

Newsletter

May 2021



Welcome to our May 2021 newsletter, from Rachel Hayman

This is a hard editorial to write. It's my last editorial as I step down from INTRAC as Director of Research, Learning and Communications (see p11). It's been a huge privilege to work on many incredible initiatives over the past decade with the most talented, devoted and inspiring people I could ever hope to meet. This newsletter once again showcases that, with insights into the important INTRAC work on evaluations, programmes, training, publications, and advisory support.

Our viewpoint from Catherine Allen reflects on how INTRAC seeks to influence policy through the evaluation process, while in her viewpoint Anne Garbutt muses on her changing perspectives on online training.

It's also a hard editorial to write because of the extreme pressure on so many of the organisations and civil society activists with whom INTRAC works. During our weekly staff check-in, you can hear the concern about friends and colleagues in countries facing civic strife, health crises and natural disasters; and about partner organisations and clients dealing with waves of budget cuts.

INTRAC is also affected by these dynamics. That is why we've been devoting time in the last few months to reviewing our values and our theory of change; we've brought together staff and non-staff consultants to reflect on how we approach learning and on what 'shifting power' means for INTRAC.

With some great talent and fresh ideas, and as I bow out, I wish all INTRAC staff, consultants, trustees and friends the very best of luck for the future.

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How INTRAC has helped to evaluate advocacy capacity building through the Dialogue and Dissent programme

Evaluations are a major part of INTRAC's work - in fact, it is one of the things we are best known for. In the last year, completing three evaluations of programmes within the same framework has given us a valuable insight into a large civil society support initiative. This specific programme links strongly with our aim to help funders increase the voice and agency of their partners.

The **Dialogue and Dissent** programme was a major initiative by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). It consisted of 25 strategic partnerships which ran from 2016 to 2020. Each one aimed to develop the capacity of civil society organisations to: lobby, advocate, and influence; develop and use evidence to support their case; build relationships, networks, and collaboration; and identify learning from the experience.

Three separate clients commissioned INTRAC to lead on evaluations of their Dialogue and Dissent partnerships. These were:

- The "**Voice for Change**" programme (implemented by SNV and IPFRI), which worked with CSOs representing pastoralists, female entrepreneurs, and small-holder farmers
- The "**Sector Partnerships**" programme (implemented by Rainforest Alliance) which worked with farmers and CSOs in food-producing communities
- The "**Freedom from Fear**" strategic partnership (implemented by PAX and Amnesty International) which worked in fragile and conflict-affected situations.

Taken together, these evaluations were a major piece of work for INTRAC. To complete them, INTRAC staff and local consultants undertook detailed studies in several countries. While the studies all launched in late 2019, much of the work was done during the COVID-19 pandemic. This affected the way in which evidence could be collected – it limited, and in some cases stopped, field engagement. Other methods used included literature reviews, interviews with key stakeholders, and facilitated discussions.

While adapting this work to the new conditions of the pandemic was challenging, our evaluations identified a number of findings. The key lesson was the important role that lobbying and advocacy play in successful development processes. We found that Theory of Change was popular with CSO partners because it helped them focus on outcomes and process. We observed a tension between funding and flexibility; while lobbying and advocacy can be responsive by nature, the financing and contract mechanisms used by funders are more rigid. The "Freedom from Fear" evaluation found that a great deal can be achieved by supporting dynamic local CSOs which have motivation and capacity, but which lack resources. It also found that supportive accompaniment was a key component in successful capacity development.

Doing not one evaluation within the framework, but three, has given INTRAC a broader perspective on how supporting the capacity of CSOs for lobbying and advocacy can contribute to achieving development outcomes across a range of different contexts (peace & security, local priorities and agricultural value chains). It also means that, as an organisation, we have made a significant contribution to the overall learning from the Dialogue and Dissent programme which MoFA and their partners will draw on as they continue their work to support the strengthening of civil society.

Catherine Allen is an INTRAC Principal Consultant who joined us in July 2019. She brings over 25 years' field-to-policy level experience of international development, applying her skills in the context of sustainability, inclusion and poverty reduction across many countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.



