

Sara Farley: Good morning!

As [Decora 00:00:10] said, my name is Sara Farley. I run the Global Knowledge Initiative, and I am joined by three incredible leaders of institutions distinguished by their pursuit of a culture of innovation.

[00:00:30] So what we are going to do in the next 40 minutes is probe into what that means. What is a culture of innovation for those organizations that seek to pursue it. Why? What's the value proposition? How do we actually do it? And then maybe talk a little bit about the future, where the industry is headed.

This will be fast. We only have 40 minutes. We won't be doing Q&A with the audience but I encourage any of you to pounce on the panelists and myself if you have additional questions or want to take the conversation further.

[00:01:00] So, let's hop right in. What's the "why" here? For those organizations that do this, that invest in building this culture of innovation, what's the value proposition? Why don't we start with you, Seema?

Seema Patel: Sure. For my organization, USAID, and I'm speaking from a founder's perspective, and one of the things that really strikes me is just the change in the financial flows in the industry. So overseas development assistance being 3 percent of the overall global flows of private and public sources of capital means we have to be very smart about that 3 percent. We have to be thinking much more meaningfully about how does our investment catalyze the investment of others. How does it test new approaches that can build the evidence base for government and private sector to get behind opportunities and inventions that can actually create a more equitable world. And that requires us to be really mindful about not only how we invest that money, but who and how we partner to really think about the long term gain there, and it opens up spaces for us to be more mindful about creating business processes then enable that kind of collaboration.

[00:02:00] The other piece that I like to think about also is 21st century challenges and opportunities. We have complexity in this world, wicked problems, and the world moves faster and faster with technology and data revolution. I think that means that we have to be much more mindful as funders to get out of our older, long-term models and start to think much more adaptively about how to respond to that complexity and volatility. We have to stop thinking about technical solutions and start thinking about complex solutions or a variety of solutions that can work in integrated fashions and all of that means we can't be working "business as usual." We have to think outside of the silos and assumptions we've made about how we organize our work and our organizations for trying to deliver that impact.

[00:03:00] On the opportunity side though, there's so many new actors coming into the development space. You've probably heard it all day yesterday. We've got entrepreneurs, we've got start ups, we've got private capital investors that are all trying to think about their role in the world and how they actually use the

capabilities they have to make a positive impact. And I think that ability to work with those new players opens up our mindset: more divergent thinking, new business models. That really means that we need to think and operate differently to be able to take advantage of those things.

Sara Farley: Yup.

[00:03:30]

Seema Patel: And information flow is faster. We have digital information, evidence in research, and access through technology to people that were hard to get connected to. And that means our ability to be adaptive and flexible by taking in that information, making better decisions is there. It's at our fingertips in we invest and really take it seriously ...

Sara Farley: Right.

Seema Patel: As and organization.

[00:04:00]

So those are some of the "why's". The contextual world is changing, our opportunities are changing, and our capabilities to collaborate and solve problems differently is changing but we need to change in order to really take advantage of those trends.

Sara Farley: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

So thriving through these drivers, both internal and external, is creating the impulse, but what does it actually look like?

Ben Kumpf, UNDP, from your perspective, when you lift the roof off of an institution that is thriving in terms of embedding this culture of innovation, what do you see? What does this look like?

[00:04:30]

Ben Kumpf: I love your optimistic outlook that we are thriving in a culture of innovation. It started really with a bottom-up approach and essentially investing in country-level experiments. The thinking of, if we provide the evidence that embracing new technologies and the merging approaches leads to better results, reaches more people, is more cost effective, that will have spill over effects in the whole system, which is UNDP. We'll get to, on the one hand, mainstream such approaches, but also get to a more adult state.

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So we are a little startup of eight people, currently, as a core team globally, with just two in New York. But if you would take away our team today, you'd still have a thriving innovation culture because this country offers colleagues and most of them are not hired for innovation. They are government specialists, climate change specialists. But I guess it's not only the merit of our team, but partially, I guess, through the combination of inspiration and insurgency and motivating people to essentially formulate a hypothesis in their current line of work and then invest and

[00:05:30] testing a new approach, documenting it.

