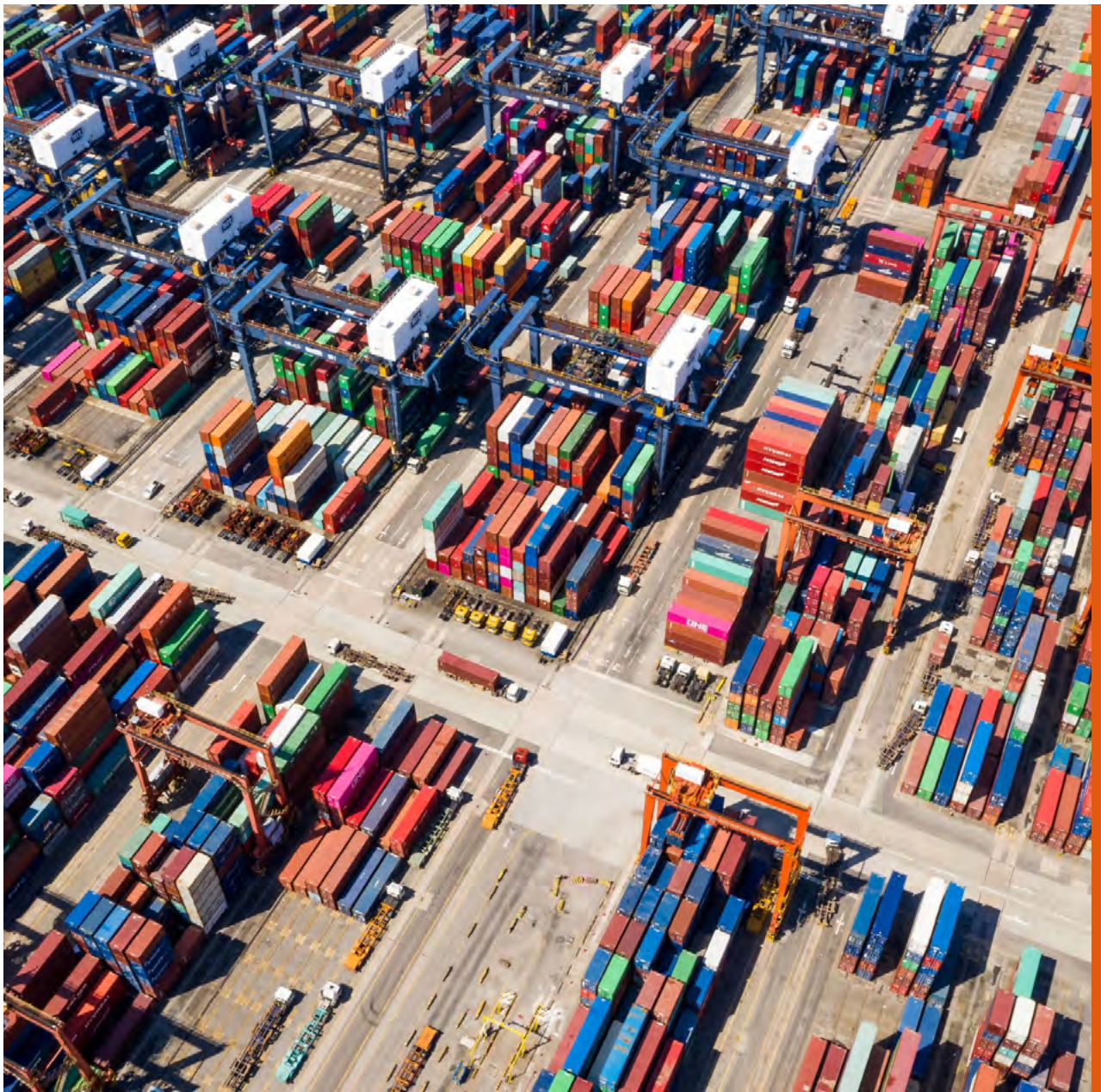


# Exchange to change

#55

Spring 2025

**Alumni**  
*magazine*



University of Antwerp

| IOB | Institute of  
Development Policy

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## Contact us

IOB - University of Antwerp  
Lange St.-Annastraat 7  
2000 Antwerp

[iob@uantwerpen.be](mailto:iob@uantwerpen.be)  
[www.uantwerpen.be/iob](http://www.uantwerpen.be/iob)

## Follow us on

**Bluesky:** [iobua.bsky.social](https://iobua.bsky.social)

**LinkedIn:** [linkedin.com/in/iobua](https://linkedin.com/in/iobua)

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**Instagram:** [uantwerpeniob](https://instagram.com/uantwerpeniob)

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E2C team: Divin-Luc Bikubanya, Hans De Backer, Sara Dewachter, Joëlle Dhondt, Laura Fournier, Baudouin Koussognon, Ezra Moïse, Joel Astora Chavez, Linh Chi Ngac.

