

# The Applied Improvisation Network D&C Days Report



### Introduction

This report summarizes some key experiences, reflections, questions and suggestions for both The Applied Improvisation Network (AIN) and BRACED based on my experience of supporting some of the design and facilitation of the December 5-6, 2015 Development & Climate Days. Please note that these are my personal reflections and don't necessarily represent the views of AIN or other parties. The intention is to capture lessons learned, and to help us improve events going forward. I have captured feedback on each part of the conference with the hopes to aid in increasing interactivity for this event and others. Partners shared the vision for the usefulness and importance of interactivity for D&C Days and acted on this vision to varying degrees. It is my intention to have this report support the argument to increase interactivity for these events across the BRACED partnership.

### Some highlights from this report

- Practical, well-designed and skillfully facilitated interactivity helped people at D&C Days to engage with the information and each other in a deep, profound way.
- Interactivity needs help from all parties to be re-framed as vital and integral. The language of 'energizers' and 'ice breakers' keep the interactivity in the frame of a 'nice to have' instead of part of the content/process.
- Despite partners' expressed interest in making D&C Days interactive, some panelists and speakers still preferred to use powerpoint and to convey information in a unidirectional format.

### A: Before the event

In the lead up to this event, multiple brainstorming, planning and negotiating meetings took place between various AIN members (notably Paul Z Jackson, Barbara Tint, and closer to the event, me), and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre (with Pablo Suarez and Carina Bachofen). Barbara Tint and I also attended two session-specific brainstorming calls to support Dr. Saleemul Huq, founder of D&C Days, currently with the IIED, and Edith Ofwana from the IDRC. Shortly after I was formally chosen to be the on site facilitator by the AIN Selection committee, Edith contacted me to request that I co-facilitate with her, and Saleemul requested that I aid in design for his session (these two sessions happened simultaneously on the Sunday). Carina also asked if I could help with the opening session on the Saturday, and with the design and co-facilitation of the Lightning Talks on the Sunday, and at the last minute to help with the opening on Sunday as the intended presenter was unexpectedly unavailable.

### A few things that became clear during this aspect of the work:

- People from the D&C Days central planning committee are super nice, work naturally and to a large degree in a 'solutions focused' way naturally, and are good

at accepting and building on each other's ideas. These people already embody improvisation a lot, even if not by name.

- There is a pervasive understanding of interactive activities as 'fun', 'ice breakers' and 'energizers'. The idea that these methods can also be an integral part of the learning, and help us to process information better, is new to many partners (outside of the RCCC). Most of them are open to this idea, but language and framing sometimes slips which potentially diminishes our contribution in small ways, especially during the event itself. The good news is that the partners are very open to feedback. And it is also up to us to clearly show the relevance of each interaction and to support partners to build their capacity to recognize the relevance of each interaction.
- Each session was PACKED with speaker presentations, and for a few sessions, there was confusion about how much time was available. Some designed for 90 minutes only to realize late that they in fact had 75 minutes. With five funding partners and limited time-frames, it is a challenge to design a consistently interactive program.



On Friday, Dec 4 2015 I had a prep meeting with Edith Ofwana and Nicole Lulham from the IDRC, as well as Andrew Kruczkiewicz from Columbia University/Red Cross about our D&C Days session on Sunday. The meeting was very practical and enjoyable. We all worked together to brainstorm how to design the session around the 5 speakers so we could have maximum engagement. It was a thrill to see Le Bourget where the COP21 was taking place. Our meeting was held in the Generations space, which was open to the public. Interesting how 'in the middle of nowhere' the COP21 was, and what a challenge it was to get in and out of.

**B: During the event**

**B.1: Saturday Observations with Improv Eyes**

Part of day	Worked well	Room for improvement	How AIN helped
Introduction	<p>Good confident, warm start by Carina. Great to be included right up front with the opening activity. Used 1-2-3 and connected it with behaviours that would help participants during these two days. We also introduced the 'waving hands' method of getting people's attention back. The speaker thanked both Carina and me by name, which was a nice acknowledgement. Also, a photo of Carina and me was put on the RCCC website the same day.</p>	<p>The interaction was framed: "before we start". The intention was to clarify that the speaker mentioned in the program would come next, but the effect could also be to separate the interactivity from the work instead of being part of it.</p>	<p>The 'waving hands' was used throughout the two days as a way to get people's attention back. Carina's choice to have me lead 1-2-3 meant AIN set the intended tone for the two days.</p>
<p>Session 1: Zero poverty Zero Emissions</p>	<p>Deeply knowledgeable speakers.</p> <p>There was one particularly engaging presenter who structured his presentations with 3 key easy takeaways.</p>	<p>The other speakers did not include interactions with audience and the energy gained from 1-2-3 was completely lost. One speaker was eloquent, but did not include visuals for those of us who are not auditory learners. Having a few visual slides to highlight their points would have helped tremendously. Also, even asking a few rhetorical questions and/or having short table discussions on useful things we've heard between/during speakers would have helped.</p>	<p>No input other than our observations.</p>

