



**INCLUSION
INNOVATION
INDABA**

THE STORY



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LINKING & LEARNING AT THE HEART OF VOICE

Besides grant-making, Voice's main strategy is to link and learn across countries, organisations and target groups. Bringing together the work by and with People living with disabilities, Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence, Age-discriminated vulnerable groups, notably the young and the elderly, and Indigenous groups and ethnic minorities.

One of the key instruments to bring this to light and to share the highlights publicly, is the annual learning event, the Voice Indaba.

To enable linking and learning to take its rightful place at the heart of Voice, our first global call was Learning from Innovation. And to enhance national level linking and learning facilitation, the programme opened a specific call to recruit organisations and social enterprises interested in 'Making Noise for Voice'. Eight global Learning from Innovation grantees, six linking and learning facilitators already on board (covering Indonesia, Philippines, Kenya, Tanzania, and Nigeria), and Voice staff from all ten Voice focus countries¹ came together in The Hague from 15 to 18 January 2018 for the first Inclusion Innovation Indaba or I-Cube.

How it started

Our adventure started some months before the Indaba with ideas shared within Voice. Zack Lee, Linking and learning officer for Philippines and Indonesia, proposed to challenge ourselves. To innovate our way of meeting, to get out of our comfort zone and try different paths of inclusion and participation than we walked before.

Most of us never heard of an unconference before so we shared definitions and blogs (e.g. <https://blog.crisp.se/author/henrikkniberg>). So, what is an Unconference? A conference without pre-defined topics set by the organizers. An open space where participants will propose, schedule, and facilitate sessions on the spot. Only overall themes, rooms, time slots and basic materials are provided.

We got excited. It fits well with what Voice wants: to create a flexible environment where participants can freely exchange experiences, lessons learned, successes, and challenges. A format where your energy, skills, and interests can lead to surprising and spontaneous conversations.

We agreed to go for it. A small working group continued conversations and preparations. It became a mixture, with a more structured and directed first day, two unconference days followed by a public day.

We applied the 4 principles and the Law of 2 feet:

Principles:

1. Whoever comes are the right people
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened.
3. When it starts is the right time
4. When it's over it's over

Law of 2 Feet: "If you find yourself in a situation where you are not contributing or learning, move somewhere where you can."

¹ Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, and Philippines

Scary and challenging: how to create an enabling environment to allow the participants to feel free to apply the above principles and law, knowing that all are okay with this? We carefully selected the Bleyenberg as the venue; inspiring spaces, accessible and near the hotel.

We regularly discussed the set up within the linking and learning team and followed up with all grantees. Little by little we understood how different our roles are in this decentralised approach and what could be needed to create an open and creative atmosphere.

[Let's look and hear](#) what participants and Voice staff say about it!

I CUBE

Getting to know each other

On a cold Monday morning, 46 persons from 15 countries and at least 20 nationalities met in the Martinus Hall for the **Inclusion Innovation Indaba**. Wow, what a diverse group of people. Time for some BINGO!

After the introductions to the Learning Indaba were made, all of us received a BINGO chart with 15 different characteristics like experience with influencing, country where you work, etc. The game invited us to get to know each other beyond the names, to find interests we shared and paint a rich picture of the experiences and talents in the room.

Outreach and engagement

We looked at the question how different marginalised and discriminated groups can be reached most effectively, for transformative change in the groups' situation to happen.

For this session we build on the insights gained from a desk review on outreach. Ruben de Winne from the Impact Measurement and Knowledge department at Oxfam Novib, supported Voice to find out what experiences on outreach are documented and how can this support Voice in its outreach. We shared 6 key criteria (or characteristics) organisations should apply for effective outreach to marginalized groups:

1. Established relationships with its target groups;
2. Extensive network of contacts with other organizations active in the thematic/geographical area (to be able to link target groups to other resources, if necessary and appropriate);
3. Grant-making skills and a proven grants strategy;
4. Effective organisational capacity and infrastructure to manage money and contingency (as processes and situations have an open and unpredictable character);
5. Excellent relationship management capacity;
6. Be engaged with the cause of and respectful for the target groups.