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## Edito | Bridging continents, building community

Dear alumni

It is with great joy and genuine enthusiasm that I write to you for the first time as the IOB chair. Stepping into this role is both an honour and a privilege — especially as it offers me the opportunity to continue nurturing one of IOB's most cherished traditions: our vibrant and inspiring alumni community.

Over the years, I've had the pleasure of meeting many of you at alumni events around the world. Each encounter has left me energised and proud, hearing about the remarkable work you're doing, the ways you are driving change in your communities, and the personal journeys that brought you where you are today. These connections are not only heartening — they are the living legacy of IOB.

In our new policy plan, we are therefore committed to deepening and expanding our engagement with alumni. Whether in person or online, we aim to broaden our outreach to ensure that our network continues to grow across countries and continents. Together, we can make the IOB community even stronger, more inclusive, and more dynamic.

In this edition of Exchange to Change, you'll find an invitation to our upcoming alumni event in Ethiopia. You'll also be able to relive recent gatherings in Tanzania and Uganda, and read about the incredible energy and exchange of ideas that happened there. Sadly, due to ongoing conflict, our event in the DR Congo has been postponed. Our thoughts are with those affected by conflict — in the DR Congo and elsewhere — and we hold onto hope for a peaceful resolution.

This issue also brings you closer to our current students. Ezra courageously shares his experiences navigating the challenges — and triumphs — of studying at IOB as a Francophone student.

And for a timely dive into global economics, we invite you to read an engaging feature where Professor Mavrotas and our Globalisation students discuss the winners and losers of today's tariff wars — a topic they tackled collaboratively in class, with insight and passion.

We hope this edition of Exchange to Change both informs and inspires. It's a celebration of our shared journey, and a testament to the incredible people who make up the IOB family — you.

*Warm regards and happy reading,  
Nathalie Holvoet  
Chair IOB*



# In the meantime...



## Community-Based Monitoring course in Tanzania: Learning, collaboration & impact

In April, students from IOB, Mzumbe University, and Uganda Christian University came together for an unforgettable five-week Community-Based Monitoring (CBM) course. The training combined academic depth with hands-on engagement, diving into the theory of CBM and citizen science while fostering strong connections through welcome dinners, hiking, and soccer matches.

Classroom concepts came to life during a visit to the inspiring LEAD project, where citizen ambassadors lead the regreening of communal lands. Participants also gained fresh perspectives from experts at Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots, who presented a powerful photovoice project on environmental education in schools.

One of the most impactful moments was the Fuatilia Maji initiative, where students teamed up with local water monitors from Maharaka and Kihondo to launch a real-time water quality monitoring effort. Together, they collected samples, ran tests, and raised red, orange, or green flags to indicate contamination levels — true community science in action.

We're deeply grateful to all the students, staff, and local partners who made this experience so enriching. From the classroom to the field, and from Mikumi National Park to village water points, April's CBM course was a powerful blend of learning, collaboration, and impact. Asante sana, Tanzania!



## Spotlight on Tanzania: Alumni and M&E experts connect

In late February, the Belgian Ambassador in Tanzania attended a vibrant Evaluation Fair network event, held as part of the Seminar on Strengthening National Evaluation Capacities, funded by the Special Evaluation Office.

The evening gathered IOB alumni and M&E professionals from across the region. Dr. Milanzi Mursali, Deputy Executive Secretary of the National Planning Commission, opened with a powerful keynote on "Shaping the Future: The Power of M&E in Tanzania's Policy Making".

A key highlight: 15 experts showcased their work during a lively poster reception.

- Soukeyna Ouedraogo won the COMMUNITOR 2025 Jury Award
- Dr. Isaack Michael Nguliki received the COMMUNITOR Audience Award

The night ended on a high — with new ideas, renewed connections, and plenty of fun and music!



## Get Together VLIRUOS

Our students had the amazing opportunity to participate in the Get Together Night organised by VLIR-UOS at Ghent University in Belgium. This event fostered meaningful connections with scholarship recipients (ICP Connect) from diverse universities and nationalities.