So when you take the lid off what does it look like, we invest a lot in ... We started with people, moved from investing individuals and investing in teams. We invest in the leadership side, working with HR, having huge pillars in innovation for leadership trainings. We sit with the people who rewrite or write our programmatic rules to embed innovation there, experimentation guidelines.

[00:06:00] And what it also looks like is we get behind four doors and we map the system. Who are players that we need to influence, who are blockers, who are neutral, who are supporters, who influence us, who and how can we hack that system? Because what we see in our organization is ... And I'm an activist. I believe in bottom-up, but it only goes so far in government or in multilateral, probably also in bilateral, you need the top-down support. And if you don't have that dedicatedly, you have to invest in people who influence the top and somehow get them converted.

[00:06:30] And I'll close with, in my perception, the element of incentives is super important.

Sara Farley: Yeah. Yeah.

Ben Kumpf: There's this quote where the CEO decides to measure accountants and there's a [marriage to that 00:06:39]. And this is something that we haven't been fully able to address yet, which also has then large implications for USAID. We are governed by an executive board of our member states. We are influenced by our donors and they want to see delivery rates, which is understandable, but is sometimes an impediment to innovation because it dictates linear planning and delivery against outputs for delivery for the next four years.

[00:07:00]

Sara Farley: Yeah.

Ben Kumpf: So I'll stop there.

Sara Farley: Yeah! Well, let's pick one of the important points you raised, which is this idea of incentives. What are the incentives we need to bring into our institutions to foster this culture of innovation? And I'm curious for you, Mark Viso, coming from Pact, what is it you are using in terms of the tools, the incentives, the policies, and other measures to actually root this culture of innovation successfully?

[00:07:30]

Mark Viso: Yeah, I like this topic we're on about why because I think at the end of the day, if we can figure that out and allow people to answer that themselves in a fairly convincing, compelling way, that's the key. I have to beg your forgiveness, I'm going to speak from an ignorant, ill-informed CO's perspective. I'm not as competent as these two, so you'll forgive me.

[00:08:00] But trying to orchestrate innovation in an organization is challenging. One, because Sophocles said, pardon me for quoting a Greek philosopher, but Sophocles said, "When the gods want to punish you, they give you 40 years of success." And to a

degree, that sort of happened to national development. We see incremental change. The Gates Foundation last week at UNGA issued this report that shows dramatic change in many areas. So we get complacent. That's one problem.

[00:08:30] The other problem is we get comfortable. We're experts. We're doing good work. In our sense, our mission is compelling, but it becomes a commodity. Everyone's got their ... We're all here for the same ... We're good people. And so what you're trying to do, innovation represents a case for change. A change for what you're doing, how you're doing it, the tools you're doing it, and sometimes the people that do it. And so whenever you're talking about innovation, it's not like, let's isolate innovation, how can we create a reward structure and incentive systems? I think that's part of it, but you're talking about a radical systemic change in how you approach some of the most intractable problems to ever face humanity: poverty, marginalization, and disease. That's a sea change.

[00:09:00] So incentives are important, but I think it comes down to a couple things. One, hire the right people. And what I mean is people who are hungry. Who are unsatisfied with the status quo. Will go through walls. People who are curious. Doesn't matter how good the solution is if you've asked the wrong question. And some other things. One of them, you could hire people that are consistent, persistent. Willing to get knocked down. Resilient. Get up and try it again. Because this stuff is tough.

[00:09:30] So it's around hiring the right people, having some incentives, but having ... Part of my job is to make sure you create a macro-enabling environment that the culture, which is really intangible, it's hard to grab, right? You can put some incentives and performance metrics and we have balance score cards metrics and all that, but it's that intangible, all the ether between all those things. It's the yeah, this is a place that's not going to be satisfied with easy answers.

Sara Farley: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:10:00] So we're talking about people, incentives, the ether, the connective tissue that stimulates entire systems both within your institution, but fundamentally outside of your institution because we're talking about international development. I'd love to hear both from Seema and Ben on this.

