

# Exchange to change

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**Alumni**  
*magazine*



University of Antwerp  
IOB | Institute of  
Development Policy

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A student’s reflection on the Most Significant Change technique (MSC) in monitoring processes

Dear alumni,

We hope you are excited to delve into a new edition of Exchange to Change!

The E2C team has prepared several interesting articles and pieces for you to enjoy.

Starting with a quick dive into student experiences, (p.4) and a very interesting account of some students’ experiences of telling their own - and hearing each other’s - most significant change stories (p. 18) of the most a-typical IOB experience ever. The only batch of IOB students ever – let’s hope so! – who had to live through an entire IOB year under ‘Corona conditions’. We are so very proud of the way they – despite the extremely difficult circumstances – have been able to make it through this whole predicament and did so with perseverance and creativity, needing to cope and adapt flexibly to ever changing situations!

The same goes for IOB staff, especially teaching staff who needed to reinvent themselves over and over. In this edition, you’ll find out what they really think about the online switch

and even what their most embarrassing moments in online teaching were (p. 10).

On a more serious note, we immerse you in the extremely interesting research carried out by Lisa Popelier (p. 8), who focussed on the dramatically understudied topic of disability for her PhD, zooming in specifically on the potential and pitfalls of community monitoring as a means to social betterment for persons with disability.

And finally, after the Women in Science Day seemed to provoke a debate about whether or not it is good practice to have such a day, we thought ... why not just ask our female researchers? Find out the opinions and experiences of some of these women about working in academia (p.14).

Happy reading!

The E2C team

# Alumni applause



## Published



Alumnus Gerald Bareebe (Uganda, GOV 2011) has co-authored an article '[Uganda's Fraudulent Election](#)' in the Journal of Democracy. The article explains how Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, in power for 35 years, has perfected a system that allows him to reap just enough votes to claim that democracy is working and thus bestow a thin veneer of legitimacy on his continued rule.



IOB researcher and alumna, Sarah Vancluysen (Belgium, GOV 2013) is really excited to share her new paper '[Deconstructing Borders: Mobility Strategies of South Sudanese Refugees in Northern Uganda](#)' published in the journal Global Networks. It discusses how for South Sudanese refugees, different forms of everyday mobility can be empowering, while going against the sedentary logic of the international refugee regime.

## In the spotlight



Alumna [Liliana Lizarazo-Rodriguez](#) (Belgium/Colombia, 1991) research professor at the Free University of Brussels and University of Antwerp has been granted a prestigious ERC Starting Grant Social Sciences and Humanities for her project: [CURIAE VIRIDES](#). - How the third wave of global judicial (and social) activism is filling ecological governance gaps and challenging the liability-remedy paradigm. In this project, Liliana and her team will explore the progressive transformation of human rights litigation into more eco-centric litigation and the role of (activist) courts.



Alumnus Firoz Ahmed (Bangladesh, GLOB 2015) proudly presents a co-authored paper on the [food security situation during the covid19 lockdown](#) published in Food Policy. In the paper they not only document the deteriorating food security situation, but go far beyond to document major coping strategies undertaken by households. Their paper offers what policymakers could target to support the poor and vulnerable during this pandemic.



Robayt Khondoker (Bangladesh, GLOB 2014) has published his study on '[Regulation and Contraband Trade in the Bangladeshi Borderland: Whose Weapons?](#)' in the Journal of Borderland Studies.



Roger Ngwang (Cameroon, GOV 2017), currently working as Regional Coordinator for Africa at Peace360 Initiative co-authored an [interesting paper](#) on Freedom of Speech vs. Freedom After Speech in Cameroon.



Alumnus Dilip Raj Bhatta (Nepal, DEM 2015) working at the Investment Board of the Government of Nepal has been awarded the 'Janasewa Shree (Public Service) Award' as the Project Expert from Right Hon. President Bidhya Devi Bhandari award as a recognition for his works related to public financial management and project development for government projects.



Luis Noda (Bolivia, DEM 2002) serving as Vice-President for Asia - Pacific Area [Habitat for Humanity International](#), was [interviewed about his perspective](#) on the effect of COVID-19 on youth.



# In the meantime...

## In action



Alumnus [Dries Boeye](#) (Belgium, DEM 2012) works as a coordinator at [Habbekrats](#), an organisation active in Belgium aiming to help young people who need support to find their way in our complex society, reaching some 2500 children through their projects. Find out about [their latest project](#) grooming youngsters into becoming the new generation of farmers by introducing them to bio farming in and around Wetteren.



Alumna [Diana A. García Orellana](#) (Ecuador, GLOB 2019), lecturer at Universidad of Azuay (Ecuador), and the university team launched a manual for international cooperation in Management of Environmental resources. Diana also invited her previous batch mate at IOB, alumna [Adinda Koto](#) (Indonesia, GLOB 2019) to present as a guest speaker at her university to introduce students and staff to the issue of ASEAN and the role of Indonesia.



Alumna Claudia Pollen (Zambia, GLOB 2009) has joined the [Consumer Unit Trust Society \(CUTS\)](#) as Centre Director for Lusaka representing the Southern African region. In this function, Claudia will contribute to more advocacy work around issues of trade and development, economic governance and consumer protection.



Alumna Jamie Robertsen (South Africa, DEM 2004) is working as MEL specialist for the [USAID Resilient Waters](#) project. For this project, [Chemonics International](#) and the [Namibia Nature Foundation](#) have partnered with farmers to implement conservation agriculture approaches to help mitigate the impact of drought and to develop more sustainable livelihoods in an uncertain, changing environment.

