

Newsletter

November 2021



Welcome to our November 2021 newsletter

For INTRAC, November 2021 is a significant month because it marks the 30th anniversary of our founding back on November 18th, 1991. As we reflected in a recent news story about the milestone, the world has changed a great deal in three decades. Much remains the same, however, including the sense of a world undergoing upheaval, and the crucial role of civil society in seeking positive change. The passion to support civil society to do this was at the root of the founding of INTRAC in 1991, and continues to animate the organisation today. That is the theme of Peter Sargent’s viewpoint article (page 2).

Change and transition are our themes for the last three months of 2021, and they play out in a number of ways in this issue. Our guest contributor is Charlie Buxton, who shares reflections on the situation for civil society in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia more widely (page 3). After discussing recent events in Afghanistan as an example of how “exit” can prove challenging, the article looks at the implications for civil society “staying in” when fewer people “are ready to take its benefits and role for granted”.

Our publication and blogs section (page 8) focuses on a recent series of articles dealing with leadership succession, capacity strengthening and exit in Ethiopia. This continues the longstanding INTRAC interest in responsible exit processes, which inspired a previous blog series in 2020.

Finally, the “Our Work” section (pages 4-7) provides updates on six recent or ongoing pieces of work, comprising support with coaching, MEL, resource development, research, and more as well as an update on the M&E Universe, to which further new papers will be added in December.

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30 years on, a passion for civil society strengthening still powers INTRAC

On 18 November, INTRAC marked its 30th anniversary, and it's a milestone which invites us to take the time to recognise the track record of the organisation. Over the last three decades, INTRAC has been on a journey together with the civil society sector. INTRAC was founded to bring together training, consultancy, and research in order to enable practical and positive change – that desire is as strong today as it was in 1991. What has changed is the context. In celebrating the 30th anniversary of INTRAC, we also want to celebrate civil society and to reflect on its wider successes and challenges, of which we have been a part.

INTRAC has remained relevant over the past 30 years, because of our ability to respond to changes in civil society. The way we work with stakeholders and clients means that we are able to understand prevailing issues and to tailor our support to better meet current needs of the sector. INTRAC has always had a specific view of how long-lasting change is achieved – it needs to start from the inside, and not imposed from outside. We have always aimed not to impose change, but to facilitate it. This is not just something we talk about, but something we strive to do in practice. It is for that reason that being a learning partner is so important to INTRAC – because it is about accompanying organisations through the process of change. If we can provide clear thinking in a practical, accessible way we know we have succeeded – the M&E Universe is a great example of this in action.

Moving into 2022, we have planned a number of ways to engage with our stakeholders and celebrate what INTRAC has achieved in the past and also to develop our plans for the future. Shifting the power will be the consistent theme through all of this. In some ways, INTRAC has pioneered projects to help shift the power – for example our Consultants for Change (C4C) programme responded to the need for a cohort of consultants to provide capacity strengthening locally in the global South. While we recognise that we are part of a system that emphasises logical frameworks, outputs, and outcome measuring we have worked to shift the power through a learning lens. We challenge donors to go the extra mile to truly strengthen organisations. Looking more widely, we want to support the birth of a new and more sustainable civil society system, one which centres around the capacities, concerns, and local knowledge of organisations in the South.

The last two years have been dominated by the challenges imposed by the pandemic, and INTRAC has experienced this just as all CSOs have. COVID-19 has made us reflect on our way of working. We are proud of the way we have shifted our training offer online, taking advantage of our existing skills in this area. INTRAC has a blend of learning methods which bring real insight and value to participants, and is a far cry from simply transitioning a face-to-face course into a virtual environment.

COVID-19 has also further reinforced our belief in the need for trusted consultants and partners on the ground. It has clarified the role that INTRAC, as an organisation based in the global North, can play to best enhance the effectiveness of organisations in the South. We continue to engage and build a network of capable consultants in the South, and this is one way we are working to prepare INTRAC for an uncertain future in which further shocks and challenges are likely.