What is this mix? This mix of incentives, policies, mindset, hiring. What are the ingredients you feel that you are playing with and, with that play, experiencing results in terms of this advanced culture?

[00:10:30] Seema Patel: Yeah, I think we've gone down that same list of things in many ways in this organization. We have this big lesson where we were thinking that innovation is about specific methodologies or about a way of solving technical solutions and creating new solutions, and we've really shifted our mindset to be thinking about, not the methodologies, but about the people. And how do we build entrepreneurial capacity within the organization?

And this is kind of a weird word to use in government. Often, people think

[00:11:00] government's not the place you innovate. And I would beg to differ. I actually think that it's an incredible place to innovate because there is an informality of roles and structures and you have the flexibility to move between different offices, technical sectors, solve different types of problems within government, and within USAID in particular, that's good to work on, such a wide range of diverse challenges.

And that leads to a network being formed in the organization where people to people connections can be made and people can come together in this very grassroots activist way and say, "We actually want to build something new! We want to try a new way of working this problem." And nobody really stops that kind of opportunity building in this organization. It actually can thrive.

[00:11:30] I think there are barriers that do get in the way, right? In terms of is there support and resourcing for those kind of ideas, is there leadership buy-in for those? Do people feel safe to put themselves out there to try something new? If they get knocked down, how resilient are they in being able to try it again and again through another opportunity or another door. And so I think there are barriers that are put in place institutionally, but the foundation for innovation is there within our way of doing work.

[00:12:00] I think one of the things that is really helpful in terms of moving from methodology to people is actually really thinking about then what are the capacities they need.

Sara Farley: Yeah.

Seema Patel: And this idea that we've structured the development organization so much around expertise, technical expertise, and very narrow areas of work, right? Certain types of farming or agriculture or water. And that's actually really limited our industry to be able to think in more divergent ways. And also, it creates a fear around not being the expert, around being open and sort of brutally honest and humble about what we don't know about the communities we work in, what we don't understand about the political economy system in which it lives, what we don't understand about the needs of the people.

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[00:13:00] And so I think that expert mindset actually prevents us from being able to be safe in having that more investigative mindset and learning to ask more questions and having the space to run processes that enable us to get that data and information, and collaborate and design with our partners in new ways. And so I think we've kind of structured into this industry, I think, some of these barriers that make it difficult.

[00:13:30] But it is happening. And I think where we see some really good bright spots, some of the programs that I really get excited about where we see teams across the agency in our country offices pushing the boundaries on that is areas where you are really enabling longer co-design sessions, designing with partners, assuming that the context is going to change so that you can redesign. We've got a great program that's been run out of our democracy office called The Civil Society Innovation Initiative that brought together hundreds of partners from civil society,

[00:14:00] government, donors, and stakeholders, and instead of saying, "This is what we're going to do", they spent a long time trying to understand and unpack the problem that they're trying to solve together, come up with solutions together, and implement them together. And so this approach to being able to bring the various skillsets and capabilities of different players, both within this organization, but then within that broader ecosystem is actually enabling more of a collective push towards implementing those solutions and testing them.

Sara Farley: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Seema Patel: And so I think we need to create more of those environments in development. Create environments where we have more collaboration and where people are incentivized and have those resources and support and space to really experiment with trying to understand the problem and not necessarily coming up with the solution.

[00:14:30]
Sara Farley: Ben, just would love to hear the UNDP reflection to both Mark and Seema's depiction of what this mix of sort of incentives, people, systemic change, a shift toward more problem definition, a beginner's mindset ... Does that all resonate with UNDP, or is there a different pathway you've taken to go about this there?

Ben Kumpf: It does resonate, however, we don't have the luxury to just hire the right people because we have largely to work with the workforce that we have in place, and that then is a different challenge.

Sara Farley: Yeah.

Ben Kumpf: [00:15:00] What you said completely resonates with us. I can give one or two examples of how we tactically approach it.