Part of day	Worked well	Room for improvement	How AIN helped
Session 2: The coming energy transition	The session facilitator used some nice techniques to engage the audience, including asking us questions and getting us to vote, allowing for dissent, and brief table discussions.	The facilitator used the hands up/mouths closed technique that I had introduced. This indicated that as a next step, we need to be very clear when introducing a technique to include what 'good' looks like as well as pitfalls. We can also brief leads on this technique ahead of time and build their confidence for using it. Mic techniques varied greatly. It might help to add an engaging primer on how to use microphones, as well as have some audience participation symbol if the mic technique is off and people can't hear.	No input other than our observations.
Lunch and breaks	Lunch and breaks were well designed and ran smoothly, allowing for lots of interaction.	Apparently, some volunteers were very focused on their task of returning people to plenary and did not appreciate that some people did not want to attend certain sessions and wanted to continue talking. This was quickly discussed and rectified.	Invited by Carina, I suggested that volunteers hold up a sign with how many minutes left and ring a bell.

Part of day	Worked well	Room for improvement	How AIN helped
<p>Sessions 3A, 3B, 3C, and 3D</p> <p>*I attended Pablo's sessions 3B: Adaptation and Finance: Participatory Games to learn and explore options</p>	<p>Pablo is so masterful at using improv games and creating a narrative at each point to anchor the experience to the content. Some things he did:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Re-enforced waving hands as a way to get the attention back - and extended the narrative by having people be potted plants and the waving hands being flowers. And adding that if someone is still talking, wave your flowers in their face to bring silence to the room quickly and respect your colleague.</li> <li>-Used 1 to 7 as a moving storm, and any mistakes were forced migration.</li> <li>- Did scaling and room geography.</li> <li>- Gave people the opportunity to ask their own questions</li> <li>- Practiced a numbers game that he would run later in the conference (with different content) Complicated, but it worked.</li> </ul>	<p>In the scaling about content, he put me at zero as I was 'from the theatre and had no idea'. It was meant playfully, but made me an outsider when my content knowledge was unclear.</p> <p>At the closing circle, women got cut off by men twice and this was not picked up (we were running a bit late and the emphasis was on closing quickly).</p> <p>The numbers game at the tables with teams had a good message about exposing our ignorance or knowledge about something, but was based on something that a participant chose and then immediately discredited as 'not the real number', which was disheartening to then use as a basis for our game. Perhaps better to use a number that you know is accurate instead of pick from the group.</p>	<p>Gave Pablo feedback after session.</p>

Part of day	Worked well	Room for improvement	How AIN helped
<p>Session 4: Radical Adaptation - far reaching and far-sighted</p>	<p>The opening session had nice slides.</p> <p>The title was enticing.</p>	<p>This session followed a more conventional powerpoint/speaker speaking to audience approach that did not include any interaction. AIN support could have helped make this format more exciting and interactive, as we did for other sessions.</p> <p>After the opening, one speaker had technology problems with videos having loud feedback sounds. The speaker was new and could have been supported earlier in taking the decision to summarize the video content for us.</p> <p>The videos too could have been tested ahead of time. The technical sound person was doing their best to optimize the situation but just couldn't fix it. I left to go into the staff room for a break.</p> <p>Apparently the final speaker was very animated and good.</p>	<p>No input other than our observations.</p>
<p>Closing remarks</p>	<p>Good confident speaker.</p>	<p>Can't remember specifics from this closing though I think it went well.</p>	<p>No input other than our observations.</p>