What I have learned about learning during COVID-19

If in 2019 someone had asked which training method was best – face to face or remote - I would definitely have said that the former is always the best and the latter is a poor substitute. Yet here I am in 2021, having to re-consider my view given all the work I have undertaken online since January 2020, due to the impact of COVID-19.

I have had the privilege of working in development for 37 years, which has meant traveling around the world meeting people, sharing experiences, and providing different kinds of support to CSOs in their own environments. Although COVID-19 changed that, it also provided me with the opportunity to reassess my ability to provide capacity-building support to organisations and individuals that I have never met in person. In that time, I have learned a great deal both technically, and in terms of methods of delivering training. As a result, my feelings now are quite different to what they were in 2019.

Since January 2020 I have delivered three tailor-made monitoring, evaluation and learning courses; co-facilitated INTRAC's M&E Systems course adapted for remote delivery; provided Theory of Change and MEAL support to two organisations with staff around the world; conducted an M&E system assessment; and facilitated a webinar series. All of this was done remotely online.

Was my support more effective in person or online? The answer probably lies more in my capacity to communicate, develop relationships and to maintain my enthusiasm for supporting clients than whether one approach is better than the other.

While the online sessions I have provided as part of MEAL support were shorter than they would be in person – which means it takes longer to achieve the desired outcome – the feedback has been good. These organisations are now continuing with the process we began together. Previously, my in-person training courses were usually run over five days and participants would all stay in the same venue for that period. The advantage of this was the opportunity for participants to meet and share experiences, both through formal training sessions and informally, outside them. However, this intense approach often left participants with little time to reflect between sessions.

Conversely, these chances to reflect have been built into our online trainings. Between weekly or fortnightly sessions, we have provided opportunities for participants to meet each other and trainers online outside the formal sessions where they could share experiences. As a result, participants often brought up interesting questions to later sessions and said that they gained considerably from the informal sessions and were able to support each other in a peer-to-peer setting.

Now, my own feeling is that neither delivery method is better than the other; they are different and require different ways of working. We as trainers and consultants providing support need to adapt the way we deliver depending on client needs, rather than our preferred way of working. There are definite advantages for the environment, for our clients and for allowing participants time to reflect which in turn generates further questions, discussion and learning. I have adapted to be an online trainer and consultant and have learned a lot both technically and in delivery methodologies, about how to deliver remote online support which not only meets the needs of our clients, but which are also valued by them. I am looking forward to doing a training course with participants in the same space in the future but am also enthused about the strengths of virtual methods.



Anne Garbutt has been a member of INTRAC's network since 2018. Previously, she had been a member of staff since 1997. Anne's main passion is developing robust M&E processes that come from quality planning, developing monitoring systems and supporting organisations who want to measure their impact.



Our work

Researching and exploring the transformative potential of core grants funding

Laudes —
— Foundation

INTRAC Principal Consultant, Rod MacLeod has carried out research around core grants as a funding mechanism – resulting in a research paper and four supporting blogs.

This originally arose out of an evaluation INTRAC carried out for Laudes Foundation on a specific core grant provided to Forum for the Future. From this particular example, Rod was then asked to carry out broader research on the issue.

The aim of the research was to learn lessons from the provision of core grants in the wider sector. It involved a literature review and interviews with donors, recipients and observers of the sector, as well as Rod's own experience as a practitioner and a consultant.

This is a topic that has been rising up the agenda and Laudes Foundation has itself increasingly been using this funding mechanism. Core grants have developed in recognition of the drawbacks of project grants. As the [Ford Foundation put it](#), 'we had to shed the magical thinking that important change can happen quickly – advanced by relatively small, short-term grants'.

Advantages of unrestricted funding (or 'general operating support') include providing grantees with more stability, enabling longer term planning, allowing for innovation, facilitating strategic shifts, supporting organisational development and changing the nature of the donor-recipient relationship. There are many examples of organisations that have used core grants to transform both themselves and their programmes.

At the same time, they are not a universal panacea. Indeed, when recipients take core grants for granted and use them solely to fill funding gaps and avoid hard choices, they can actually be detrimental. So, considering the criteria and an appropriate process for selection is critical.