[00:15:30] One way, for example, we support country office entrepreneurs is providing a [limitive 00:15:06] risk capital to run the experiment. So that goes with low reporting requirements, but we tell them every two months, we want to see you writing a blog post. And not the typical development blog post where you brag, but use it as a strategic partnership tool. Do horizon scanning: who in your country and in the region has worked on a similar problem and might be an interesting partner? Or works in a different area, but brings, for example, data science. And use this blogging, working out loud, we call it, to create partnership opportunities and talk about what you do while you do it in a non-"we have the solution", but "we are inquiring" way. And that has led to incredible partnerships in some countries. It has also led to incredible cross-fertilization.

[00:16:00] We ask our country office colleagues to be aggressively outward facing that has led to new partnership with actors UNDP traditionally doesn't work with. And particularly, I want to emphasize that we learned that many of our innovators of the teams, they bring amazing drive, this intrinsic motivation. That's the reason why I love my job. What they often don't bring as much as needed is political

economy understanding and thinking through power relations.

[00:16:30] And then working with activists often proves to be a real asset in thinking through, scaling pathways because I think innovation is inherently political. It's changing the status quo. And some people have an interest in changing the status quo and some don't. Who are the ones that don't, and how after you navigate that system to either win them over or sometimes it's a struggle. You gotta fight.

Sara Farley: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ben Kumpf: So tactically speaking, we invest in champion programs, we invest in this working out loud, we invest very much in supporting horizon scanning for new partners.

[00:17:00] One of the small things we also learned the hard way is way too often, our people, including us, want to push the boundaries and we forget to bring the back office people on board. They see themselves as the guardians of the rules and regulations, we come forward, want to partner with this crazy activist outfit or with academia, they want to support us pro bono. And then our colleagues are like, "No, you can't do this." So one small thing I really recommend is having constant, often conversation with your back office people and lay out why are we doing this and how can we get that together. What Mark said in the beginning. I see way too much friction with the back office, unfortunately, and it's partially due to us because I think we don't explain well enough why do we want to do all these crazy things.

[00:17:30] Mark Viso: Can I just talk a little bit about the status quo that Ben brought up?

Sara Farley: Yes, please!

Mark Viso: And again, I'm talking from ... I'm not an innovation expert. In fact, I had to say, or at least a comment that I want to make is I don't really care about innovation. A little bit of an apostasy. But it's really, innovation is a tool that helps us to do what we're trying to do anyway, which is solve intractable, pernicious, terrible problems. And if innovation helps us, amen to that. Great. If the status quo helps us, grab the status quo and love the heck out of it, right?

[00:18:00] So I think one of the problems that can happen, at least in an organization, because we're talking about culture, right? Not innovation itself. Is when a lot of folks are doing a good job, and in our sector, I think the currency has always been proficiency. Are you good? Are you competent? Do you get it done? Right? And we're talking about changing the currency to discovery a little bit, and that's destabilizing, right? And with that says, "Well, the cool kids are doing innovation and I'm just here doing my job and it's a little bit the status quo", and in a sense it's implicit you're attacking my sense of worth. And I'm here for the mission, for Pete's sake. Don't you value me? And then the status quo's no good. Well, I happen to pay your bills. It gets your bills paid and we're making microchip, project to project change. What's going on?

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But the cool kids ... We've done nothing other than come up with some idea because we gave them some seed funding! Off they go.

So I think the challenge is how do you make those things not antipodean? How do you make them not antagonistic?

Sara Farley: That's right.

Mark Viso: How do you not get some kids ... Kids. How do you get folks that are willing to experiment, to try stuff who are vocal, give them some money and get sort of this treat and give them a lot of attention that go off and do something, and everybody else, the bulk, or at least, my case, the bulk of the organization, UNDP, doing really good work, but don't get any attention. How do you not create that? That's our jobs to do that. How do you mainstream it?

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[00:19:30] And for us, what we tried to do is say it's fruit from the poison tree. Where does it start? If you design in a linear delivery fashion as opposed to a collaborative, let's discover, human-centered design, political economy analysis, if you can get the design right, which is slow and my apologies, but donors don't allow us to do that very fluidly. I think that's changing. Thank goodness you're there. Then the rest is no good. But that's how you mainstream, I think. Right from the beginning, this is how we design. This is how CARE designs, how USAID designs. We design this way because we want to discover, we want to collaborate. I think that makes it mainstream.

