strengthening or organisational development work with local partners? Maybe you are grappling with how to provide remote capacity strengthening support, particularly in the context of COVID-19? If these are the sorts of challenges that you are facing, then INTRAC's new Partner Capacity Strengthening online course could help you. This six week e-learning programme covers all of the basic core skills needed to support a partner through an organisational change process.

Online Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Online, 2 June– 8 July 2021

Course fee: £750

INTRAC's most popular online course to date, this course will guide you through the key aspects of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL), helping you to build effective MEL practices into your work. Designed for newbies as well as for more experienced staff who had to learn by doing, this course covers all the basics of M & E, from jargon busting to choosing indicators, collecting and analysing data, as well as reporting and learning.

Online Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Online, 29 June– 20 July 2021

Course fee: £550

Designed for more experienced M&E professionals, this advanced course aims to provide you with the knowledge and skills to help you develop an effective M&E system for your project, programme or organisation. The course will set out the key components of an M&E system, how to make decisions on what information to collect, how to summarise and aggregate that information, and how M&E systems differ for projects, complex programmes and organisations.



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