We added to this a few working principles for the outreaching agency to maximize its effectiveness:

⇒ Approach possible target groups in a respectful & tailor-made way:

- collect accurate data about its target groups to maximize its understanding of their needs;
- know the issues and attributes unique to the respective target groups;
- make sure communication and services are as culturally and language -specific as possible;
- use media appropriate to specific communities when delivering information;
- hire staff from the communities it is trying to engage and involve them during interactions as much as possible;

- keep geography in mind, by locating and delivering activities and services proximate to the target groups it is trying to reach.
- ⇒ Seek and maintain a relationship with the target group that is based on equality.
- ⇒ Be aware of how the target group perceives the outreach activity.

Participants indicated what criteria and principles they are currently applying in their outreach work and what works well and what could be done different. Discussion followed these individual stories. This session added a partner perspective to the data on outreach gathered from the country teams and in the review. Nothing about us without us or ‘peer-led’ outreach shows to be an important success factor to reach marginalised groups and members of highly discriminated groups in society. Some examples, by [Tung, MCNV](#), and [Lee Mondry, Positive Vibes](#).

THE “UNCONFERENCE”

Learning from innovation

The day started with an agenda creation activity where all global grantees proposed a session they wanted to facilitate during one of the 8 available slots in the morning. This was very exciting and created a vibe to get the best room and best time slot. After short, convincing pitches of proposed sessions, remaining participants choose where to go. After lunch, there was a short agenda setting activity again. The afternoon breakout sessions also offered an opportunity for participants to go deeper into discussions cut short during the morning or come up with a new idea.

We ended the day with a gathering session where all could share what they learned and experienced during the day.

The global grantees were asked to prepare a session that would touch upon at least one of their own **learning questions** around innovation in approaches, inclusive and innovative ways to influence, how to turn multi stakeholder initiatives and alliances more inclusive, and ways to learn and promote uptake of lessons and successes at a broader scale.

Participants were left free to choose how they wanted to bring their experience; through experiential learning, a skill-sharing workshop, or a discussion-based activity. Inviting other participants to engage with the activity of their choice. Some participants choose consciously for sessions with a target group they wanted to learn more about. For some it was their first opportunity to engage directly. Others joined sessions working with similar approaches or in similar circumstances, to learn with peers to enrich their own practice.

By the end of the day, all embraced the informal sphere of the “unconference” and the chance to guide their own learning. The global grantees each told their stories in their own way, as reflected in the visual notes taken during the day (see annex 1).



The reflections highlighted for instance the need to find suitable ways to transmit a story and how to use it. In restricted contexts a shadow play can work to give voice, tell a story, and start a conversation. People feel safe behind the screen. Another option is theatre drama: 'It is easier to take on a role than to be yourself'. Photo Voice and Photo Exhibition can be used to give a snapshot on the struggles of acceptance and inclusion, the issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights that marginalised and discriminated communities, such as the LGBTIQ community or Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence, face in their daily lives.

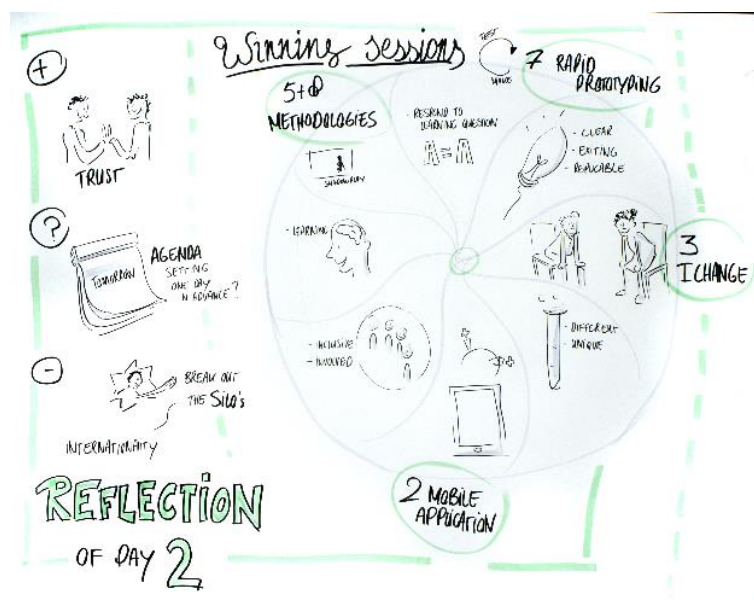
These methods do not necessarily attempt to solve the problems raised but they provide an opportunity for the Voice groups to have their voices heard, share their live stories, raise awareness on the issues to the public and policy makers and reach out to other marginalised groups without jeopardizing their safety.