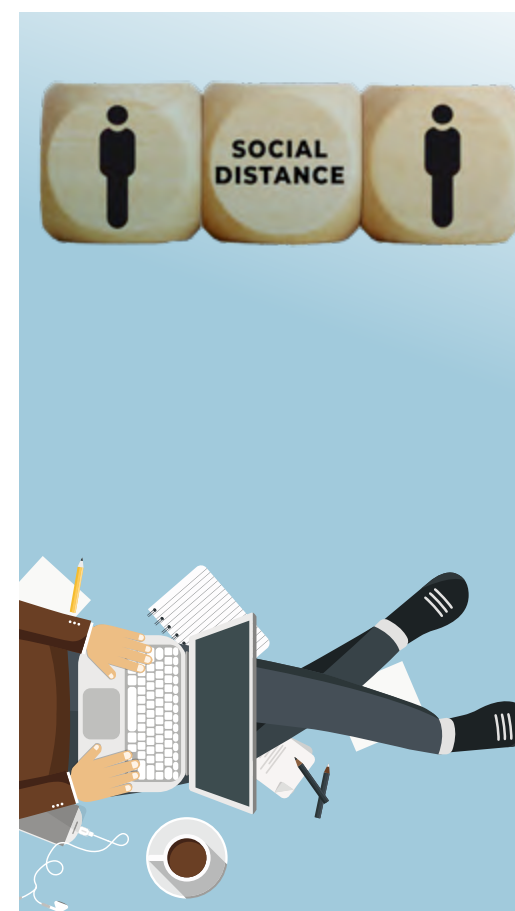
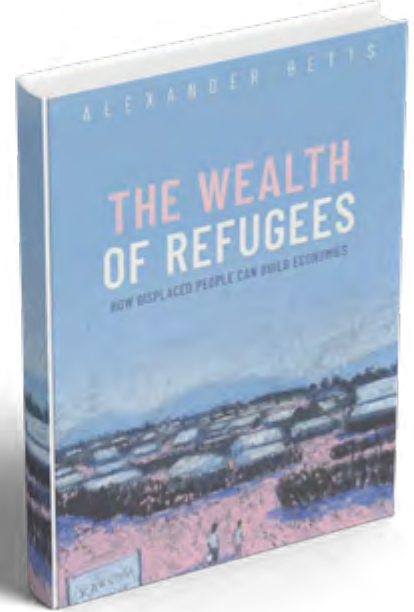
## Voices from Abroad: prof. Alexander Betts

Each year, the Centre for Migration and Intercultural Studies (CeMIS) and IOB organise a 'Voices from Abroad' lecture, in which an inspiring researcher is invited to Antwerp to present his or her work. This year, Prof. Alexander Betts was invited, one of the world's leading thinkers in the field of forced migration studies. Prof. Betts is Professor of Forced Migration and International Affairs at the University of Oxford, where he was also the director of the Refugee Studies Centre between 2014 and 2017. In his research, he focuses on the politics and economics of refugee assistance. He is a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader and his TED talks have been viewed by over 3 million people.

On Monday 26 April, Prof. Betts presented his new book to us: 'The wealth of refugees:

how displaced people can build economies'. During his public lecture, Betts reflected on possible solutions and insights on how we can respond to rising numbers of refugees while the political willingness of rich countries to accept migrants and asylum seekers is declining. For this book, Betts draws upon his years of quantitative and qualitative research experience, with a regional focus on camps and cities in Africa (Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya). The event was widely attended, with close to 100 participants. The following day, he discussed the challenges and opportunities of doing policy-engaged research with refugees.

With 'global challenge-led' research, Betts provided plenty of inspiration on how academic work can provide practical solutions on the ground. Some food for thought...



Changing pandemic dynamics have led IOB students to become versed in the art of adaptation and resourcefulness. Finding ways to connect and socialise were challenging but worthwhile endeavors that allowed students to bear pandemic challenges as a community. The IOB sports club is one such endeavour, a student led group that focuses on sport activities and capitalises on Antwerp's beautiful public parks and sport infrastructures. Through the club, students have organised lively football matches at Park Spoor Noord. "The IOB sports club has become a refuge, an outlet, and a stress reliever," remarked Catherine Amenya, both for herself and others, allowing a safe way to interact and exercise during these times. Students have also been able to connect with the larger Antwerp community through these football matches, with community members jumping into the games from time to time. The IOB student committee has also been finding ways create community. A socially distanced trip to Lillo

was organised. Students took the ferry, many for the first time, and enjoyed the sights while getting to know a little bit more about Antwerp and Flemish culture in Lille. Similar trips were planned by the student committee for the Easter Holiday, with Belgian students volunteering to lead guided walks. Several students joined a trip to Oude Landen led by Marie Kenis, the students shared laughs while tracking wild cows. Fien Swaanen, also led a group on a nature walk through Wuustwezel. Maria Hrimech and Thu Nguyen shared their thoughts on the trips, stating that these outings have allowed them to get to know their classmates on a personal level outside the classroom, as well as get to know those with whom they do not share classes with and who they would otherwise not have been able to befriend. Focusing on the possible has made all the difference for student activities, and will continue to do so as we navigate through this next phase of the pandemic.



# Uncovering the potential of social accountability initiatives in fostering disability-inclusive development

PhD by Lisa Popelier



At the start of this year, we said goodbye to Lisa Popelier, who has been a PhD researcher and teaching assistant at IOB for the past six years. On 18 January she successfully defended her PhD thesis titled 'Uncovering the potential of social accountability initiatives in fostering disability-inclusive development. A multi-method analysis of the influence pathways of disability-sensitive community-based monitoring in Katakwi, Eastern Uganda'. E2C asked Lisa to look back and reflect on her PhD trajectory and

what her post-PhD life looks like.