Sara Farley: That's an incredibly important point that this antagonism, I think, does develop, it does emerge in organizations that feel an us versus them, the innovators versus those carrying the water. How have you learned lessons, maybe, the hard way or through reflection? Jumping to the head of the pack on this, how do you align both of those forces? Those that need to maintain the status quo and those that are trying new things? How have you found the balance?

Seema Patel: Well, I think coming into USAID, I was learning a lot about how this organization works and functions and trying to understand, using all the tools, what incentivizes people. How do I understand the users, in this case, which are staff and are our team members and our partners even beyond that. And one of the things that I quickly realized is that we don't, we can't program development dollars without touching every part of this organization at some point. HR touches that, procurement offices touch that, legal offices touch that.

[00:21:00] So if we can't design investments without all of those capabilities at the table, then the idea of creative problem solving needs to live in all of those places, right? They might not all have the same purpose. They might not all be innovating for the mission of impact and field-based projects. They might be innovating to save cost so that we have more available for those things, or they might be innovating to improve efficiencies so that they can be a better back office support for those programs. So really understanding the reasons and what catalyzes the different offices and the different roles within the agency is critical.

[00:21:30] And then I think giving them each, making sure that there's space in each of those environments for that. So one of the things I'm really proud about within USAID is A) let's just start with recognizing that innovation doesn't just come from outside the organization. That there are so many opportunities to mobilize that creativity and that resilience within the organization and that has to be part of the story. And I think organizations that focus on only external innovation are really missing an opportunity to leverage the internal assets that they have.

[00:22:00] But the other big piece is that the other piece that we really started to see happen is that innovation doesn't just live here in the global development lab or in this innovation shop. It's supposed to live everywhere. And it is a mindset and ethos that lives in all staff, that you can support in all staff, but you do need central informal structures to support that. So at USAID, we have also worked on policy environment and trying to integrate flexibility and adaptivity and learning principles that then create some space and permissions for trying new things.

[00:22:30] But we have formal structures across the agency. One of the ones I'm really excited about is the acquisition and assistance lab, which is an innovation lab which lives within our procurement offices. And they're able to understand the role of procurement, the value proposition of the work that procurement does, understand how do we talk about innovation from that perspective with the stakeholders that they sort of govern. And so that creates a space for technical officers. So now you've got policy, procurement officers, legal officers that are the champions for innovation in this organization that we've hired and identified to be that role. And you've got the lab that's able to support technical teams that are looking to innovate on their programs.

[00:23:00] With us all speaking with the one voice and really elevating the principles, not the specific "how's" but the principles of innovation, which is focus on outcomes, focus on cost-effectiveness, look at adaptive and responsive ways of problem-solving, then in the field, when those teams work together, they actually are speaking in the same language and have aligned incentives. And they all have a place to go back to for support and for lessons that have been learned across the agency that can be captured and offered to them.

[00:23:30] So I think that's been one of the great things to see is trying to set up that innovation space in every role that you may have within your organization, I think, enables the whole thing to flow a little bit more effectively.

[00:24:00] Sara Farley: I think these lessons learned are incredibly powerful, and all three of you have helped us hear a picture and also a picture with diversity in terms of how institutions are really going about this charge of enhancing cultures of innovation.

But I want to jump to the future. So this has all been sort of descriptive of past efforts and what you're doing today. Let's talk about where the field is headed. So looking industry-wide, I want to hear from all three of you, what are your thoughts

[00:24:30] of where the international development industry is heading in terms of a more ubiquitous, shared, pervasive culture of innovation? Are we heading in the right direction? Are we heading in the wrong direction? What do you see in the future? Ben?

Ben Kumpf: I'm not going to go right or wrong, but I do see promising signs. I see the shift to outcome-based financing as a really promising sign. To not look at log frame [logics 00:24:59] and designing for outputs, but rather agreeing on a set of outcomes and saying, "We gotta be quick in learning how we get there and adapt on the way." That is, in my opinion, including social impact bonds, pay for success models, one of the major promising drivers I see in the future.

