



**Global Knowledge Initiative**



**2018**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**

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# A Decade and Change

*A Letter from Our Co-Founder Sara E. Farley on GKI's Tenth Anniversary*

Ten years ago, three people sat down together in the basement of the US National Academies of Science with a question: **how might we magnify people's abilities and resources to solve their own challenges?** Like my two co-conspirators—Nina Fedoroff and Sam Pitroda—I believed that if we could upend old models of development to offer something collaborative, open, and innovative we could amplify the energy of the world's problem solvers. And so, we planted our flag at the edge of the frontier, dubbing 2009 the dawning of "The Collaboration Era" and heralding the power and necessity of a new flavor of innovation, one that is deeply rooted in partnership, sharing, and collective action. We called it **Collaborative Innovation**.

The decade that followed has offered a rich learning journey and spurred the formation of a growing community of thousands of partners who've counted on the Global Knowledge Initiative to help them transform themselves and their organizations into "Super Collaborators" — people and institutions adept at uniting disparate ideas and resources to solve challenges in complex systems. Of the countless memories, victories, and lessons we accumulated along the way, a few stand out:

\* **We built things:** Networks, Social Innovation Labs, playbooks, toolkits, scripts, policies, interactive experiences, strategies, analyses... GKI has been a sandbox and a laboratory for innovation over the decade. Wielding a makers' philosophy toward creation, we believed if it didn't exist, we could construct it. The most rewarding experiences I witnessed at GKI were those involving different actors engaged in co-creation together. For example, through [network formation and the production of systems analysis](#), GKI unified the people, processes, and innovations successful in solving a mysterious problem in Rwandan specialty coffee, minimizing the challenge for tens of thousands of farmers and their families as showcased [here](#). It was a network that took years to build and which became a sustainable feature of the coffee system through ongoing partnerships with University of Rwanda, Michigan State University, Rwanda's Agriculture Board, various coffee cooperatives and exporters, and thousands of farmers.

\* **We broke things:** For some, collaborating comes naturally. For others entrenched in disciplinary, industrial, cultural or geographic silos, boundaries thwart collaboration. The result: mis-aligned incentives, untapped resources, and duplicative efforts. Some of GKI's most provocative and successful work has been in silo-busting. I will cherish the memories of our work in [Pakistan and Afghanistan](#) and in [Malaysia](#) where we focused on skills building and facilitation to overcome power asymmetries and cultural barriers to connect scientific research to food security and water challenges.

**“Our non-systematic ways of thinking are so damaging specifically because they consistently lead us to focus on low leverage change: we focus on symptoms where the stress is greatest. We repair or ameliorate the symptoms. But such efforts only make matters better in the short run, at best, and worse in the long run.”**



\* **We grew things:** Becoming a Collaborative Innovation Rockstar begins with a mindset shift. Growing the capacity of others to wave the Collaborative Innovation flag and adopt the [mindsets, skillsets, and toolsets](#) that make Collaborative Innovation habitual has defined much of our work since 2009. We count 2,000 entrepreneurs, policymakers, researchers, and change agents among the alumni of GKI's training programs. These alumni serve as an enduring legacy of our work and offer hope for a new kind of "[systems leader](#)" emerging in vitally needed spaces for social impact and transformational change.

\* **We reimaged the future:** Many of GKI's most provocative and impactful endeavors were rooted not only in systems methods but in Futures thinking. Helping people and organizations envision their collective future so that they can attune policy, investments, and strategy to a future that may emerge is one of GKI's most exciting areas of work. I'll never forget facilitating 300 youth from 100 countries at the [Thought for Food Summit](#), helping each participant [visualize their role in the future food system](#) of interconnected actors, innovations and resources. Pulling it off took costumes, a Swiss green house (in which the experience took place), a dozen co-facilitators, a fantastic GKI team, 3,000 sticky notes and an artist to help us visualize the [results in a simple graphic](#). Still today GKI is working with partners like the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition to reimagine the future of nutrition and [the innovations](#) needed to prevent diet-related disease globally.

\* **We changed:** Through the decade we grew, we experimented, we made mistakes, we got it right, and sometimes we got it wrong, learning through that most instructive of teachers: failure. The ten-year journey wasn't a straight line, but it has trended upward in terms of growth (e.g., our size, the number of partners) and impact (the depth and breadth of our effect on the world). At GKI we pursue change itself: we want to change the degree to which billions of people's lives are defined by poverty, inequality, and a host of food, health, water, and energy insecurity challenges. I've learned that pursuing change means being open to change yourself. It means loosening your grip on what you're certain of to sit with the unknowns and the complexities that render development so very hard.