Ultimately, we want to use the occasion of our anniversary to share the passion around civil society strengthening. That is what brought the founders of INTRAC together in 1991, and it is what animates INTRAC today. Both INTRAC and civil society have come a long way in 30 years, but there is still a great deal that we can achieve together.

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.



On “getting out” and “staying in”: thoughts from Central Asia

When we talk about exit strategies, there can be a tendency to assume a peaceful environment where carefully laid plans ensure a smooth transition to local sustainability. In reality, exit is often a forced and hasty process, prompted by funding cuts in donor countries, or sometimes foreign interventions programmes – military or via “soft power” - being resisted in recipient countries. I am based in Kyrgyzstan, and not so far away in Afghanistan the withdrawal of US, UK, and coalition troops provides a clear example of how “getting out” can have tragic consequences.

The Afghan debacle adds another worry for those of us analysing the context for civil society in Central Asia – what will be the consequences here? Imperialism’s “Great Game” in Central Asia has long been a conversation piece here. Today, increasing tensions between the major powers – expressed in the West’s new political and economic “cold war” with Russia, now being extended to China - are bad news for so-called “international development”. Civil society is being pulled first one way, and then another.

Civil society has changed in Kyrgyzstan. On the individual level, there are lots more local experts – trainers, consultants, and academics with a civil society focus. There is a core of national and provincial CSOs with experience of participatory, long-term development programmes – though often key specialists have moved on, leaving just the leader and some new, younger staff. Ex-NGO people can be found high up in government service, politics, and business; a number of them are strategically placed in global civil society networks. New players in the sector include religious and business associations organising charity events or distributing humanitarian aid. This was very visible during the COVID-19 pandemic and after Kyrgyzstan’s recent border conflict with Tajikistan. Increasingly these players, along with political leaders, are registering non-profit organisations so as to widen their influence, especially in election years.

Once again, CSOs are under threat from a new law tightening up financial reporting. In 2013-14 a broad campaign successfully halted a similar initiative, but in summer 2021 Kyrgyzstan’s new President signed the law along with a new Constitution and government reforms, as the country moves back to a more presidential system. This was another major setback for the development agencies, who over a 15-year period had invested millions of dollars into support for enhanced powers for parliament, despite, it should be said, popular anger at the way the political set-up had been captured by the business class. The new regime has a populist stance, but upcoming elections to the new Parliament may return many of the same old faces.

What are the strategies for “staying in” when international and national conflict is the order of the day? First, we cannot count on “civil” behaviour or expect always to work without interference. Some of our practices may need to be tightened up; while we must be as open as possible, structures do also need a defensive aspect. National themes take increasing precedence over international or global ones. A new generation of civil activists is using IT in creative ways, informally, spontaneously, many of them avoiding association with “old” NGOs. Many of the first principles of civil society activity are as relevant as ever; but the way that civil society has been used and its failure to adequately challenge economic and political power is a serious weakness. Compared with ten years ago, fewer people in Kyrgyzstan are ready to take its benefits and role for granted. Civil society actors who are “staying in” must recognise this if they are to succeed.



Charlie Buxton has been living in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan since 2002 and is director of a locally registered public foundation [Books for Development](#). He has been working for almost 40 years in the voluntary sector – 20 in the UK, 20 in the former Soviet Union. From 2002 to 2018, Charlie was INTRAC’s representative in Central Asia.



Our work

Creating and piloting a new partner capacity development resource with the Danish Refugee Council



Although the [Danish Refugee Council \(DRC\)](#) has historically implemented programmes directly themselves, in 2018 they increased their commitment to localisation. Working in partnership with civil society is now an organisational priority and key area of growth.