[00:25:30] Internally looking, we have, in my small team, a discussion whether we should make the claim for the next stage of our strategy to say four years and we're going to work ourselves out of a job as an innovation team, and that means dedicated horizon scanning capabilities for every country office, experimentation guideline in the organization, and a couple of more details. Or do we think nah, actually we should have a small team that continues to look at the cutting edge and what comes up because most of our people have such a delivery pressure. We see that as the number one inhibitor for innovation that it's not realistic for them to really look at how a block chain might be a real disruptor for government legitimacy. Who knows what comes up in three years on that front. Do we need that small innovation team?

[00:26:00] But we are constantly struggling with how to avoid being the cool girls and boys club. I think we're pretty successful doing behind the scenes work and praising the people from the verticals and what they do.

And one attempt to work ourselves out of a job for the future and looking internally again is something that I'm really curious how it's going to pan out. You talked about innovation is much more than tools and methodologies, yet when you encourage people to change businesses, usually they ask, "Give me tools!"

Seema Patel: Yeah.

[00:26:30] Ben Kumpf: You provide toolkits, and people don't use them. And we saw this very much and see innovation kind of still on the margins of the organization. And it's very often weekend work. So what we did was we spent months and months in country offices and for country offices with project teams at different stages of implementation cycle. Tested a number of tools, and often I'd say, "Give me one thing that works." And then visualized our project cycle because that's how most business is done within my organization within the confines of a project and program.

[00:27:00] And it's a physical asset. It looks like a board game. And you put your figure where you are in the implementation cycle, and then there's a set of cards that ask you really tough questions. What are the current challenges? What does the data tell

you of potential realistic and wild car scenarios for challenges five and ten years down the line? Or what do you know about the people you design for?

[00:27:30] So in my opinion ... Well, there's a toolkit coming with 18 tools that all prove to add value, but more important, it's the questions, the tough questions a country director or project manager can ask the team to have a different kind of conversation. That's very internally looking.

For the external part, I'll hand over to ... Because I've talked much already.

Sara Farley: Mark, do you want to pick it up? Industry-wide transformation: what are the odds that this becomes pervasive?

Mark Viso: It's tough. I don't know, it's hard to get a read. In fact, I'm actually doing some work with the World Economic Forum right now trying to get an understanding, and there's lots just from my space, lots of my peers doing work on this. We're all going in different directions. But everybody's understanding it has to be done.
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I think from my perspective, there's two things we worry about: business model innovation, how we get done what we need to get done, is that relevant, is it helpful, is it irrelevant, are we going to go out of business, not because we're concerned about business, but if you believe in what you're doing, then you want to keep doing it to more people. And 2, the things that allow for greater mission impact, for people to own their future themselves and take this innovation and rather being done to them, but they do it and they drive it. Like some of this stuff going on in Lagos with artificial intelligence for the SDGs.

[00:28:30] I think it's going to happen. I think that it won't necessarily fall under the rubric of innovation, but it will fall under the rubric of change and greater relevance and greater return on investment because as you start to see the lines between sectors blurring and see this fourth sector emerging, we don't know what that means. The private sector is putting pressure, like we do it, we go in and out of business. This movie Blade Runner is coming out, those of you who are old like me saw the first one, and there's this curse that all the fancy brands that were in Blade Runner have now disappeared, Atari ... They were all the leading edge! So they all deeply know that this is a thing. We haven't been faced with that.
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Private businesses, as we get more funds with them, collaborate with them, design with them, they're bringing that, that urgency.

[00:29:30] The other thing, this pressure, as Ben said, prove it. Prove that it works. This is an investment. Because we could put it somewhere else. And we're bringing that to ourselves, good for us, but also the private sector and other philanthropists are doing this.

So I think the forces are good. I think we're still in fairly adolescent times where we're trying to figure that out. I brought this book not because I have anything to do with it, but it's called Lead and Disrupt by two professors, Charles O'Reilly at

[00:30:00] Stanford and Tushman from Harvard, that talks about how do you keep doing the status quo? How do you keep doing good work and still allow yourself to evolve and go somewhere as an organization, but as a sector? So that a whole sector doesn't go away like a photocopy.