**E2C:** Can you give us a short summary of your PhD research?

LP: My research examined the way and conditions under which the adoption of a disability-lens in community-based monitoring of primary education services could facilitate or hinder social betterment for persons with disability in Katakwi, Eastern Uganda. Guided by the evaluation influence framework, I set up a mixed methods research design which combined Social Network Analysis (SNA), Most Significant Change (MSC),

descriptive and inferential statistics, and policy analysis. Based on my primary data collected in Katakwi, I concluded that local descriptions of disability seemed to focus on individual ability and deviations from a contested norm. The wide range of disability proportions further urged critical reflections on disability measurement and dichotomisation by disability. Comparative analysis of the study areas' socio-economic and demographic features, local education realities, perceptions on political efficacy and levels of citizen engagement uncovered differences across the study

areas which could hinder or facilitate the effectiveness of collective action for disability-sensitive social accountability. Yet, the nature and structure of the information exchange and problem reporting networks looked similar across the study areas. We found relatively dense education-related information exchange networks, but sparse problem reporting networks in part due to the low perceived responsibility and feasibility to engage in such high threshold activities. Our SNA also revealed that an actor's popularity and activity levels within the network depend on individual attributes (e.g. disability status, participation in research activities) and formal positions which may be subject to change in response to external events (e.g. local elections). Finally, the MSC analysis identified the capacity development activities as crucial in unlocking cognitive, affective and attitudinal changes that form the foundations for dynamic impact pathways towards social betterment for persons with disability and their relatives.

**E2C:** Your thesis focuses on disability-inclusive development. What was your motivation to do research on this particular topic? What sparked your interest?

LP: I was convinced that I should choose a research topic that would keep me motivated and passionate along the PhD trajectory. While social justice concerns have always intrigued me, I eventually narrowed my focus to disability-inclusive development after an occurrence on the train. During that train ride, an enumerator entered the train carriage to conduct a satisfaction survey among travelers but was visibly puzzled when seeing my travel companion with Down syndrome. The experience made me realise how experiences of service delivery vary and that commonly used monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems may exclude voices and perspectives of marginalised groups. My PhD thus tries to call upon the evaluation and research community to be sensitive to perspectives of persons with disability in the M&E process, with a view to contributing to more equitable development.

**E2C:** What do you see as the main takeaway of your research? Which finding are you most proud of?

LP: In short, I believe that it has been important to demonstrate that paying attention in our evaluative assessment of public service delivery and development interventions to the worst-off groups can actually make a difference. By bringing the lived experiences of persons with disability and their parents to the attention of the community, the disability-sensitive community-based monitoring process appears to have instigated motivational, attitudinal and behavioral changes among some well-positioned change agents. I might be naive, but I truly hope that these change agents will continue to pursue their aspirations and that it will prove a foundation for more systemic changes.

**E2C:** You did substantial fieldwork in Katakwi, Eastern Uganda. How do you look back on your stays there?

LP: I had been to Uganda several times prior to my research visits in Katakwi, but I must admit that I felt completely overwhelmed during my first weeks in rural Katakwi. However, gradually, I started to feel more at home thanks to the open conversations I had with the local research team, the housekeepers of the guesthouse, the owners of the local printing shop, some research participants... about the role of women in society, job application procedures, religion and so many other topics. I visited them when they were in the hospital, attended graduation parties and funerals and we went to church together on Sunday mornings or spent hours waiting for the rain to stop in the printing shop. While none of them are extraordinary experiences, when combined these daily encounters with my local social network form a beautiful memory.

**E2C:** What did you find most challenging? If you could start anew, is there something you would do differently?

LP: I realised that conducting interdisciplinary research within the framework of an individual PhD project is quite a challenge. My

research touched upon literature on disability, social networks, evaluation influence and inclusive education, and combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Looking back, I believe that it might have been advisable to undertake such interdisciplinary research while embedded in a research group which brings different areas of expertise together. However, I must admit that my research interests did not fully align with the existing research groups at IOB. As such, I do somewhat regret that my deviant research topic has curtailed opportunities for research collaborations with other researchers at IOB and that I have not been more effective in reaching out to other teams working on similar topics.

**E2C:** Do you have any good advice for current and future PhD students?

LP: Run while you still can! No, I am joking... In my experience, it helps if you can manage to accept that there will always be areas for improvement, further research or observations you cannot reasonably explain or examine within the scope of the doctoral research project. By acting as my soundboard for ideas and doubts, my supervisor and colleagues played an important role in keeping my perfectionism in check. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic, the life stories of the people from Katakwi and other personal challenges have helped me to put the PhD research into perspective and ensure that personal sacrifices remained within reason.

**E2C:** What are your future plans or aspirations? What does your (professional) life look like after the PhD?

LP: I am currently employed as Strategy and Quality Advisor for VLIR-UOS. In that capacity, I am contributing to the next Five Year Programme while also following up on evaluation processes that provide us with lessons learned. It is a challenging but interesting time to (re)define the future of higher education cooperation for sustainable development within a context of debates on decolonisation, global citizenship, equal partnerships, digitalisation and distance learning, and green universities.