Another means is participatory video: after simple instructions people use their smartphones or tablets to make videos of their life or on a theme they want others to know about.

Furthermore, the group reflected on the use of (mobile) technology or other more appropriate methodologies to reach those who are not yet reached: reach the unreached. To be able to do so, it is key to understand the persons concerned – put yourself in their shoes, get to know your persona². What do you know? What do you assume? The more precise the better. A persona can evolve over time, so you can confirm and review assumptions you base your work on over time. It also helps to decide what channel to use, more ‘traditional’ communication or new technology, or, as was often reported, smart combinations of both.

The deeper knowledge of the target audience and the context they operate in, will help decide what influencing strategy to choose. Examples were shared of loud and visible up to silent action and diplomacy. Yet, all use expression, and tell stories.

We used the dot-democracy (each participant has equal votes/dots) to select four presentations for the workshops on the public day.



² Persona -the aspect of someone's character that is presented to or perceived by others

Inclusive and participatory approaches to advocate and lobby

What makes an approach inclusive and participatory and valuable to work with challenging groups? Do they support working in an empowering and transformative way? Why, how? What makes working with different media and working with art & culture accessible to many? These facets were explored during the third day of the Indaba.

Putting the **HOW** central.

It was again a vibrant day with even more people feeling empowered to share their stories and to critically reflect on the value and advantages of different ways of working. Significant lessons are integrated in the chapter What we learned. To unleash our creativity further, the reflection in groups at the end of the day translated into some collective drawings.

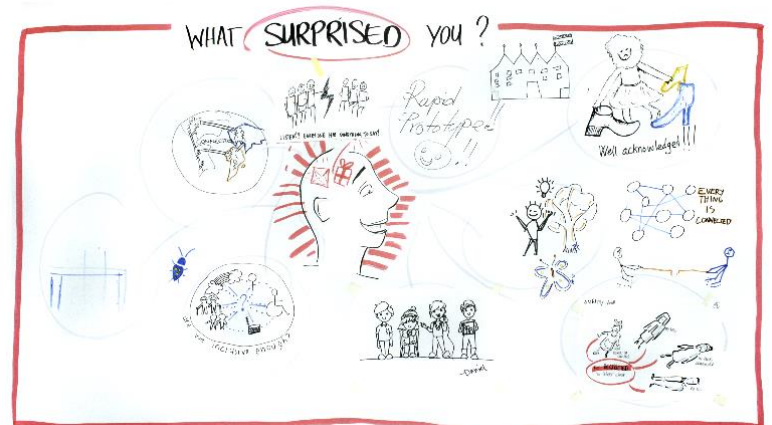
We share two of them here.



The groups reflected on:

- What elements make the approach and tools inclusive and participatory?
- To what extend are these elements context specific?
- Elements of innovative, non-traditional lobby and advocacy tools and strategies
- Any unusual suspects or interesting alliances?
- What was surprising?

The specific and generally complex situation Voice target groups live and work in require context specific interventions, and preferably small scale. However, scale up is possible based on key elements and characteristics like identified during the Indaba. Personalised approaches, the use of art and culture, inclusive facilitation and bringing out personal stories have proven essential to empowerment and voice of most marginalised and/or discriminated people.



THE PUBLIC EVENT

Participation in the public event was challenged by the heaviest storm in many years. Yet, 93 people came together for the first Voice Inclusion Innovation Indaba ([click for programme](#)). Representatives of the Voice target groups, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Voice Advisory Board, (International) NGOs, and the “unconference” participants.

The day started with two inspiring speeches. In his opening words, Bart Romijn, the Chairman of the Voice Advisory Board, proposed to add one more “I” to the Inclusion Innovation Indaba, the “I” for Inspiration! Looking forward to the stories of the marginalised and discriminate people around the world “fire in the belly”, here represented, Bart Romijn also mentioned the Advisory Boards’ discussion about the longer-term evolution of Voice: extending the partnerships and finding links with media to transfer the outcomes of Voice’ work; link up with the broader Civil Society agenda and shrinking civic space discussion; and further understanding of (self-) exclusion within the Leave No One Behind platform.