In 2020, DRC created a 'Civil Society Engagement Strategy' which described their high-level organisational commitments to this important area of work. To help operationalise their strategy, DRC commissioned INTRAC to develop and trial a new resource for key staff involved in capacity development processes with local civil society partners, between June and December 2021.

The aim of the guidance is to increase the effectiveness of DRC's capacity development support with different types of civil society partners, including large NGOs, small CBOs, and networks. We anticipate that it will be particularly valuable for programme staff from an operational background, who are not already familiar with partner capacity development principles and good practice. Included in the resource is:

- High-level guidance on how to help partner organisations become stronger and more effective, including an introduction to the 'capacity development cycle'
- Detailed guidance and tools for different stages of the capacity development cycle, for example on how to help partners to assess their capacity development needs
- Cross-cutting principles and tips, for example on how power dynamics can impact the effectiveness of capacity development support when working in partnership

"Investing in the development of this resource is a critical piece in the process to complement our strategic ambitions with practical 'how to' guidance to build up our expertise, and ultimately provide more effective support to the civil society partners we work with."

Vassiliki Lembesis, DRC's Global Civil Society Partnership Advisor

The piloting process starts soon, when we will be user-testing the materials with staff and partners in three different locations around the world. INTRAC staff consultant Lucy Morris and a member of our network Brenda Lipson will be closely accompanying each of the offices and partners, and will update the resource on the basis of the initial feedback before DRC continues the roll-out process.

Supporting CAFOD with a six-month team coaching process



Team coaching is currently the [fastest-growing](#) part of the coaching industry according to the [Academy of Executive Coaching](#). Organisations are waking up to the realisation that while one to one coaching for staff can be very powerful, working with staff in the context of their teams and wider organisation and systems is a game changer. We have all seen how during an era of COVID-19, teams needed to be more agile, virtual, and - increasingly - hybrid. Partly as a result of this, organisations are investing more than ever before in learning and development specifically for teams.

One such forward-thinking organisation is CAFOD (part of the Caritas Network), who approached INTRAC for coaching support for one of their International teams in February 2021. Our qualified coach Lucy Morris began by having individual discovery calls with each member of the team, and collected insights about how each member felt about being in the team, what was going well, what challenges they were experiencing and what they felt the priority for development should be. Because it is good practice to co-coach when working with a team, Lucy recruited another experienced coach, [Doris Saouma](#) to work with her. The team coaching programme has been designed for six months initially, and involves six 90-minute calls on Zoom plus the work the team takes forward between sessions. In their first team coaching call with CAFOD staff, they agreed how to work together, shared the insights from the discovery calls, and helped the team to shape their own team development agenda.

In addition to dedicated 'team coaching' sessions, systemic team coaching can also include helping to facilitate conversations between different key stakeholders, to 'coach the connections' between the different parts of an organisation, and increase communication and alignment.

In a world where things are constantly changing and where civil society has a key role to play, team coaching allows its members to take stock, gain new perspectives and be intentional about their next steps.

Developing a measurement and learning system for UK-Med



INTRAC has recently started work with the British NGO [UK-Med](#) to help them develop a measurement and learning system. Born of the NHS, Manchester based UK-Med is a frontline international medical aid charity with 20 years-experience responding to humanitarian crises and medical emergencies overseas. The charity works in three main areas: rapid response to emergencies by delivering the medical expertise needed to support local health services to save people's lives; strengthening local healthcare systems so that they are better prepared for emergencies, and working with academic partners to identify and promote evidence-based practice that improves patient care and the humanitarian sector.

INTRAC will work with UK-Med to identify their measurement and learning priorities, select appropriate indicators and data collection tools and train their staff on how to implement and manage key processes. A key aspect of the support will be to ensure the system developed for UK-Med is tailored to their needs as a charity that deploys healthcare professionals to emergency settings for short periods of time. This will be done by working closely with the UK-Med team and making sure the system is lean and easy to implement. The work will be delivered by Senior MEL Consultant Richard Ponsford and INTRAC Associate Anne Garbutt.