One of the major reasons core grants are not more widely adopted is the challenge of measuring their impact. If an organisation is working in multiple areas, aggregation and summarisation is complicated. Even where an organisation has had a clear impact, assessing the contribution (let alone attribution) of a donor core grant is hard. Some donors are now therefore favouring more open-ended approaches based on a series of learning questions about the grantee *as an organisation* (e.g. How have you changed? How do you learn and adapt?), rather than trying to pin grantees down to quantifiable programme results frameworks.

The overall conclusion of the research is clear: multi-year core grants – if properly employed – can be transformative. But this means putting more focus on the recipient's rather than the donor's wishes. In doing so, this can enable both to achieve their objectives more effectively.

Bringing the voice of people affected by UK aid into ICAI reviews



The [Independent Commission for Aid Impact \(ICAI\)](#) scrutinizes how UK aid is spent, reporting directly to the UK parliament. In 2019, INTRAC joined a consortium led by [Agulhas Applied Knowledge](#) which acts as service provider to the ICAI Commissioners, helping them to

deliver independent reviews and reports on UK aid spend. ICAI reviews are grounded in a rigorous methodology that scrutinizes evidence on different themes, policies and funding streams.

ICAI's work is now in its third phase, and the Commissioners are committed to ensuring that the views and experiences of people affected directly or indirectly by UK aid are brought into the review process, wherever possible. This is where INTRAC comes in. Using our expertise in participatory methodology, community engagement, and feedback processes, since 2019 we have helped several ICAI review teams reach out to people in numerous countries as part of evidence gathering. Over the past two years we've supported reviews related to UK aid to halt deforestation and biodiversity loss, youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa, tackling modern slavery, support for nutrition, and a portfolio review of aid in Ghana. We're just getting started with support to a review on the UK's response to the safeguarding crisis in the humanitarian sector.

We've helped to develop guidelines for the ICAI Secretariat for involving people and communities in reviews in ways that meet high ethical standards, addressing key questions around who to engage with, how to do that, how the information gathered will be used, and how the feedback loop will be closed. For INTRAC, supporting the ICAI review process contributes to our mission by strengthening the voice of people affected by the aid system.

Sharing knowledge and unpacking the “L” in MEL

INTRAC's staff and network recently took part in two events focusing on different aspects of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL).

In April, 15 INTRAC staff and members of our network took part in a series of workshops on unpacking the **L in MEL and Programming**. The aim of these workshops was to build connections between the INTRAC people working on learning and consolidate experience and knowledge about learning processes. The workshops helped surface useful reflections on the support we provide in the area and explore opportunities for improving and expanding INTRAC's offer and outreach on learning in different ways.

In May, Nigel Simister, INTRAC associate and Pauline Salin of INTRAC took part in **Expertise France's M&E Forum** and presented INTRAC's approach to M&E of Capacity Strengthening Work and the M&E Universe papers on the topic. 125 representatives of Expertise France and of the Agence Francaise de Development (AFD) attended the event.

Over the next few pages, we share updates on three different projects that INTRAC is currently undertaking with the British Council. These include our long-running relationship with the Active Citizens programme, reviewing a shift to digital methods, and our continuing work on the Media for All programme in the Western Balkans.



Continuing INTRAC's engagement with the Active Citizens programme through a longitudinal evaluation

In January 2021 INTRAC started working with the British Council's [Active Citizens programme](#) on an evaluation to fill a key gap in the programme's knowledge. The first phase of the evaluation was completed in spring 2021 and the idea is that it will be followed by a further phase to provide learning on how the programme influences participants' personal development and outcomes over the longer term.

British Council's Active Citizens programme is a social leadership programme that promotes intercultural dialogue and social responsibility, supports community-led social development, and develops leadership skills for the 21st century. As of 2021, the Active Citizens programme has been running for 12 years. In that time, it has connected with 1,464 partner organisations in 80 countries, training 382,063 Active Citizens and initiating 17,122 social action projects. INTRAC has previously worked with the Active Citizens programme to help clarify their Theory of Change and to evaluate the impact of its programmes.

The purpose of this longitudinal evaluation is to build on the extensive [previous work INTRAC has done with Active Citizens](#). Specifically, the evaluation will track how individual programme participants' agency and resilience change after training, and how participants' social actions as well as their wider civic engagement develop over the longer term. By mapping these longer-term journeys for a representative sample cohort of Active Citizens globally, the study will support the British Council to understand some of the ways that individuals benefit from the programme, as well as enablers and barriers to them undertaking effective social actions following the training.