# COVID-19 footprint on IOB education

## Lecturer's experiences



The COVID-19 virus spread into Belgium in the beginning of 2020. By the end of the first quarter of the year, all 10 provinces of the country had registered cases of infection. Consequently, the Belgian federal and regional governments embarked on efforts to address the coronavirus outbreak. Several containment measures were announced, such as travel bans for 'non-essential' travel abroad, gathering bans, closure of 'non-essential' shops and closure of cafés and restaurants, as well as social distancing measures and mandatory use of face masks, among several others. Schools, including universities, were closed and distance working became the new normal. These containment measures also affected IOB. Our master students had to switch to an online mode of learning, with lectures through several

online platforms including Blackboard Collaborate. Several other teaching/learning strategies, for instance the use of group discussions, had to switch to an online mode as well. IOB had to adapt almost overnight to ensure that learning continued and that students stayed engaged and motivated. For the cohort of students in the next academic year, courses and schedules had to be restructured to fit the online study system. Different time zones, from the Philippines to Nicaragua and beyond, made it difficult to find a suitable time for all students to attend class simultaneously before making their way to Belgium. Exchange to Change invited the IOB teaching staff to reflect on their experiences during the transition to an online teaching mode.

### Approaching the unfamiliar

Some of the lecturers felt completely unprepared for the switch to an online mode of teaching. IOB's DNA centers on in-classroom, lecturer-student and peer learning which facilitates interaction and stimulates debate. As such, students benefit from the sharing of diverse professional and socio-economic experiences. IOB has had decades of experience with in-classroom learning. Therefore to require a 180 degrees switch to a completely online teaching modus can be quite demanding. Some lecturers researched for tips and tricks on how to moderate online discussions and how to facilitate interaction and participation among the students. Given that a completely online teaching mode had never been used at IOB, the unpreparedness was predominantly a fear

of the uncharted. A lack of acquaintance with the upcoming modus operandi that was set to take center stage. Nonetheless, most of the staff were open to experimenting with the new method of teaching.

### With change comes challenge

Ready or not, the initial transition period was not devoid of challenges. Some were more technical, relating to management of the online platforms. For instance, one lecturer intimates that they had to shut down an entire teaching session and start a new one because the session had been trolled by uninvited guests. These trolls somehow obtain the links to the live online teaching sessions and wreak havoc. Such occurrences cause dissipation of attention and loss of valuable time. Another technical issue relates to the internet. Initially, as everyone was expected to switch to an online learning system en masse, there were fears that the internet infrastructure would suffer an overload. Consequently, some staff were requested to minimise the bandwidth usage by keeping videos off and only using the audio platform during teaching sessions. For the students, it wasn't uncommon to see some 'fall out' during classes, only to rejoin and disconnect again. One staff member explained that during this period, it felt like days of darkness as they had to speak to a black screen.

On another note, some staff quickly realised how demanding it is to moderate online discussions. Many realised more than ever the importance of things like eye contact – usually taken for granted but sorely missed during the rather challenging task of maintaining a fruitful lecture session. 'This is when I noticed how much we rely on body-language, facial expressions, tiny interventions to moderate a balanced and active discussion'. It was also quite challenging to maintain order of communication during online discussion sessions without instilling very strict rules which dampen the discussion climate. When a student was not concise with their intervention, it usually felt quite aggressive for some lecturers to unmute and abruptly interrupt. With the discovery of the chat function, the need to multitask became apparent during the lecture sessions, with questions and comments

coming in from all directions. Yet in some instances, it was quite an uphill battle to get students to contribute to a lecture session. After all, it was not obligatory for students to keep their videos turned on. 'And even up to now, people at IOB are very reluctant to put on their camera. It is now perhaps rather a matter of keeping others out of their private world. [...] there is no clear bright line anymore between our public/professional and our private personas'. As one staff opined, some students were disinclined to put on their cameras. Understandably, since working from home blurs the line between the public or professional and private aspects of one's life. However, in such cases, it usually felt like talking to a screen. Fortunately, these were isolated cases, as IOB students are always enthusiastic and eager to participate.

Having to adjust to an entirely online teaching style demanded a restructuring of the courses. Rethinking these structures in a way that ensured that utility was maximised for the students became an immediate challenge. The staff had to devise ways of delivering their course content in a relatively interactive and highly engaging way. This included allowing for self-study and group sharing. Moreover, a feedback loop had to be completed to ensure that students had the opportunity to ask questions, to clarify any unclear concepts which they encountered during the self-study sessions. Given the time constraints and urgency of the required changes, restructuring courses was indeed a great challenge.

Distance working ('teleworking') implied that, at times, the lecturers had to work away from their IOB offices. The flexible working style that comes with teleworking sounds rosy, but not all that glitters is gold. For many, overcoming embarrassing moments was a daily norm. These embarrassments doubled as interruptions to live-online teaching and/or recording sessions. These interruptions ranged from constant back and forth movement with curious peeps at the teaching screen from family members, sometimes in pyjamas to attention-seeking displays from their lovely balls of fluff as the cats zig zag back and forth in front of the teaching screens. Others were called into family duty amid teaching or recording sessions,

for instance, having to attend to emergencies such as a toddler falling off of their bed and injuring themselves. As if that is not embarrassing enough, these moments were captured on camera and saved for future reference.