We're building a global community that transcends borders, academic programmes, and cultures.



## Human rights & legal pluralism

In March, Master's students of the Governance and Development programme at IOB participated in two insightful sessions:

Experts from the Flemish Human Rights Institute led a discussion on human rights, citizen empowerment, and access to reporting channels.

Later that month, Prof. Filip Reyntjens, a founder of the IOB programme, shared his expertise on legal pluralism in societies.

## Mobility Window in Tanzania: field insights

Just before the Christmas break, three of our students embarked on a Mobility Window in Tanzania. Merel (GLOB) joined a research project at Mzumbe University, exploring resilience and social networks. Jo (GLOB) focused on primary schools in Bagamoyo, engaging with citizen science to examine local water quality. Alejandro (DEM) focused on studying the influence of social networks on parent's attitudes towards education.



This opportunity has deepened my understanding



## DR Congo conflict webpage

The ongoing insecurity in and around the Kivus is affecting countless lives, including those of our colleagues, friends, and research partners. We stand in solidarity with everyone impacted and remain committed to supporting those on the ground.

To keep you informed, we've created a dedicated page where we'll share recent news, media articles featuring IOB colleagues, and updates on activities we plan to organise.

Stay updated here: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/great-lakes-africa-centre/news-updates>



## PhD defences: new insights on post-conflict Burundi

In recent months, two of our doctoral researchers successfully defended their PhDs, each offering fresh perspectives on post-conflict dynamics in Burundi.

**Réginas Ndayiragije** defended his dissertation on "Post-conflict institutional engineering and political representation in Burundi". His research critically examines how power-sharing arrangements, initially vital in ending ethnic conflict, have evolved — often reinforcing elite control and limiting deeper political transformation.

**Eliane Giezendanner** earned her PhD with her dissertation "Embodied legacies of rebellion: (body) memory, self-conception and political participation among ex-combatants in Burundi". Her work sheds light on the embodied experiences of former fighters and how their pasts shape their roles in the country's political landscape today.

Congratulations to both Réginas and Eliane on their impressive contributions to peace and conflict studies!





# The US trade war and tariffs: winners and losers

The recent escalation of tariffs initiated by the United States has sparked intense debate and uncertainty in global markets. As IOB alumni might remember spirited debates about globalisation, trade dynamics, and their implications for development in our classrooms, we currently see those theoretical discussions materialised into pressing global challenges. To unpack these developments, master student Chi Ngac sat down with Professor George Mavrotas, a leading scholar in macroeconomics and development finance with about 35 years of experience in international development.

## The end of trade globalisation?

According to Prof. Mavrotas, this series of actions signifies “the official end of trade globalisation” as we know it and marks the start of unprecedented protectionist policies. Broadly imposed tariffs, ranging from 20% across all European Union countries to 145% in China (at the time of writing, 6 May 2025), have fundamentally changed the global trade landscape.

The current US administration has characterised them as a liberation, or at least a tool for renegotiating trade agreements. However, Prof. Mavrotas asserts that this narrative mischaracterises the scenario. Instead, he argues, these tariffs are disruptive to global value chains and are damaging businesses, consumers, and economies worldwide rather than being liberating. The tariffs on China (145%), India (26%), and the EU (20%), among others, are illustrative of the significant economic dislocation currently underway.

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**"There are no real winners in a trade war — only ripple effects that destabilise economies worldwide"**

## Ripple effects

Small businesses would experience the most significant impact of the tariffs as they depend heavily on importing products to run their businesses smoothly. Goods once affordable through globalisation have now become significantly more expensive, which translates into increased consumer prices. The European Parliament said



that the US tariffs could wreak havoc on European economies, hitting jobs and consumer prices. Several economists have recently argued that this inflationary effect might cause economic turmoil and even recession. Prof. Mavrotas also stressed the interconnected relationships of economies, which could create a ripple effect throughout the US and the world

economy, causing a recession.

## Reshaping trade alliance

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) adds further complication in the current unprecedented situation as it cannot mediate or settle trade disputes “because of a flaw in its institutions.” Prof. Mavrotas commented that the WTO’s role is hopeless at this stage as a platform to resolve this

issue. Countries facing US tariffs see little to no possibility of resolving this via the WTO and have basically chosen the path of limited retaliation, forming trade alliances, or negotiating directly with the United States. China, Japan, and South Korea have started discussing coordinated responses, highlighting the potential for new geopolitical groupings.