As of May 2021, INTRAC have completed the data collection for the study's baseline. A survey was conducted and received 553 responses from Europe, East Asia, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The follow up would involve repeating the survey 6, 12 and 18 months after the training. This will be complemented by qualitative interviews with participants to learn more about their experiences and how the Active Citizens programme has contributed to their longer-term confidence and actions.

The study is being led by INTRAC's principal consultant Dan James, together with senior consultant Richard Ponsford.

Working with the British Council to review a shift to digital delivery methods



In February and March of this year INTRAC worked with the British Council to review the **Digital Skills Programme (DSP)**. This programme aimed to facilitate the development of creative and inclusive ways to engage audiences digitally - in order to widen participation in the British Council's cultural relations programmes worldwide.

The British Council works to build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries using arts and culture, education, and the English language. A great deal of this involves face-to-face engagement, including training courses and events. All have been affected by the pandemic. The DSP has

supported the adaptation of several of British Council's existing programmes through a process of transition to digital delivery, as well as piloting some new ones.

Digital delivery has enabled many of British Council's offers to reach out to new audiences. By concentrating the direct engagement in shorter sessions spaced out over a longer period of time, they have also been able to increase the number and diversity of participants, speakers and mentors. This has led to positive experiences among participants and other stakeholders, by encouraging sharing information, networking and learning together. Conversely, digital delivery also presents a significant barrier to reaching people who do not have good access to the internet or a device that would allow them to do so (either access to one, or knowledge of how to use one). This issue applies as much to marketing an offer as it does to delivering it. We found that these challenges are well understood by the British Council staff, who are incorporating lessons from DSP into practices to strengthen equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

The British Council staff we spoke to as part of this study have been working hard to respond to these changing circumstances. They and their partners have done an amazing job developing and implementing a range of creative digital content in such a short space of time. They have really appreciated the new opportunities for greater collaboration with colleagues around the world, arising from the shift to remote working and focus on digital delivery. Most of the work supported by DSP had its origins in an existing course, programme or project. Being able to build on past work has contributed significantly to achieving such a quick turnaround.

Digital delivery was new to many British Council staff. They have been making use of a range of digital platforms - including specially developed websites, Zoom-based workshops, and YouTube. For everyone not already familiar with these approaches, it has been a steep learning curve. Our study highlighted how valuable it is to have access to technical know-how in order to navigate issues associated with digital systems development and use, while also considering their implications for EDI.

This review was led by Catherine Allen, and the INTRAC team also included Floresca Karanasou, Richard Ponsford, and Alastair Spray.

INTRAC's continuing work on independent media in the Western Balkans

Media for All: Supporting Greater Media Independence in the Western Balkans is a project funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) which aims to build citizens' trust in and engagement with more independent, financially sustainable, local media in the region. The initiative is working with 85 mainly local media outlets in six countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Project interventions include business development, engaged citizens' reporting, gender training, mentoring of women journalists, and work with young journalists and youth-led media. The project ends in June 2022.

INTRAC is the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) partner for the implementing consortium, which is led by the British Council in partnership with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) and Thomson Foundation. Over the past six months, the main MEL focus has been on completing the project baseline, bringing together quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of methods and tools, including organisational capacity self-assessments, an audience size and perception survey, media content analysis and web analytics. All approaches need to be gender- and conflict-sensitive and be adaptable to varied country contexts and a more challenging environment for media, due to the impact of COVID-19.

The project has a strong learning component and we have been using quarterly 'team self-review' online workshops to help the team to reflect, learn and adapt the project. Learning from one of these workshops led us to carry out a piece of research into the impact of COVID-19 on women journalists in the six countries. The research found that women journalists face a number of separate but related challenges: 1) the environment within which they work is already one where gender discrimination and inequality are the norm, along with acceptance of gender based violence; 2) journalism during COVID-19 was incredibly challenging; journalists who are lower down the hierarchy along with freelancers were the most likely to lose out on work opportunities and this is where women tend to be in the majority; 3) women shouldered more of the burden of unpaid care work resulting from the pandemic, compared to their male counterparts.