### The links in the chain

Despite the numerous challenges staff had to navigate through, the teaching duties were successfully delivered. One major factor which lessened the burden of charting the relatively unfamiliar ICT world was the help from the digital team at IOB. All the lecturers appreciated the contribution of this ICT-savvy team. The digital team introduced the staff to an array of digital tools which were at their disposal. The main online teaching platform used by the staff is Blackboard Collaborate. Though some of the lecturers were acquainted with this platform, there were various user functions which were unfamiliar. Training sessions were essential to steer the staff towards using the digital resources in creative and diverse ways. This included combining digital platforms to produce an overall dazzling experience for the students. Refresher training sessions were also organised at IOB. The support from the digital team didn't end at offering trainings and refresher sessions. It was extended to the live online sessions where they were available to sort out any technical issues that arose. As one lecturer observed, 'I think the availability of BB Collaborate, but also the technical backup from the IOB staff during the sessions, really made a difference. Otherwise I would have been too distracted by all the technical hiccups. Also, Joëlle's assistance in familiarising us with all the different modalities of the technology available was crucial'. The digital team was also very pivotal during the course restructuring periods where they advised on how to transform the courses to fit the new digital education style. Moreover, they also helped to convert the course materials to a digital format.

IOB also engaged the adaptive-management gear. It is said that the wiser learn from others' mistakes. Therefore, self-help groups were initiated to allow staff to share their experiences with the digital platforms. During these meetings, staff who had completed several of

their own teaching sessions highlighted challenges and best practices for the others who were next to teach. This offered colleagues the opportunity to proactively prepare for their own sessions and minimise setbacks.

### Holding the target

Even with the technical assistance, every lecturer had to figure out how to keep the students engaged and ensure that learning takes place. One lecturer utilised a rather innovative approach by asking the students to question the validity of exam questions. In a twist of events, after exams were taken, the students had to critique the accuracy of particular multiple choice questions during Q&A sessions. The questions which were deemed invalid were disregarded from weighing on their exam scores. This power of verdict was an incentive for the students to critique the questions after the next round of examination. Such a strategy ensured that the students carefully studied the course content in order to have strong reasons to invalidate particular questions. 'So in the end, mission accomplished': learning was taking place.

The lecturers concurred with the use of multiple interactive tools and methods of teaching to increase student participation and encourage learning. Alternating lectures with seminar sessions is one way to keep the students engaged and to ensure that they are grasping the course content. During the seminar sessions, the students discuss at length particular concepts in smaller breakout groups and then present group opinions in a general virtual room with the lecturers as moderators. This way, the lecturers have the opportunity to clarify unclear concepts and the students are also able to learn from each other. Moreover, the seminar sessions break the monotony of hearing from one voice, the lecturer. It was also imagined that online teaching sessions are more interactive when the students turn on their cameras. However, this is in acknowledgement that it can be quite intrusive to require this from the students during the online sessions. Students who would love to turn their cameras on should be encouraged to do so, without ostracising those

who prefer not to. One key suggestion was that keeping the duration of sessions short can help, since it is quite challenging to maintain attention during online sessions. One way to achieve this is by having several breaks between sessions for long duration lectures.

### The silver lining

No matter how challenging it was to switch, the completely online teaching style opened a door for particular opportunities. First, it became much easier to invite guest lecturers from all over the world. IOB benefits from interaction with various experts from diverse fields. These are usually practitioners or scientists who are invited to deliver guest lectures and seminar talks during particular courses. In addition to logistical considerations, matching the schedule for the guest lectures and the availability of the targeted experts can be challenging. However, since online teaching didn't require the guests to travel to Antwerp, it was quite easy to arrange lecture sessions with the preferred persons who delivered the service in the comfort of their own countries.

The online learning style also involved recording of sessions. This made it possible for students to revisit lecture recordings in order to patch up any gaps in their personal notes. For students who were unable to attend specific live online sessions for particular reasons, this function proved quite handy.

Further, the requirements for transformation of the courses offered a platform for IOB to rethink the structure and content of some of the courses. Additionally, some of the lecturers attest to learning new ways of making the educational material more attractive and diversified. As a result, evolutions are taking place as IOB continuously learns as it grows.

With the online teaching system, the time which would have been spent commuting to and from the office has been saved. As a result, some lecturers claim to have been able to find the time to participate in other professional and social activities which they would normally have struggled to. As one lecturer noted, 'Professionally, I have been able to follow so much interesting webinars

and workshops, with participants from around the globe. Socially, I can enjoy my days so much more now that I do not have to commute anymore'.

### Imminent nostalgia

When all is said and done, a look at the experiences of the past year has left lecturers undecided on whether they would want to switch back to a completely live in-person in-class teaching mode. There is strong support for the in-class interactions as this has been the norm at IOB. Moreover, some lecturers argued that a choice of completely online sessions denigrates the importance of in-person interactions and in-class humour. Nonetheless, a preference for a blended teaching mode has emerged. Some lecturers at IOB have appreciated the online experience and feel they can find a place for some of the acquired tools and skills in a predominantly in-person learning environment. If required to switch back to teaching completely live in class, some of the lecturers have indicated they want to maintain some of the newly acquired experiences. For instance, students can have time for self-study from the online platform and then the actual contact hours are utilised for debate and in-depth discussion over studied materials.

Also, some lecturers now believe that it is not a necessity to have guest lecturers to be physically present in Antwerp. Arrangements can be made for international guest lectures to be easily organised and delivered. Therefore, as the coronavirus pandemic wanes and IOB prepares to return to an in-person teaching mode, some things will be dearly missed about the digital IOB era. Among some of these will be the chance to deliver highly captivating and engaging lectures in the comfort of pyjamas.

# Women in science

## A brief close-up of some experiences in the IOB community



On the 11 February 2021, the International Day of Women and Girls in Science was celebrated for the sixth occasion since 2015, marking the progressive inclusion of women in academia and science. But it exists especially as a reminder of the still very unbalanced proportion of women working in science, and the unequal conditions under which they are involved when compared to men. According to UN Women, globally "[...] only 33 per cent of researchers are women, despite the fact that they represent 45 and 55 per cent of students at the Bachelor's and Master's levels of study respectively, and 44 per cent of those enrolled in PhD programs."