To Tjoelker, Head of the Civil Society Division (DS/MO) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, key note speaker, underlined the inspiration coming from stories and experiences from grantees, and how humbling it is to listen to their struggling with shrinking space, taboos, difficult and complex situations.

The Dialogue and Dissent policy framework aims to strengthen local organisations to hold governments to account, to influence, lobby and advocate. With a strong focus on the independent role of Civil Society and enhanced role of the southern organisations. Individual and collective stories of dialogue and dissent will show what kind of change and results we are altogether working on.

Marinke van Riet, Voice Programme Manager, introduced what we do and how we integrate the Nothing About Us Without Us in our activities. One big learning is that what unites us is much bigger than what divides us!



Four breakout sessions facilitated by the ‘Learning from Innovation’ grantees, offered an impression of the unconference way of working and the innovative and creative methods developed or applied for empowerment and influencing. The session facilitated by MCNV and partners focused on [innovative communication methods](#) applied to raise awareness on problems faced by LGBTIQ communities. Shadow plays, people acting in shadows without speaking, show successful in telling personal stories and addressing difficult situations.

Research into existing Multi Stakeholder Initiatives showed they are not inclusive. The project introduced “Rapid prototyping”, a user-centred design technique, to better incorporate perspectives from and serve the needs of participants from marginalised communities. A simulation exercise gave participants a first-hand experience.

#itheChange engaged those who attended their session the same way they engage youth in conflict with the law: playing interactive games. Fun games for young people, to catch their attention, come to terms with their past and think in possibilities for their livelihood.

And the fourth breakout group looked at the use of mobile apps developed to engage vulnerable young people like drug users, HIV+ youth, Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Trans gender and Intersex persons through

games, quizzes, and stories with questions around their (sexual reproductive) health and to support their contact with (specialised) health services. The data and stories gathered help to get the inside story and better understand its users.

The vibrant energy from the group sessions came together in the Voice Pop Up, a small market where anyone could meet up, ask questions, and learn with the other; where organisations shared their stories through photo collages, videos, games, publications, or an inspiring conversation.

The afternoon started with an Inclusion Game facilitated by Light for the World. Teams worked on the challenge to find immediate, creative solutions to enable three persons with various disabilities access public health services within a limited period. At the same time, suggestions for long term solutions were given with the help of resource cards. Conversations about how best to respect the dignity of the person living with disability led to more ideas that strengthen their independence. Solutions aimed at better (physical) access, communication, and most importantly, a positive attitude of health staff and people around.

The Indaba continued with the Town hall **Everybody Matters**, a conversation on the reality and challenges around Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), disability & gender identity. The title referring to the book jointly published by Dutch Coalition on Disability and Development and Sharenet. Lambert Grijns, SRHR Ambassador, and Nidhi Goyal, stand-up comedian and activist on sexuality and disability, shared their views on the integration of SRHR in UN conventions and legal frameworks, the role of humour in breaking down the barriers of sexuality and disability, and statistics and experiences relating to Voice target groups. To energise the Town hall, a Participoll was done. Guests could join the poll through a mobile app. The statements covered topics like sexual activity of people living with a disability (as high as their non-disabled peers), the level of sexual violence faced by young people with disability (young women between 40 to 68 %!), criminalisation of same sex relations (72 states), and other realities of Voice target groups.

To get a lively image of the atmosphere and interaction during the Indaba, have a look at [these pictures](#) and [this video](#).



WHAT WE LEARNED

We experienced the effect of an “unconference” setup, new to most of us. Below some reactions and reflections on how the Indaba contributed to a rich space for sharing.

And in this space, amazing stories on what worked well and what didn't. Participants experienced the effect of different approaches, reflected on similar challenges, and got inspired how these can be overcome. Experiences of participating organisations provoked new ideas, alternative solutions and initiatives for further collaboration.