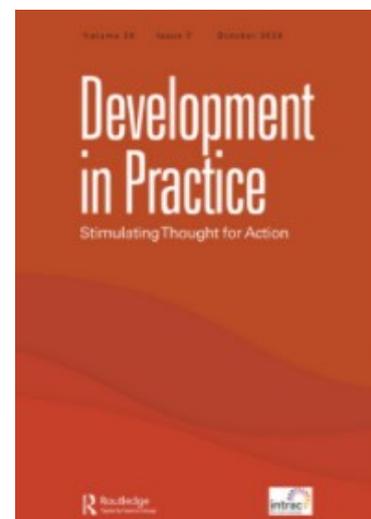
The project is using data from the baseline, along with learning from this and other research to review and adapt the project's Theory of Change as we move into year 2 of implementation.

INTRAC's work on this project is led by Alison Napier, with the team including Pauline Salin, Elanor Jackson, Nigel Simister and Richard Allen. The research was conducted by Elanor Jackson, and British Council's MEL Manager, Tatjana Obradovic Tosic.

Development in Practice journal continuing under new editorship

From 2010 to 2020, INTRAC held the editorship of [Development in Practice](#), one of the world's best-known journals in the field of international development practice. *Development in Practice* was set up by Oxfam in 1991. Pratt served as Editor in Chief of Development in Practice during INTRAC's tenure, with Adam Houlbrook as Deputy Editor. In recent years, INTRAC is proud to have grown the journal's readership, and especially proud to have increased the proportion of contributors from the global South to nearly 50%.

INTRAC welcomes the announcement that the [Development Studies Association of Australia \(DSAA\)](#) has taken on the editorship of the journal. We wish the new team every success in continuing to develop the journal, and to play a key role in advancing the study and practice of development around the world.





Changing the rules of the game during a competitive tendering process

In a recent blog, [“Cultivating collaboration”](#), INTRAC Principal Consultant **Lucy Morris** and **Louise Armstrong**, Inquiries Lead for Forum for the Future, explore their learning from an unusual joint effort. A commissioning party which wanted to positively disrupt the international development system, invited selected suppliers to bid for a contract as “system change facilitators”. Having been invited to explore potential synergies with other suppliers, Forum for the Future invited INTRAC and a group of freelance facilitators to undertake a unique collaboration. While the joint bid was not successful, the collaborating partners learned a great deal from their short, intense period of working together. In the blog, the authors explore the background to the tendering process, how the collaboration worked in practice, and their four key learnings for future joint efforts.

Core grants: the long and winding road to transformative funding

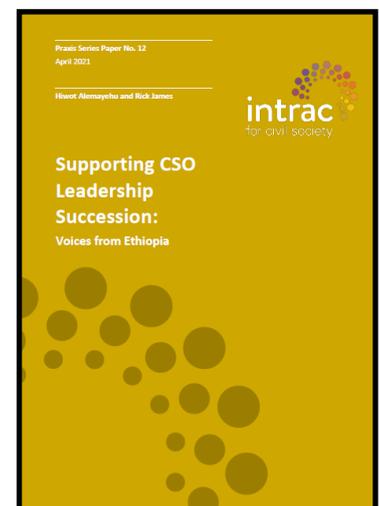
INTRAC Principal Consultant Rod MacLeod has been working with Laudes Foundation on a major piece of research into the best practice around the flexible funding mechanism provided by core grants (see page 4). In April 2021, this culminated with the publication of a research paper titled [“Core grants: the long and winding road to transformative funding.”](#) The paper is supported by a series of four blogs, each highlighting specific findings about the use of core grants:

- [“Core grants: why isn’t everyone doing them?”](#)
- [“How to select suitable recipients of core grants”](#)
- [“How to use a core grant”](#)
- [“How to measure the impact of core grants”](#)



Supporting CSO leadership succession: voices from Ethiopia

This entry in our long-running Praxis Series focuses on the topic of leadership succession in civil society organisations (CSOs). Co-written by Hiwot Alemayehu and Rick James, this paper is a product of research commissioned by Oak Foundation. Taking a qualitative approach, it focuses on nine Ethiopian CSOs and targeted key informants. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for funders to help them contribute to healthy leadership transition and “avoid the all too frequent transition crises”. [The full paper is available to download now.](#)