At IOB, the current balance looks like this: 56% of currently enrolled master students and 48% of alumni are women, while for PhD students this representation stands at only 37%. Within the IOB staff as a whole, 44%

are women. Among Administrative and Technical staff (ATP) 82% are women, while as lecturers (ZAP) they make up only 33%.

Here, Exchange to Change wants to celebrate the invaluable contribution of its female researchers in making science more open and diverse by sharing some of their experiences and opinions regarding their role in the scientific world.



**Anh Vu**  
IOB Alumna, Post-doctoral Research Associate at School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University (UK)

My research focuses on delta sustainability, equitable livelihoods and climate change in the Southeast and South Asian contexts. I think the added values female scientists bring to the intellectual world is enormous and straightforward. In my perspective, womanhood helps researchers to be attuned to the marginalisation and sufferings of groups who are left behind. Also, womanhood stimulates researchers to embrace and deepen the ethics of care while conducting sensitive research.



## Catherine Amenya IOB Master student



I am a gender expert and have worked extensively in the areas of violent extremism, natural resource management, gender in peace building and conflict resolution, with different communities in the African Great Lakes region.

For a long time, research has been male dominated, especially in political science and international relations. As an African woman I am glad that I can contribute towards the diversity in developing and disseminating new information and shape the narrative of what is written and read about Africa.

One of the biggest challenges is related to the fact of being a single mother of two young children. Balancing research and motherhood has been hard. Women must compete for research funds which require travel and have an age limit and so that means you are forced to sacrifice one for the other. If you choose raising children, by the time you are ready, your years are advanced which exclude you from certain funds. If you want children, you are also competing with an expiring biological clock.

I have also encountered stereotypes at work which assume that women cannot handle positions of power because they can't work with fellow women and so they need to be handled. Women therefore do not have the luxury to disagree at work because then it is assumed that it is jealous female rivalry, while for men competitive rivalry is healthy.

## Nathalie Holvoet Professor at IOB

My research expertise is situated in 'monitoring & evaluation' and 'gender & development'. Specific research topics in these broad research areas include national evaluation systems/societies, evaluation influence, community based monitoring, (unconditional) cash transfers, intrahousehold allocation, gender & climate change, gender budgeting.

As we are all influenced by gender (and other) norms and in this way also differently placed in society, we bring in another perspective, e.g. in the research questions being asked, the research topics, the process of data collection, the interpretation of data, etc. As women are still underrepresented in science, certainly in comparison to their higher performance in tertiary education, I guess that more women in science also leads to 'richer/better' science. You could somehow say that the current situation is still a waste of resources for academia. More women in science might also help to put into perspective 'stereotypes', here in Belgium in both in the public and private sphere, but also when doing research in the Global South.

For me personally, I think a big challenge as a woman has been the combination with care work at home just after having obtained the PhD. This tension between professional and personal life is present in many settings, but maybe it is felt more in academia as one of the most important moments in the academic career coincides with important decisions or changes in your personal life. For many, the moment at which you obtain and need to valorise the PhD is also the moment at which the biological clock is ticking... so for me personally this combination or tension between PhD valorisation and having small children was the period in which I felt it most challenging to do science as a woman.

I have faced stereotypes as a woman in science, and this will be true for men as well. For example, when I was doing field research in South India on microfinance

and had to explain my research to bank directors, they always looked at my boyfriend, who was accompanying me, because they thought that he was the researcher. Similarly, if you are a young female professor and you work together with (older) male colleagues, you are often not considered a professor but an assistant. This is most clear when you are addressed differently, using your first name instead of your title (I never experienced using the first name to be a problem but it is funny when experiencing the difference). This differential treatment is somehow solved when you grow older, so it might also be a matter of age (probably intersecting with gender).



## Semhal Gebrekirstos IOB Master student

My research interest revolves around the idea of responsible businesses: looking at the new EU due diligence requirement for EU-based companies, business and human rights, and business and development partners.

I think the biggest value of being a woman in science is that I represent a view repressed by intergenerational barriers and I am the embodiment of who my foremothers fought to become. I am who they wanted me to become and I am extremely grateful and honored. For me, being involved in science is not an "added value", we (women and men) are the value. Science won't have much value if women are not able to participate in it. We, women, make up around 49.6% of the world population. When we fail to involve women in science, we are excluding the

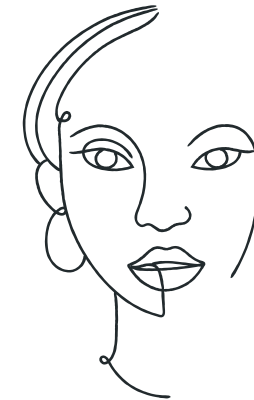


view of half of the world's population.

I think a big challenge is that society dictates that women can't have it all, it is either success or family. Whether you are from a rural part of a developing country or in a modern city in the west, societal pressures steer women into having 'practical' career goals. We are fortunate to see so many women beating those odds and showing the world it's possible to have it all, but these women are considered superwomen and their success is considered as a rare event. We are constantly asked how we are planning to balance our work life, while similar questions are not typically asked of men. In today's day and age where everything is commodified, women's domestic labor is rarely ever considered and in fact used against women to further patriarchal thinking. Not only that, but women are also compensated much less on average while they work twice as much to maintain a similar career. The barriers don't only start there, similar ventures in work or school are labeled differently for women – for example, there is often a thin line between perceived promiscuity and networking for women. Most women in my circle, including myself, have faced harassment at work or in school and especially while networking, but out of fear for our careers we all choose to resolve it quietly. Successful and empowered women in science still face similar dilemmas and much work needs to be done to provide a welcoming space for women to report harassment of any extent without fear of reprisals of any sort.