So what does that look like? And it talks about it and it's a really, really interesting book. And I think our sector, my peers need to borrow more and more from that type of thinking, not because it's cool to think like that or we think we should, but because it's a real existential question.

Sara Farley: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And it's about surviving change, which will be the one constant we can predict for whatever future evolves, right? Seema, let's hear from you. Your prediction as to industry transformation becoming more amenable or less so to these cultures?
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Seema Patel: I wish I had that crystal ball. But I think the signs are positive and, to reiterate some of the ones here: the focus on outcomes, I think that's a huge opportunity in the development space. To really promote that kind of thinking, to hold ourselves accountable to what are we really trying to achieve and leave the space open for how we get there.

[00:31:00] I also think it shifts incentives in our organizations away from the costs and the counting and the way we sort of try to communicate our delivery and our value around impact and it enables more investment than in performance metrics and being able to have the evidence that says, "Prove it. It worked." And I think the more that we can start to find the right balance between outcomes-based thinking and more traditional styles of investing, I think we do ourselves a service as an industry to focus on what matters and what we're really trying to achieve out there.
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I'm super excited about the young people. Like, I think development still has this sort of power of the experienced field person that has been out there for 30 years. And I think that we have a gap in talent and development coming in from young leaders that are coming into development, but yet so many people in the youth want to work on social impact that there's a disconnect there for me.

[00:32:00] We did this study, and it was a while back, but I try to reference it quite a bit with Dev X around what is the young professional of the 21st century look like in the development sector? What are the skills and capabilities that they value that we value? And it's not 30 years of cassava farming alongside farmers and knowing exactly how that value chain works. It's facilitation, it's communication, it's the ability to partner. It's creative thinking. It is these other skills and competencies that we maybe aren't investing enough in for that future of development. But I think the young people want it, they're hungry for design thinking and being able to apply creative problem-solving to social impact problems, and we should take advantage of that excitement.
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And one of the other things that I just want to mention is last night, it was

[00:33:00] incredible for me to see twenty-one CEOs and Pact was there making their own pledge. You know, this industry is filled with lots of different players and we all have different abilities to influence. Faith-based NGOs and the donor community. We all can stand up and make those commitments and I think that leadership, being able to say and value why is it important for us to be better at what we do? And whether you use the word innovation or not, Alexis used a word yesterday that was about the relentless pursuit of excellence. I don't know who can't get behind that kind of mandate within their own organizations. And to see that leadership is also caring about it just as much as the grassroots cares about it, I think, creates a positive space for that.

[00:34:00] I think that we have problems to solve, though. I'm not going to gloss over that there are real challenges. I think our linear thinking of program design has gotta be hacked. We have to think much more flexibly about how we design programs from strategy to design to implementation to learning. These are not linear, cut-off paths in the world we work in. So that needs to be hacked. I think that we really need to think about how we're structuring our relationships between donors and partners, partners to partners, and recreate that flexibility for people to have the safe space to talk about what's working and what's not working in an honest way.

[00:34:30] I think we really need to be thinking much more seriously about how do we design with our communities instead of for our communities. We may be giving some lip service to it, but we can all go further in creating that agency and empowerment that others ... Who we seek to support, we are actually supporting them based off of what their needs are and what their role is, and having some power in that dialogue. And I think some of the areas that we can continue to push the boundaries and where it's happening, we should learn from it and we should showcase it and celebrate it so that others may pick up on that viral kind of excitement about what that can lead to in terms of better programming and impact.

[00:35:00] Sara Farley: Fabulous. I think we've generally heard a positive prognostication of where we can go. Not only as individual institutions, but as an industry. But as Seema, Mark, and Ben so aptly help us understand, there are certainly still some structural barriers, be they how we think about incentives, how we operate in systems, how we transform our own mindsets so that we can influence others.

[00:35:30] Thank you so much for all of your perspectives and your candor on this panel. And thank you for joining us for the discussion! I know all of us are eager to continue talking about these topics, so please grab any of us out in the halls. Thank you so much!

Mark Viso: Thank you.