Part of day	Worked well	Room for improvement	How AIN helped
Coverage	Same day coverage with a picture of me and Carina leading 1-2-3 and an article. <a href="http://climatecentre.org/news/664/development-and-climate-days-underway-in-paris-alongside-pivotal-cop-21-climate-talks">http://climatecentre.org/news/664/development-and-climate-days-underway-in-paris-alongside-pivotal-cop-21-climate-talks</a>	The original caption was that I was from AIN doing 'Ice breakers'. When I told Pablo, he told me how to change it instantly to this ' <i>Belina Raffy of the <a href="#">Applied Improvisation Network</a> conducts a quick skills practice session to open the 13th D&amp;C Days workshop alongside the UN climate talks in Paris. Its theme is <a href="#">Zero Poverty. Zero Emissions</a>: Tough talk on poverty and climate. (Photo: Alex Wynter/Climate Centre)</i> '	I facilitated, at the prompting of Carina, the opening session skills practice of 1-2-3, which made for a good picture and way to describe how D&C Days is different from other COP events.

**B.2: Sunday Observations with Improv Eyes**

Part of day	Worked well	Room for improvement	How AIN helped
Session 6: Opening and Welcome	At the last minute, I was asked to add an interactive piece to open as the planned poem reader was unable to arrive on time. We did a simultaneous clap piece, which led to an applause crescendo to welcome the main speaker. Raised the energy a lot.	I was rather surprised by both needing to do the activity last minute and the crescendo of simultaneous clapping - I did not anchor it into practical 'working together' to tackle our enormous challenges but did raise the energy of the room.	On hand last minute to fill in for an absent speaker and deliver an impromptu activity.
Session 7: Lightning Talks	Worked well. Very interactive. Process broken down into bite-sized chunks for the large room. Facilitated very interactive discussions and a good harvest. Ensured a balance of table host presentations, table participant discussions and whole-table harvest.	Ran out of time. Was initially 3 rounds (and people were counting on this) and cut down to two as timing for the morning was running late. The shift from 3 to 2 was only decided when the second round was in full swing and the focus became to add the twitter activity. Announcing the change in the number of rounds was left out.	I helped to design the session with Carina and Fran. Suggested that they group the 20 topics in the room into 3 zones. I also facilitated the process of the world cafe and introduced a Twitter activity at the end - low and high tech to support the event's social media and harvest.

Part of day	Worked well	Room for improvement	How AIN helped
<p>Session 8: Taste the Change: An experiential approach to rethink our climate choices through food</p>	<p>Stunning idea for a session - linked to what we need to do and what lines we are willing to cross. Very experiential and directly linked with our personal involvement. Good mix of data and activity. I ate bugs! Great choice to have Oliver Morton from the Economist and chef Pierre Thiam - both were very engaging. Pablo facilitated well. The food was delicious. Great to have the hot fresh food in addition to the pre-prepared. Genius to put it right before lunch.</p>	<p>The audio was not great, partially due to mic technique. I was in the back and often had trouble hearing.</p> <p>Good invitation to launch 'taste the challenge' but it got confused by a split focus. We were invited to make our own video, but then the room was invited to hear the video creations of others (e.g. Saleemul Huq) and then we moved on with no space for us to take up the invitation on creating the videos with the food in front of us.</p>	<p>I ate bugs. No other input other than feedback. (See page 13 for pictures).</p>
<p>Lunch and breaks</p>	<p>Nicely managed.</p>		<p>The disco ball was engaged in helping signal that the break was coming to a close. My suggestion :)</p>

<b>Part of day</b>	<b>Worked well</b>	<b>Room for improvement</b>	<b>How AIN helped</b>
<p>Session 9B: Success of climate and development - adaptation in Least Developed Countries</p>	<p>I was not in this session but I heard from Dr. Saleemul Huq afterwards that it worked well.</p>		<p>I asked Paul &amp; Barbara for ideas of things to do in rows and attended a pre-session meeting where I suggested an interactive approach for Saleemul which allowed people to repeat the previous person's word and add their own as part of sense-making.</p>