I face stereotypes on a daily basis. I have grown a thick skin in the face

of stereotypes but they come in such different shapes and forms that each incident is a learning process and part of the process of how thick my skin becomes. One particular event that will always stay with me is my old high school teacher who consulted me on my plans to study law. He told me that studying law is very complex and a very long degree for a woman to do hinting I might not excel at it. As a law graduate himself and favorite teacher, it made me second-guess my decision. It had such a big impact on me because it was disguised within genuine advice. Sometimes women face stereotypes from mentors we admire, leaders we look up to, and family members who we love and who care



about us. Stereotypes are often hard to identify when many times they are hidden within gentle and loving words, but we must learn to detect them and fight for our dreams. We must learn with whom to share our dreams and aspirations, and make sure we support one another and the next generation to come. I hope one day he will get to see that not only did I do a five-year degree in law school but that I would will spend another two years doing two masters and hopefully soon enough a PhD.

## Danya Nadar IOB PhD Student

While my sex seems obvious to most at first glance, my ethnicity remains a mystery. In my work I am often asked "Where are you from?", as if any answer can determine all the moving parts that form my identity.

Being a woman doesn't define me but

it is the vehicle that makes or takes the space which I negotiate in the sciences. My gender - including my class, ethnicity, sex, age, sexual orientation, physical abilities, my 'Western' upbringing - all affect the status I hold in institutions, when conducting research and my creative outputs. In today's universities, scholarships and fellowships, my intersectional identity has helped me fulfill a quota or hindered me from advancing. My heritage, sex and the passports I carry have given me access to work and conduct research in most countries in the Middle East and North Africa. The languages I (don't) speak have facilitated the ways I relate to people, live and work in various fields and places. These details continue to impact the outlook and perspective I bring when writing or presenting ideas. I am not simply a woman in the (social) sciences. I am all of these intertwining elements that shape my capacity and privileges to navigate the sciences today.



# Alumni panel

## Sorely Calixto Peñafiel DEM 2011 | Peru

### Where do you work?

I work at the Secretary of Decentralisation in the Chair of Ministers in Peru, working on territorial approach tools and methodologies for the provision of public services in policies and programs.

### Tell us more about one of the exciting projects/ programmes/ ideas you are currently working on?

I am currently working on a couple of projects. One is about a Closing Gap Plan for a region in the Peruvian Amazon. This project is a big challenge because it is the first plan with a territorial approach which also requires that the Chair of Ministers take the lead for the intersectoral and intergovernmental coordination. The other project is the Annual Decentralisation Report that the Chair of Ministers has to present to the Parliament about the main achievements in administrative, fiscal and political decentralisation as a means to achieve territorial development.



### How has the IOB experience affected your life/ career?

The IOB experience widened my understanding of the diversity of countries and cultures around the world and how they approach a range of policies, programs and strategies, which has increased my awareness of how these approaches are used to improve development in my country. The knowledge I gained from living and working in a few of these countries reaffirmed my passion for my vocation and has enabled me to help bring about beneficial and lasting change in Peru. Perhaps the most important lesson I acquired was the ability to think critically about my work and harness the importance of flexibility to adapt to a wide array of contexts. I consider the latter to be integral in maintaining cohesive and successful relationships in order to provide the best provision of public services.

## Munalula Mulonda GLOB 2015 | Zambia

### Where do you work?

I'm currently working on small scale mining in Zambia, which is also part of the PhD research that I'm pursuing at Stellenbosch University in South Africa.

### How has the IOB experience affected your life/ career?

The IOB experience gave me a wonderful and unique opportunity to acquire the necessary acumen for development policy analysis and advocacy. In addition, I also acquired research skills that have enabled me to perform successfully in my job as a lecturer and researcher at the University of Zambia.



## Doan Hao Chau DEM 2014| Vietnam

### Where do you work?

I'm an Enterprise Advisor at Better Work Vietnam. I provide advisory services to factories in the garment and footwear sector to improve working conditions and promote social dialogue in the factories.

**Tell us more about one of the exciting projects/ programmes/ ideas you are currently working on?** When I was in Antwerp, one of my hobbies after library time was walking along Meir street and trying on nice clothes. Many of them were made in Vietnam. Interestingly, I am now working on the Better Work program to improve the working and living conditions for workers who are working in factories where those nice things come from. What I learnt and experienced during my

time at IOB and in Belgium will always be valuable and precious to my professional career and my life. It helped me become more practical and critical thinking, confident and positive in decision making. It was a big chance for me to see a bigger and a different world and frame a new me and my life. Making new friends from different countries and cultures and enjoying moments with them always makes me happy and smile when I think about it.



# Whose story of change is it anyway?

## A student's reflection on the Most Significant Change technique in monitoring processes

Much has been said about the sacrifices the aid sector has made at the altar of quantitative data, the stories and the insights we miss in favor of simplicity. Most of us have at some point or another subscribed to the belief that the more an activity can be quantified, the better the policy choices and management of it will be and the easier our jobs get. Yet, most of us can also agree that we hold on dearly to values like inclusion, participation, and shifting the power. I believe many of us would like to pay more than lip service to these ideals, but how can we do so if our day-to-day tools and ways of working are not fit for purpose? The last quarter's qualitative action lab at IOB introduced students from the Development Evaluation and Management Program to an evaluation technique that holds the potential to lead us in the direction of our loftier ideals. The technique, called MSC (Most Significant Change), arose from a need to overcome the inadequacies of conventional monitoring processes in situations where program impacts are difficult to quantify and those which prioritise learning, not just accountability. Simply put, MSC consists of collecting and analyzing qualitative information about change, usually in the form of stories, obtained from individuals, which are then subject to selection by different stakeholder groups. Our task was to evaluate IOB as a project intervention in students' lives - our lives - using the MSC technique.