Similarly, the European Union, which has its internal diversity and debate over trade policy, must also respond under pressure to present a united front in the face of US economic influence. But the coalition's effectiveness in preventing damage is unclear. Currently, the European Union has already started drafting retaliatory steps against these US tariffs. The European

Union's strategy is designed to focus on politically sensitive sectors in Republican states and exert maximum political pressure on the US administration, Reuters reported.

### **So, who wins when the US starts a trade war?**

Prof. Mavrotas said that no real winners would emerge if the current trade war continues. The severe disruption in global supply chains and the resulting inflationary pressures would make the goals of reinvigorating US manufacturing, Gross Domestic Product growth, and employment improbable, contrary to the rather naive claims of the current US administration. He also predicted substantial economic losses, not just for the targeted countries but also for American businesses and consumers. International corporations for consumer

### **"Tariff policies may appear domestic, but their consequences are profoundly global"**

goods like Nike have already experienced a considerable fall in their market value because their supply chain heavily depends on tariff-affected countries such as Vietnam and Bangladesh. This could potentially lead to broader economic implications and upcoming recessions worldwide.

The current US trade war highlights the important truth that global trade relations are profoundly complex and incredibly responsive to policy changes. The effects go well beyond simple economic numbers, affecting foreign relations, consumer well-being, and political stability over time.

### **Engaging with the current generation of IOB students**

Students from the Master of Development and Globalisation Programme discussed these current developments in international trade during their course. As part of their final assignment they even

created an insightful video or podcast which captured some of debate around the complexities of the recent tariff updates. Their projects illustrate how tariffs impact global value chains, emphasizing the need for nuanced and informed perspectives in international trade discussions.

[Click here to watch the video from the students and join the discussion on how the US tariff policies are shaping global trade.](#)

Merel, one of the IOB students from the Master of Development and Globalisation Programme, shared her perspective on these tariffs and global value chains. Acknowledging global trade's complexity and interconnected nature, she found it hard to predict how much the tariff war would impact people's everyday lives. Merel emphasises an urgent need for public education about how interconnected the global economy is and how important critical thinking is to assess governmental messages concerning tariffs and their predicted benefits. ■

*Written by Linh Chi Ngac  
master student Development  
Evaluation and Management*



## MA. Catherine Bucay DEM 2021 | Philippines

**Where are you currently living?** Currently, I am living in Antwerp, Belgium.

**Where do you work?** I am currently working as a project coordinator for UNITAR.

### **How did your IOB experience affect your career and life?**

The hard and soft skills I acquired from IOB, along with the life-changing experience of studying and living abroad, are all integral parts of my career. My time at IOB broadened my perspectives, expanded my horizons, and opened doors to new opportunities — ultimately giving me the courage to start over and rebuild my life from the ground up. I left the Philippine government as a senior staff member and began my journey with the UN as a trainee. It was a leap into the unknown — filled with uncertainties, a lot of moving, meeting new people and teams, and adapting to a different work culture — but I wouldn't have it any other way. Who would have imagined that discovering an internship opportunity through IOB's network would lead me back to the meaningful and fulfilling world of development work, this time within an international organisation?

### **Do you have some advice for incoming IOB students?**

You will never get anything wrong by doing your best — studying and working hard to achieve something, traveling while studying, making friends while studying, enjoying



while studying — all that is possible at IOB and more!

### **What current global trend or issue worries you the most about the future?**

The world today is grappling with systemic challenges — ongoing wars, deepening polarisation, international organisations losing influence and funding, shrinking development assistance, growing inequalities, and widespread exploitation...

### **What recent development or activity gives you hope for the future?**

...yet we are the ray of hope. Even the smallest actions we take make a difference. I choose to believe in humanity.

## Shirshah Amerkhail GLOB 2020 | Afghanistan-Belgium

**Where are you currently living?** I'm living in Antwerp, Belgium.

**Where do you work?** I work for Terumo Blood Cell Technologies (TBCT) as the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Manager for Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Australia. In this role, I am responsible for leading the company's sustainability strategy across these regions. My work focuses on supporting TBCT's decarbonisation roadmap, driving initiatives that reduce our environmental footprint, and ensuring that our operations comply with relevant sustainability regulations and frameworks. Terumo Blood Cell Technologies is a global leader in blood component, therapeutic apheresis, and cellular technologies, dedicated to advancing patient care through innovative and responsible solutions.