Researching cultural relations within the DICE Digital R&D Fund



Between January and July 2021, INTRAC carried out research on a British Council programme, the Digital R&D Fund of Developing Inclusive and Creative Economies (DICE). This work was undertaken by Principal Consultant Floresca Karanàsou, and it explored how cultural relations can develop only through digital means.

Cultural relations can be defined as “reciprocal transnational interactions between two or more cultures, encompassing a range of activities conducted by state and/or non-state actors within the space of culture and civil society.” (Definition by the British Council and Goethe Institut)

In an effort to maintain international cultural exchanges during the COVID-19 pandemic, the British Council created the DICE R&D Fund to support 20 international digital collaborations in six countries (Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, South Africa, and the UK). Over five months, 40 civil society organisations, creative enterprises and university departments collaborated in pairs to create 20 digital projects that would foster inclusion, connection, experimentation, and co-design. INTRAC’s research explored the nature of these digital partnerships, with a focus on the power balance between partners. The research involved interviews with all 40 digital partners, observation of Community of Practice sessions and a document review.

The resulting report included four case studies, which were presented not only in narrative format but also visually. Two of them were made into animations and the other two into graphic stories. The report will be shared widely through the British Council’s website in early December 2021 and it will be discussed in several online meetings with British Council staff globally, cultural relations specialists based in Europe and the 40 organisations involved in the programme, scheduled to take place from November 2021 to February 2022. This research will also form part of the basis of future research activity and programmatic reflections for the British Council’s work in digital cultural relations.

INTRAC’s M&E Universe approaches completion with latest papers

In May 2019, INTRAC launched the [M&E Universe](#) - a large and growing resource on a wide variety of monitoring and evaluation topics specifically intended for use by civil society practitioners. As of November 2021, the Universe now comprises **116** short and accessible papers, all made freely available by INTRAC. Soon, a further three papers will be added to the “M&E of development approaches” section.

The three forthcoming papers are M&E of civil society funds, M&E of development education, and M&E of humanitarian action. Contributors to the papers include Nigel Simister, Dan James, Alison Napier, Rod MacLeod, and Jeremy Astill Brown.

The release of these papers will bring to a close the two and a half year first phase of the M&E Universe project. INTRAC will continue to maintain the Universe resource, and updates to papers to bring them in line with shifting M&E thinking can be expected in the future. To find out more about the M&E Universe, to get started using the papers to augment your monitoring and evaluation practice, [visit our dedicated project page](#).

Supporting the baseline process for the Strengthening Civil Courage Alliance

From June to October 2021, INTRAC supported 13 programmes of the Strengthening Civil Courage Alliance. The team assisted in the development of programme Theories of Change and results frameworks, including baseline indicator values, milestones, and targets. INTRAC provided the detailed methodology and facilitated the process, working closely with each programme team. This process was carried out through a combination of:

- Online workshops and meetings facilitated by INTRAC with programme staff of the relevant Alliance partners (and sometimes local partners)
- One-to-one meetings with those leading in each programme or other staff
- Reviewing and commenting on the Theories of Change and results frameworks

The INTRAC team consisted of Principal Consultant MEL Alison Napier (team leader and responsible for the Africa programme ToCs), Principal Consultant MENA Floresca Karanàsou (responsible for the Middle East programme ToCs), peace building consultant Phil Vernon, and Principal Consultant Rod MacLeod.

The Strengthening Civil Courage Programme is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Power of Voices Partnerships grant for the period January 2021 to December 2025. The programme is implemented in 11 countries in Africa and the Middle East and in one region – the Sahel. The programme also includes projects at the international level, not directly linked to a specific country programme.

The programme is implemented by an Alliance of ABAAD, a Lebanese gender equality CSO, Amnesty International The Netherlands, a Dutch human rights CSO, DefendDefenders, a human rights CSO operating in the East and Horn of Africa, and PAX (the lead Alliance partner), a Dutch peacebuilding CSO.