We promptly set out to tackle our task in two groups, each one serving as the other's storytellers. My group quickly coalesced and after a short discussion we decided to test the technique on ourselves first. The stories poured out more easily than we expected at this testing stage, and we bonded swiftly over the commonalities of our experience as the task quickly shifted from academic exercise to genuine interest and curiosity about each other. The power of our stories grounded us, it felt like a natural method of inquiry and we chose to delve into it without explicitly valued directions, a purely inductive approach. Choosing loose domains of change based on our own stories, we each set out to interview our peers both inside and outside the classroom. I interviewed Globalisation student Paola Pozo who, thinking back over our interview experience, remarked, "I had never had the opportunity to sit and reflect on the program that was now part of my story, its quality, its impact on my life, and ways that it could be better." She further reflected on students interviewing other students, "it's uncommon to see this disruption of power relationships, this allowed myself to open up in ways that I would not have been able to otherwise." Our shared and equalising experience as students is a crucial factor in this dynamic, and speaks to larger industry debates around the importance of locally led research. Besides the start of our bond of friendship, Paola's experience with MSC ignited a sense of action

towards improving the experiences of students at IOB. Despite covid limitations, engaging in this process without being burdened by prescriptive criteria allowed us to understand change on a bodily, even unconscious level, allowing us deeper insight into the ways our individual axiologies both differed from and echoed those of the traditional academy. As Mouna Guidiri put it, "being in a multi-cultural context also broadened the discussions more, it was finally a space where we got out of the standard frameworks to debate what really matters to us, as students, future evaluators and ... peoples of the world." The MSC technique subverts conventional monitoring techniques which usually focus on outputs and the mechanics of implementation, and whose criteria are established by program managers. Instead, our experience was more akin to a listening ear technique in which we were attentive witnesses to a testimony, allowing us to de-center our interviewer gaze and be led by the story. "It was a learning process for me, as I listened keenly and probed the storytellers for more insights into their stories," said Neh Tantoh Sheila, who felt that the exposure to how powerful stories can be in research will leave a mark on her professional future.

After the flurry of stories, our group gathered together to reach a consensus on the stories which best reflected the most significant changes. Though we ran through the conceptual mapping

of MSC, and subjected our stories to an informal ranking against what we had identified as our domains of change, the most crucial part of MSC happened organically, as we sat down to explore the values and preferences of participants and of ourselves. MSC happens on two fronts, during the process of gathering and sharing of stories from participants, but also at the organisational level, by allowing implementers to make their values explicit through dialogue and then finding the common ground that drives project objectives. Our group was lucky because, together, we discovered a shared sense of purpose as students of color and a love of pluralist views over positivist methodologies, both of which guided the way we made all choices. Not all organisations will reach this level of consensus, but the MSC technique is a valuable way to discover who lies where. Finally, the time to vote came and we each voted for the story which to us signified a personal transformation but also spoke to the transformations that are needed at the program level. As Mouna Guidiri pointed out about the selection process, "the stories that were gathered also confirmed many things and, maybe for the first time, gave a certain collective perspective on some views on the learning process at IOB." Though a clear winner emerged, it was the iteration of that choice which makes the MSC process a truly participatory approach. We all agreed, as a group, on our joint decision-making criteria and discussed the subtle choices that made up our selection. The final selection flowed effortlessly out of us as if from a hive mind.

The flow of our experience does not diminish the challenges of this technique, though. Recognizing the most significant change is not always easy, and Maria Hrimech cautions on the importance of follow-up on this technique, as MSC can be best recognised at the end line of an intervention rather than during, and as with any tool or methodology watching out for any potential biases and addressing them is

crucial. These include the bias towards stories of success, bias towards those who are good at telling (or writing) stories, and subjectivity in the story selection process. One experienced member of our group, Joshua Byenka, had previous experience implementing the MSC technique and reflected on his learnings in the Action Lab, "I learnt that MSC is an approach that is heavily participatory and requires consultation at various levels of planning, preparation, execution, reporting. In addition, the story tellers' feelings, expressions, opinions, judgements need to be respected by the evaluator. This calls for evaluators' independence during the interviewing process to minimise interviewer bias. Needless to say, the values and beliefs of the story tellers need to be deeply cross-examined to discover contextual underpinnings that subliminally influence the stories being told." In the upcoming months, Joshua will be presenting and publishing some articles on his experiences with MSC both inside and outside the classroom.

My own experience with MSC in the

classroom has led me to question my sense of place, and led to deep introspection regarding the ways I want to move forward as an evaluator - whose stories do I want to tell and for whom? Questioning hegemonic centers of knowledge and the politics of who defines what is most significant and what's valued. MSC offers us a glimpse of what it means to have research by us and for us, and to place the populations we serve first and foremost. The next steps now beckon us, and urge us to challenge who is included and who is excluded when deciding what is valued, and how we can ensure that we are promoting multi-epistemic pluralist methodologies that can subvert the status quo and open up new paradigms, dialogues, research, theory and action. After all, whose story of change is it anyway?

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