Part of day	Worked well	Room for improvement	How AIN helped
<p>Session 9D: Institutionalising climate information services for impact at scale</p>	<p>The speakers were engaging. Edith was a delight to work with. The design to have table-based interactivity during and in between speakers helped to keep energy and focus high. It helped that they had all experienced a similar process in the Lightning Talks earlier that day. Also starting this session with a room geography activity to see how many people were interested in the different phases of institutionalising climate information services was useful - as well as having them discuss in pairs what their expectations were.</p>	<p>3 main points: 1) Having 3 different flip charts on each table (for the three different phases represented in the talks) - and each divided up into four sections - was ambitious and on reflection a bit too complex. Next time I recommend one table wide flip chart to capture ideas during and in between talks. 2) We also had a prestigious moderator who we thought was no longer involved in the session show up an hour before - so we had to adapt to include him and a bit of this was bumpy as he did not know the process of the session or the 'to-the-minute' timing of it. 3) In the room geography and expectations - I was facilitating, but it really needed someone with content expertise (e.g. Edith) to be my 'wing person' or the lead facilitator to respond to the content of the expectations.</p>	<p>Barbara &amp; I had a skype meeting with Carina, Edith, Nicole and a few others to discuss possibilities. Edith and I had a few more emails back and forth, and then we met on Friday as mentioned earlier in this report. I co-facilitated with Edith.</p>

Part of day	Worked well	Room for improvement	How AIN helped
Session 10: High-Level Closing Panel	Simon Maxwell ran this incredibly prestigious panel - and included voting and comments from the floor with roaming mics. He also prioritised the time with Mary Robinson (who had to leave early) well.	None.	No other input other than feedback and me making a remark in plenary about the need to frame these issues in terms of what we want that was picked up by the Assistant Secretary General for Climate Change Janos Pasztor.
Session 11: Closing remarks and cocktail reception	It was lovely to be greeted with snacks and drinks in a relaxed atmosphere.	It was odd that after they had 'let us go', they interrupted us with a talk releasing a report. This could have been done in the plenary room before drinks.	No other input other than feedback.



Me eating edible insects in Pablo's Taste the Change Challenge session. How far are you willing to go for achieving zero poverty and zero emissions? :) P.S. - the bugs were surprisingly tasty.

## **C: Post Event**

It would be great to have a Skype meeting with BRACED to go through this report and their thoughts/feedback.

## **D: Tips for future AIN facilitators at BRACED**

### **Some things I noticed for this trip that might be useful for you:**

- You will need to improvise on many levels, be it dealing gracefully with last minute changes to meetings, sessions, timings, etc.
- The degree of difficulty for basic self-care was unexpectedly difficult. My hotel was in a food desert and had strict restaurant opening times that I kept missing. Bring snacks and make sure you eat well as the days are very long (and incredibly rewarding, but long.)
- The recommended hotel was in a rough neighbourhood and I was making my way back late by myself which didn't feel great. Perhaps ask to stay at the same hotel as other D&C Days people or enjoy having an AIN buddy as support.
- The upfront outlay of expenses for me was over £600 (which will be reimbursed, but just to let you know). And this was for neighbouring Paris. Not sure what the expenses will be like for the next project or how AIN should/could handle supporting this upfront expense. I was given half of the fees upfront to help offset expenses.

### **Some things I noticed about design & facilitating that might be useful for you:**

- You will be invited to time everything out to the minute, and invariably timings will shift, sessions will start late, etc. Be ready to let go and roll with it smoothly.
- See if interactivity can really be designed in as an integral part versus an afterthought.
- Even simple interactions add so much to the energy and information processing in the room.
- Make every move count - have it be fun and very linked with practical stuff.
- Watch Pablo - he is really masterful at taking the games we are familiar with and weaving practical and related narratives to each piece of an activity.
- Don't let them pigeon-hole us as 'ice breakers' or 'energizers'.

## **E: Questions/Ideas for next time**

- Business cards - should we make nice AIN Business Cards? Should we bring our own? Both? What is the best way to do this? I did not have any business cards with me, but gathered some.
- What is the policy for people who want to work with me as a result of the event? Each time I introduced myself, I mentioned that I was there representing The Applied Improvisation Network. But for example, for a few London-based people, I also mentioned that I am running Sustainable Stand Up - which is something I do apart from AIN and which is different. For requests about events and applied improv - I would go

back to our group for a ruling. For Sustainable Stand Up - that feels ok for me to go direct with those people. And I don't know if that's right or not.

- There were a number of bad microphone technique moments by speakers at the event. People holding it wrong or moving their head and not having the mic track their mouths. See if you can get in there and help.
- It strikes me that the use of MeetingSphere - an information platform, might be super useful for these types of events. I've used it a number of times for the Thrivable World Quest, and once for a project with the Maryland Green Building Council. It is amazing for realtime collaborative brainstorming, polling, and organizing of data.  
[www.meetingsphere.com](http://www.meetingsphere.com) Let me know if you'd like a connection with the CEO Steve Bather.