In that spirit of change, I've long felt that GKI itself needs to keep changing and adapting to remain at the frontier. This includes changing leadership. And so, with this letter I'm sharing the exciting news of the arrival of our new CEO, Seema Patel. Seema joins us from USAID where she ran innovation and design for the Global Development Lab. She takes the reigns at GKI with vision, energy, passion, and so much insight into innovation and systems change. I have no doubt **GKI will continue to build, break, learn, reimagine, and change** on her watch and I'll be enthusiastically cheering from my new perch at The Rockefeller Foundation. At Rockefeller I'll apply my passion for innovation, systems change, integration and strategy to the challenge of transforming our food system. I'll do it buoyed by all that I've learned and loved while on this epic journey with GKI.

To my team, our Board, and our incredibly bold, fearless, thoughtful partners on the frontlines of development, I extend my most heartfelt thanks for the unimaginably rewarding decade together. Continue doing great things. You and your work matter.

Sara E. Farley



# 2018 SNAPSHOT

*Key achievements from 2018*

## 20

### PROJECTS

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GKI worked with partners on 20 new or continuing projects, which ranged from 3-day workshops to multi-year strategic or research engagements.

## 523

### EVENT PARTICIPANTS

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GKI engaged 523 individuals from across 6 continents through facilitated workshops and trainings with our partners.

## 6

### SYSTEMS EVALUATED

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GKI worked with stakeholders from six complex systems, including the Global Livestock System and the South Africa Healthcare System. We empowered decision makers to analyze system features and interactions, map the DNA of challenges, and found ways to optimize projects and programs across the world.



## 32

### PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

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Key partners with whom we did exciting work in 2017 included: AECOM, African Great Lakes Region Coffee Support Program, Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, BHEARD, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Causal Design, Circulate Capital, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, Global Cold Chain Alliance, Heifer International, International Society for Performance Improvement, John Snow Inc., Johns Hopkins University Global Obesity Prevention Center, Kaizen Global Investments, Lehigh University, LINC, Michigan State University, Moonshot Global Consulting, OpenIDEO, Pennsylvania State University, Resonance Global, Postharvest Loss Alliance for Nutrition (PLAN), SecondMuse, United States Agency for International Development, University of Fort Hare, University of Pretoria, University of Rwanda, the United States Department of State, Virginia Tech University, The World Bank, World Wildlife Fund

## 96

### INNOVATIONS EXAMINED

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GKI analyzed the potential of 96 technologies and innovations across multiple sectors and countries poised to disrupt systems.

# PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

*A Spotlight on GKI's Experiences in 2018*

## **Designing Development Programs for Sustainable Impact - United States Agency for International Development (USAID)**

GKI partnered with USAID's Global Development Lab to help them examine this question: "How might we design development programs that achieve impacts that are sustainable beyond the program's lifecycle?" By combining robust research and a collaborative and action-oriented visioning Workshop, GKI developed a novel conceptual framework to define the elements of a program that contribute to sustainable outcomes. This research was shared widely with USAID staff with the goal of continuing to advance USAID's policies and practices that enable sustainability and self-reliance.

## **Project Disrupt - Global Alliance for Improve Nutrition (GAIN)**

GKI, in partnership with GAIN used techniques from the discipline of foresight and collaborative innovation to source and evaluate innovations for their potential to improve nutrition outcomes. GKI convened experts in the fields of nutrition, agriculture, and sustainable food systems to identify the latest innovations in agribusiness market places, food design, information connectivity, materials science, and supply chain technology. Next, GKI used the Delphi Technique to harness the insights of a diverse panel of global experts to assess more than 90 relevant innovations. Ultimately, GKI's work illuminated the transformational potential of each innovation on the nutrition and food system

## **Strategic Program for Analyzing Complexity and Evaluating Systems (SPACES) - USAID**

GKI completed a systems evaluation for USAID SPACES in South Africa of the Albertina Sisulu Executive Leadership Programme in Health (ASELPH). GKI blended an array of techniques, including systems visualizations, narratives, and indicator based approaches, to determine which areas in the South Africa Health Systems ASELPH might have the greatest potential for impact. Ultimately, SPACES South Africa is a part of a larger effort to close the gap between the public and private healthcare sectors into a unified system that provides quality health services to all regardless of income level.



# PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

*A Spotlight on GKI's Experiences in 2018*

## **Building Researchers' Collaborative Capacity - Virginia Tech University**

GKI led a faculty-fellows program for early career scientists at Virginia Tech University, under the belief that science thrives in an environment of open collaboration across boundaries. As the capacity-development partner, GKI led scientists in developing and articulating their research pitches, empowering them to reach a wider audience and drive further collaboration. With the ultimate goal of creating, establishing and sustaining international scientific partnerships, GKI also led the scientists in developing systems maps, building fellows' capacity to visualize complex systems within which they work and empowering them to use a systems lens in their research.

## **Shaping a Systems-Focused Livestock Strategy - The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**

GKI partnered with the Foundation to design and lead a custom experience aimed at unifying its global roster of livestock grantees. The facilitation resulted in empowering grantees to effectively map the global livestock system, explore areas of alignment for grantee networking, and evaluate the Foundation's strategic direction. Ultimately, GKI's work helped shape an effective method to spur collaboration across the Foundation's livestock portfolio

## **Activating Systems Change through Systems Leadership - USAID**

On behalf of USAID's Global Development Lab, GKI undertook an analysis to identify the competencies and characteristics of leaders capable of catalyzing systems change. The analysis, based on primary and secondary data collection, informed GKI's creation of a typology of leadership styles and identified nine key competencies and mindsets for systems-oriented decision making. GKI then developed a "Systems Leadership Skill Builder", offering 1-month, 6-month, and 1-year self-guided learning journeys to empower individuals to build the necessary capacities to engage in systems leadership.

"To the GKI team, I don't know how you do your job. You exceeded my expectations. [We've seen that] all good intentions can have unintended consequences and that's a good lesson. Day two [of the convening] was incredibly insightful in seeing how the system works. We're going to use that substrate to build our systems strategy." - Samuel Thevasagayam, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

# PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

*A Spotlight on GKI's Experiences in 2018*

## **Education in Emergencies MIKTA Challenges - Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

GKI partnered with DFAT to support early-stage Emergency Education startups aimed at sustained schooling for children (particularly girls) affected by conflict and internal displacement. For this project, GKI designed an open innovation challenge which was implemented in partnership with OpenIDEO. The program currently provides continued training to disruptors in improving their early stage businesses and supports them in creating partnerships with sources of funding.

## **Global Leadership Summit (GLS) - Heifer International**

GKI was a strategic partner in designing and facilitating the Heifer GLS in November 2018. The Heifer leadership faced a challenge in designing a GLS that spoke to country leaders, who had a diverse range of knowledge on market systems. GKI designed an experience to equip all 140 Heifer International leaders from across the globe on market systems development, including the mindset and tools to disrupt those systems to benefit the poor. The three-day summit served to help leaders achieve a mutual understanding of Heifer. The new strategy combines direct interventions with indirect, facilitative market systems approaches to leverage a multiplier effect, intended to lift millions of people out of poverty towards a living income.



# Meet our CEO

*A Spotlight on Seema Patel*



In 2018, Seema Patel joined the Global Knowledge Initiative as our new Chief Executive Officer.

“Ten years into our journey since starting the Global Knowledge Initiative we needed to increase the size of our leadership team and so we sought a tested leader endowed with a clear sense of scale strategy and growth,” said Sara Farley, co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of GKI. “Seema’s enthusiasm and vision are infectious! I trust her ability and hunger to take what we’ve built to the next level and I join the entire team in warmly welcoming her.” Sam Pitroda, chairman and co-founder of GKI echoed this thought and said, “We welcome Seema to GKI and look forward to her leadership, talent, and expertise to help take GKI to new heights.”

Seema started her early professional career as an investment banker, where she advised and raised financing for technology startups and large multinational companies to support their growth strategies. During this time, she discovered her passion for achieving social impact through innovation and private sector business models and transitioned into this space shortly thereafter. She served as a Policy Advisor for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, where she worked to empower citizen voices in designing solutions for economic recovery in postwar environments.

After that, Seema served as an advisor to United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and helped to pioneer the Agency’s open innovation efforts, which have successfully channeled more than \$250 million in investments into promising social innovations around the world. Most recently, she established the Innovative Design and Advisory practice in the U.S. Global Development Lab, working to foster a culture of innovation in the Agency and empowering development professionals to integrate innovation practices in projects and initiatives across the world.

Through her courage and vision, Seema has demonstrated an outstanding track record of strategic leadership, design excellence, and a passion for leading entrepreneurial teams in the social sector.





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