Developmental evaluation of environmental campaigns supported by the Oak Foundation



[Oak Foundation](#) has contracted INTRAC to undertake a developmental evaluation (DE) of seven environmental campaigns which are being supported by the Foundation, from August of 2021 to the end of 2023. The seven campaigns are focused on: flattening the curve of aviation; ending offshore oil and gas; banning bottom trawling; changing food consumption habits in China; reducing the use of pesticides in the EU and Brazil; reducing the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry; and tackling deforestation through EU imports.

The developmental evaluation is being undertaken by a team of consultants who are members of INTRAC's network, led by Helen Collinson. The team will engage with Oak Foundation partners involved directly in the seven environmental campaigns, and will aim to embed evaluative thinking, real-time data and insights and reflective practice into their design and implementation. The team will provide feedback to inform ongoing adaptation, supply Oak Foundation with periodic updates on what has been achieved, and support learning about how best to orchestrate campaigns so that the Foundation can play an effective funder role for this type of work.

Publications and blogs

INTRAC publishes blog series on leadership succession, capacity strengthening and exit in Ethiopia

In October and November, INTRAC has published three blogs in a series focusing on leadership succession, capacity strengthening, and responsible exit in Ethiopia.

For 15 years, Oak Foundation had supported Ethiopian partners within their Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Programme. Having decided to exit from these partnerships, Oak Foundation wanted to go about this in a responsible and sustainable way. They contracted INTRAC to design a capacity strengthening process that had the potential to leave partners more resilient and able to survive post-exit. Together with the Ethiopian grantee organisations, INTRAC co-created a 20 month capacity strengthening for exit programme (February 2020 to October 2021) implemented by Ethiopian consultants with INTRAC support.



Please start supporting succession: four practical suggestions from Ethiopian civil society [\[click here to read\]](#)

By Hiwot Alemayehu and Rick James
October 12, 2021

The programme included a research component focused on leadership succession. In the first blog in the series, Hiwot Alemayehu and Rick James - [authors of Praxis Series Paper No. 12 on the same topic](#) - share four practical suggestions from Ethiopian civil society on how leadership succession can best be supported.



Investing in exit: funders with foresight [\[click here to read\]](#)

By Ayele Ashagre (with Rick James)
November 12, 2021

The second blog in the series is authored by Ayele Ashagre, who evaluated the programme. It relates a number of key observations about the way the programme was designed and implemented, and concludes with a firm recommendation that “funders approach to partnership should include guidelines for responsible exit.”



High stakes and last chances: how to strengthen capacity during exit? [\[click here to read\]](#)

By Rick James and Ayele Ashagre
November 19, 2021

The third blog begins by stating that “the really challenging question is how best to actually go about” investing in capacity strengthening before exit. Rick James and Ayele Ashagre then explore a number of practical actions, from using in-country “accompaniers” to making use of adaptive management.

INTRAC training

Online Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Online, 2 February - 10 March 2022

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.

To read the course profile for this course and to apply, [click here](#)

What previous participants have said about this course:

"I was so impressed with how engaging this course was, the group work sessions were really helpful. The mentoring was a fantastic way to go through a real life scenario where MEL knowledge was needed to facilitate a co-design process."

Ebony Ackland, Australia

"I found the course very informative, thought stimulating and well-organised. I appreciate the competence of our trainers and the variety of experiences I encountered with the other participants. Will recommend it!"

Savelina Roussinova, Bulgaria

Did you know?

- INTRAC has been delivering training courses since 2001.
- 'Developing Outcomes and Objectives' and 'Developing Indicators' were the top two topics which recent participants to the Online Monitoring Evaluation and Learning course found most useful.
- You can access free monitoring and evaluation resources from the M&E Universe, an online repository of papers on different subjects related to M&E.

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](#).



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