### **Can you tell us about an exciting project, programme, or idea you're currently working on?**

One of the most exciting projects I'm currently working on is leading the implementation of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) at Terumo Blood Cell Technologies. This is a major step forward in aligning our sustainability reporting practices with the upcoming EU regulatory requirements.

**How did the experience at IOB impact your life/career?** The IOB experience had a significant and lasting impact on both my personal and professional life. Academically, it deepened my understanding of global development challenges, policy frameworks, and sustainability practices, which are highly relevant to my current role.



# Alumni panel



**Adeline Uwonkunda**  
**DEM 2019 | Rwanda**

**Where are you currently living?** I am currently living in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

**Where do you currently work?**

I work for the African Development bank (AfDB) as an Evaluation officer for the Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) office.

**How did your IOB experience impact your career?**

The IOB experience has been a transformative milestone in my professional and personal journey. The advanced Master of Development Evaluation and Management provided a solid foundation in research and evaluation, equipping me with the analytical and practical skills required to navigate complex development contexts and contribute meaningfully to evidence-based decision-making.

Since graduation, I have applied the critical thinking, methodological rigour, and M&E skills gained at IOB in both my roles at the World Food Programme and now at the AfDB. IOB shaped me into a more globally minded professional, ready to engage with evolving development challenges across borders. It didn't just prepare me for a job — it launched my international career.

Beyond the technical knowledge, studying at IOB in Antwerp, in a diverse and multicultural environment broadened my global outlook and deepened my understanding of inclusive and collaborative work; qualities that are essential in international development. The exposure to peers from across the world and

the interdisciplinary approach of the programme helped shape my ability to work effectively in cross-cultural settings and adapt to evolving global dynamics.

**Do you have some advice for incoming IOB students?**

Our academic year was unique due to the pandemic, as we had to adopt a hybrid learning approach. Although your time at IOB may be different, here are a few pieces of advice from my experience:

- Be present and engaged, and take every class seriously. Try not to miss any lectures, and participate actively — it makes the course more interesting and meaningful. Since the IOB programme is structured in modules, every lesson contributes to your overall performance. Aim for a distinction — it's not just a grade; it can open doors in your future career.
- Maintaining a balance between study and life is key. Make time to rest, relax and explore! If you can, take short trips within Belgium or to nearby European countries. These experiences will leave you with unforgettable memories after the IOB programme.
- Build and maintain your network. Remember that classmates could be future colleagues, collaborators, or even supervisors. Stay in touch, support each other and nurture those relationships beyond graduation.

I hope you enjoy the journey! Remember, IOB is not just a degree, it's the beginning of a new adventure.

# Beyond words: finding my place in a language that wasn't mine

■ Written by Ezra Moise Amisi - master student of Globalisation and Development

My first time at IOB was during the introduction week, in September 2024. I was surrounded by attentive faces from all over the world, open laptops, and fast-paced academic English. I had just arrived from a Francophone university system, passionate, but a little lost in this new environment where I was desperately trying to follow, understand... mostly just survive.

Coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo, with an entirely French academic background, I knew this year would be demanding. But I hadn't anticipated just how revealing, transformative, and, let's be honest, painful it would be at times: linguistically, culturally, and emotionally.

This story life article is not a miracle guide. It's a survival story, my own. Here, I share my struggles, my strategies, and what helped me persevere, perhaps to inspire those who are about to embark on this journey.

## Personal experience

### The shock

The first weeks at IOB felt like a tunnel. Most nights were sleepless. I spent my evenings in the library, reading, translating course materials to understand better, trying to keep up with the others. I knew it would be tough and that I would need to work four times harder than those from Anglophone background to reach the same goals.

I could understand the ideas, but I couldn't express them perfectly, afraid of sounding ridiculous. My brain was thinking in French, translating word by word, and speaking a broken English, often too slow to keep up with discussions. It was frustrating.

Sometimes in class, I would laugh just because everyone else was laughing, without even knowing if the teacher had actually made a joke. All of that was just a mask, hiding my weaknesses.

The English used in an advanced master's programme is not just a language issue, it's also about academic codes. The technical concepts of development, how to structure an argument, how to cite properly, how to engage in critical discussions... it was all new to me. I still remember my first assessments at IOB during the micro and macroeconomics, statistics, and English pre-tests. I had poured my heart and energy into them, but the feedback was so disappointing that I began to feel illegitimate. I asked myself: Do I really belong here?