INTRAC training

How civil society organisations working in the global South can benefit from INTRAC's Training Access Scholarship

INTRAC offers a limited number of scholarships to participants working for small civil society organisations in selected countries. Eligible participants can attend our courses paying only a nominal fee of £50 to cover administrative costs. To be eligible, you must meet the following criteria:

- You are a staff of a non-profit, non-governmental organisation, including social enterprises, working to support communities in the global South.
- Your organisation is based in [any of the least developed countries](#) listed by the OECD Development Assistance Committee.
- Your organisation's annual income is less than £1 million GBP gross in the last financial year (or equivalent in other currencies).

We require official documents to show your organisation's non-profit status, vision and mission, as well as proof of your organisation's income.

After you have successfully completed our course, we would love you to tell us in a short article how the training has made an impact to you and your organisation. To apply for our Training Access Scholarship, please indicate this in the application form and upload the required supporting documents when prompted during the application process.

To keep up to date with our training opportunities, be sure to visit our [upcoming courses page](#). To submit your application for a course, visit the [apply now page](#). To apply for access to the training access scholarship, please indicate this at the appropriate step. For more information about INTRAC training, [see our FAQ](#) or [contact us](#).

Tailor-made support

In addition to our scheduled courses, INTRAC can also design a specific training programme tailored to your organisation's needs, or provide tailor-made coaching to individuals facing a specific challenge. To learn about our range of expertise and how we can help you with tailor-made support, [visit our in-house training page](#).



Our People

Bidding farewell to INTRAC – and still very proud

By Rachel Hayman

A year ago I wrote a blog about how proud I was to work for INTRAC as started my 10th year with the organization. Now I'm writing my parting words as I depart INTRAC at the end of May 2021. It's a pretty emotional time as I work through my final To Do list in my last week with this amazing and dynamic organization. I came to INTRAC from the academic sector, bringing my academic experience into practice; I am now heading back to academe, and will be taking a much larger wealth of knowledge from practice back into that sphere.

The last couple of weeks have been enjoyable. I've been sifting through 10 years of my work – and the 20 years of INTRAC research that came before me – as I write up my handover notes and attempt to help INTRAC made decisions about what it needs in the research, learning and communications space going forward. My inner archivist is having a wonderful time, as I relive the richness of the work I've had the privilege to be involved in.

Shortly after joining INTRAC in 2011 I headed off to The Netherlands for our last major M&E conference. Ten years later, I'm proud to have played my part in ensuring that the wealth of wisdom and knowledge on M&E that sits at the heart of the INTRAC approach is openly available throughout the world via the M&E Universe.

In 2011, INTRAC was just getting into the Civil Society at a Crossroads project, which was then the focus of our 20th Anniversary conference in Oxford in November 2011 (the big 30th is just around the corner). That led to a significant portfolio of initiatives around civil society sustainability, civil society in emerging economies, the changing role of philanthropic funding for civil society, responsible partnership and exit planning, topics that have kept me very busy over the years.

And that's just two of the many areas of research I've been involved in over the last decade. We've also explored accountability, governance, partnership, aid effectiveness and tackling power imbalances in the aid system. We've tried out new approaches to data collection and analysis, and to research collaboration and learning. We've worked with a wealth of local researchers, consultants and activists, building strong connections with civil society funders who share the INTRAC vision.

I am leaving INTRAC at a time when the aid system is under fire. Some of this is necessary in my view, forcing actors in the sector to take a long, hard look at their practices. I welcome the critical debates around decolonization, shifting power and localization which are long overdue. At the same time, it is hard to watch charities struggle under the weight of politically-driven funding cuts, compounding the pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. INTRAC has not been immune, facing budget cuts or delays to programmes and learning initiatives.

As I re-read my blog from last year, I realise just how much of it still resonates strongly. Under new leadership in an uncertain world, INTRAC is currently reviewing its values, theory of change and goals, how it addresses diversity, equity and inclusion, and how it communicates and learns. What's inspiring is that these reflections are being driven by an enthusiastic, largely new cohort of 'INTRACers'. As I head off to join the big family of ex-TRACers who never quite manage to leave entirely, I wish all INTRAC colleagues and friends the very best for the future.



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