Learning on the Indaba “unconference” approach

The chosen decentralised setup led to a different learning environment than the “usual” conference or workshop setup. The experience was well received, as expressed by the Indaba participants:

1. There was space for all: All themes and groups were able to present and discuss what they were bringing or what came up on the spot, like the debate on LGBTI.
2. The unconference enabled people to come out of their silos.
3. There was a lot of trust from all sides, and flexibility. Therefore, it was possible to immediately respond to the suggestions to do agenda setting day before and to vote for the top 4 who would be presenting without a feeling that people were left out.
4. It was highlighted that despite being a heterogeneous group, those elements that unite us are much greater than what divides us
5. Voice is taking steady steps towards amplifying a collective story on exclusion and inclusion

The Indaba confirmed expected benefits of the “unconference” approach. We noticed a

- **Higher energy level.** The fact that everybody was actively engaged and focusing on issues that matter to them created a wonderful dynamic and vibrant atmosphere.
- **Less up-front planning.** Although the work to create favourable conditions became even more important, there was much less investment needed in creating a detailed agenda ahead of time.
- **More flexibility.** As mentioned above, the feedback and appreciation received from the participants confirmed space for unexpected topics, adaptation to what is emerging in the moment and high satisfaction of the participants with the outcome of the conference.
- **Spontaneous conversations.** We have seen so many of these! Spontaneous alliances to organise sessions, informal conversations during and in between activities, constant mixing of people who don't normally meet or work together. The open and safe space that was created definitely encouraged the participants to get to know each other, exchange knowledge, and build trust.

The above was supported by highly valued elements such as the powerful practice of deep listening, the interest shown in individuals, and the connection with peers allowing to look for commonalities and similarities.

Furthermore, the use of conducive methodologies to share personal stories, where the storyteller decides what is shared and how. It allowed for a deep insight in the work and live of the participating people and their communities and for sharing stories touching our hearts.

It was a **ROLLERCOASTER** – lots of surprises, fast paced, intense, great, and exhausted

HUMBLED— at how well the grantees turned ideas into real learning experiences

DIVERSITY – I was positively overwhelmed by the people from such diverse background. Also grateful for the great acceptance



Learning on inclusion and innovation

- Even with the greatest legislation and laws in favour of LGBTI(Q), more work must be done at the grassroots level to change people's attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions to achieve the change we are aiming for.
- Inclusion needs our constant attention and effort. At the one hand the inclusion game showed that a lot can be done to increase inclusion both at the spot and at the longer term. It all starts with our attitude and

flexibility. Respect for the dignity of all people and acceptance of our differences is leading in this. On the other hand, inclusion asks for conscious changes to our ways of working and joint action and influencing for legislation and resources to enable all to participate fully in society.

- The experiences shared underline the importance of actions led by those concerned. Nothing About Us Without Us might seem another fashionable expression linked to the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, it is key to the marginalised and discriminated population. Experiences of Voice grantees confirm the impact of people taking the lead in the changes they need to improve their participation and to create necessary conditions to live their life fully.
- Personalisation has been a recurrent aspect in the approaches and methodologies presented. Whether in the innovative approach around empowerment, self-esteem and personal change like [looking in, looking out](#), the transforming use of [User personas and User stories](#) to get to understand the goals, motivations and needs of our target audience, [playing games with youth](#), or increasing the effect of advocacy for indigenous people's access to land or respect for sexual and gender identities in South East Asia. All these approaches centre on getting the personal story out. Accepting people as they are, seeing people more fully and building any intervention on increased knowledge and insights in the different perspectives. Underlining the need to invest time and resources for this.
- Activism – art as activism, activism as art – artistic expression has shown a strong feature building self-esteem and enabling people to find their voice. It enhances the success of people-led advocacy, to share personal stories and package a message in a creative and accessible manner. Making use of different media and technology. Able to touch people's hearts and bridge the gap created by different perspectives, different ways to see the world.
- Distilled lessons surfaced during the Indaba have been nicely summarised by our grantees in an inspiring [blog post](#)³.

“A person from a deprived environment would say, ‘there’s no opportunity’. But in reality, there would always be opportunities along the way. The youth, themselves, are the capital, and their environment is their opportunity.”

~ Voice grantee, quoted during the annual learning indaba

“Inclusivity is not something natural because it is not MY lived experience. This mentality poses as a challenge in the attitude of people without disability towards People with Disabilities”

~ Voice grantee, quoted during the annual learning indaba

³ Outcomes, publication material and follow-up actions of the first annual learning indaba will be outlined in detail in the next reporting period