### The Adaptation

Slowly, I realised I didn't need to fight the system, I needed to learn how to navigate it my own way. I understood that while others could afford to rest, spend time online, walk around, attend music

events, or chat with friends, I couldn't.

So I set my own learning pace to push myself further. I was afraid of disappointing those who believed in me and that fear motivated me. I left social media, and only connected to the internet to check Blackboard. I took distance from family and friends back home we would speak only once a week, usually on Sundays, unless I was buried in assignments.

I also found allies, classmates who encouraged and helped me improve. I'm thinking especially of Brenda Guruwo, Emmanuel Iziomoh, and others... above all, my Institution, University of Antwerp, where the motto "No one is left behind" is more than just a slogan.

### The growth

After imposing a strict discipline on myself, something started to change.

I stopped translating word for word. I began thinking in English, speaking with more confidence, asking questions without fearing I'd sound silly. And I realised that my Francophone background wasn't a weakness, it was a strength: a solid foundation to focus, push beyond limits, and reach my goals. I learned that my voice, too, had a place in this global and diverse learning space.

## Reflections and advice

If I could speak to the version of myself who arrived in Antwerp that September, suitcase full of dreams, heart full of uncertainty, I would say three things: breathe, be patient with yourself, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

To those who are about to take the same path:

- Don't aim for perfection, aim for clarity. What matters at IOB are your ideas, not your accent or grammatical accuracy.
- Use all the tools and support systems offered by the university: the library, computer facilities, Linguapolis, counseling services, network, etc. take full advantage of them.
- Don't hesitate to ask for help. Don't isolate yourself from others, especially when assignments pile up. Seek allies.
- Enjoy time with others during group events organised by the university, such as the kick-off weekend, the Paris trip, or even informal visits like the one to the European Commission.
- Keep your academic identity. Your Francophone perspective is not a handicap, it's a valuable asset.
- Find your own pace and protect your well-being. Burnout is real. Breathe, sleep, laugh, talk, call your family, and relax.
- Be proud of your journey. You made it here, and that's already a huge achievement. Not everyone had this chance.



## Conclusion

Today, I look back at that silence from the first class with tenderness. It no longer symbolises fear or stress, but rather the beginning of a much broader learning journey: one about myself, about others, and about a new world.

IOB taught me much more than development theories. It taught me how to survive in a new world, how to adapt without losing myself, and above all, how to think critically about societal issues.

Ultimately, I'm convinced that, even if this text is not a guidebook,

if it can, in some way, reassure another Francophone student, whisper to them that yes, it's hard, but yes, it's possible... then it has served its purpose.

To you who are packing your bags for September, or who have just arrived: I have just one thing to say: hang in there. The experience is worth it. ■

UPCOMING  
EVENTS

# In the meantime...

## 24 June | Driving Change – Small-Scale Miners in Focus

On 24 June, IOB will host the final event of the Driving Change project, which explores how small-scale producers in the DRC can play a more active role in regulating battery-mineral supply chains. The afternoon will feature research insights, discussion paper launches, and the presentation of Who Decides? — an outreach piece co-created with artist Melissa Jina. A photography exhibition on DRC's cobalt sector will also be on display. Join us to reflect on inclusive approaches to supply chain governance.

<https://www.uantwerpen.be/drivingchange-event>



## 18 June | Ethiopia alumni Meet & Greet

Are you one of the IOB alumni based in Ethiopia? Don't miss this special Meet & Greet in Addis Ababa on 18 June, hosted by Prof. Nathalie Holvoet during the 25th Anniversary of the African Evaluation Association!

Join us to (re)connect, share experiences, and celebrate our IOB community.

Date: 18 June 2025

Location: Addis Ababa

More info & registration: <https://bit.ly/iobalumni-ethiopia-2025>

## A FAREWELL TO X

IOB has decided to stop posting on X/Twitter. This decision comes in response to the platform's ongoing changes, including shifts in its values and direction, which no longer align with our own.

We remain committed to open, respectful, and inclusive communication.

Thank you for your understanding and continued support.

### Follow our work on other platforms



IOB - University of Antwerp  
Lange St.-Annastraat 7  
2000 Antwerp

**Tel** +32 (0)3 265 57 70

**e-mail:**

[iob@uantwerpen.be](mailto:iob@uantwerpen.be)

**website:**

<https://www.uantwerpen.be/iob>

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