

## **The Resilience of Ashoka Fellows During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**By:** Alexandra Ioan\*, Veronica Chiodo\*

\*Co-founder and Head, Ashoka Learning and Action Center, Ashoka

\*Junior Assistant Professor, Politecnico di Milano School of Management

**Keywords:** social impact, social entrepreneurship, partnerships, Ashoka, COVID-19 pandemic, replication, mindset shift

### **Abstract**

COVID-19's effect on the work of social entrepreneurs is still unfolding. Current research has observed how social enterprises were involved in immediate responses to the crisis and were affected operationally. Many questions remain regarding the role of social entrepreneurs in generating change in a post-pandemic world.

This research article investigates how several dimensions attached to Ashoka's 'Everyone a Changemaker' vision played a role in the resilience of Ashoka Fellows during the pandemic. We found that the replication of their solutions and high partnership and collaboration levels positively impacted the intention of innovation Ashoka Fellows have moving forward. Partnerships also mitigated the negative impact of the pandemic on Fellows' operations and their capacity to continue their activities. On the other hand, the focus on mindset shift as the main impact goal also meant a higher chance of reduction in funding for social entrepreneurs during the pandemic.

These results emphasize the importance of strong connections and partnerships with other stakeholders for the motivation and opportunity to continue developing new ideas for social change. Whether as replication partners, peer social entrepreneurs, or partners in other roles, we must continue supporting the exchange between social entrepreneurs and a variety of stakeholders. Large numbers of partners can offer stability and provide security for social entrepreneurs in times of crisis. More importantly, however, the support ecosystem for social entrepreneurs – especially funders – needs to be made more aware of the different levels of impact social entrepreneurs aim to achieve in order to be more supportive of them in complex contexts. Although direct service responses are immensely valuable, the mindset shift work done by social entrepreneurs contributes to deeper change in the long term and needs to be supported accordingly.

This research article contributes to our evolving understanding of how social entrepreneurs navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. As the situation evolves, we will be able to identify more elements that contribute to their resilience, factors that foster their creativity, and drive to continue addressing social issues effectively.

### **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has massively disrupted the world. Its effects are still unravelling. The world is still grappling with the collective next steps in overcoming and making the best of this turning point. Social entrepreneurs, their organizations, and movements have not been

left untouched by the pandemic's impact. All have faced challenges. These have ranged from limited access to their target groups and communities during the lockdown, to changes in funding flows, strategic directions,<sup>1</sup> and coping with the advantages and challenges of digital transition.<sup>2</sup>

So far, the literature focusing on social enterprises and the COVID-19 pandemic has focused on the following main areas of inquiry: the solutions provided by social enterprises and other stakeholders as immediate responses to the pandemic; the way social enterprises were affected operationally by the pandemic; and the role of social entrepreneurship and the social economy in the post-pandemic world.

#### *Solutions provided by social enterprises as an immediate response*

Together with other social sector organizations and actors, social enterprises have been strongly involved in addressing the immediate effects of the pandemic since 2020 spring. The situation required new ways of managing and leading social enterprises<sup>3</sup> in a highly uncertain and disruptive context. Social entrepreneurs were part of multiple organizations mobilizing people throughout communities to respond to the challenges of the situation.<sup>4</sup> Digital solutions were vital in connecting various stakeholders to respond to the crisis,<sup>5</sup> which triggered reflection about how technology and science can reduce inequities and have a positive social impact.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Operational challenges of social enterprises during the pandemic*

The effect of the pandemic on social enterprises varied by geography. Whether struggling financially or in fulfilling their social mission, the opportunities to continue their work or to develop new activities depended greatly on where they were located in addition to their financial and operational models.<sup>7</sup> This translated into the need to develop coping mechanisms and resilience in multiple ways. The coping process entailed adjusting essential operational elements like funding sources, financial models, and how social entrepreneurs engaged with partners and collaborators.<sup>8</sup>

#### *The role of social enterprises moving forward*

There are many emerging and unanswered questions about the changes within social enterprises in the upcoming post-pandemic context.<sup>9</sup> These include: what the differences are between traditional for-profit businesses and social enterprises in the ways they were affected by the pandemic and how the focus on social outcomes influences this; how market collapse affects social enterprises working with various business models and revenue-generating mechanisms; how we can better bridge the global and local differences in the level of capital and financial security for social enterprises; how social entrepreneurs connect to other collective efforts to mobilize for change, and more. By looking deeper into these aspects unveiled by the pandemic, we can advance the role of social entrepreneurship and the social economy in emergency response to crises and reframe our long-term economic practices and systems.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Ashoka Fellows during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Ashoka Fellows have played a substantial role in tackling the immediate effects of the pandemic through their work. They developed new operating ways and created new solutions for the emerging issues that became visible in these past two years. Through programs like Changemakers United,<sup>11</sup> our support program for social entrepreneurs developing response

solutions to the pandemic, Ashoka aimed to provide appropriate support to the Fellows during these difficult times. We were also interested in how they navigated the crisis and what aspects of their work played a role in their resilience.

Ashoka's vision of 'Everyone a Changemaker' is based on a few core elements that are strongly represented in the work of Ashoka Fellows: the importance of empathy, building change-making teams, open-sourcing solutions, and working in a fluid team of teams.<sup>12</sup> Ashoka also differentiates between different levels of impact in the work of social entrepreneurs. They can focus on direct service, system change and/or mindset shift as their ultimate goal.<sup>13</sup>

Through the Global Fellows Study, we wanted to see how these various ways of working affected Ashoka Fellows' navigation of the COVID-19 crisis. In particular, we were interested in whether and how the Fellows who embrace aspects of the 'Everyone a Changemaker' vision in their practice were more likely to be resilient to crises than others. In this article, we focus on three main dimensions: the level of replication of the solutions of Ashoka Fellows; partnerships and collaborations as a critical way of working of Ashoka Fellows; and a focus on mindset shift as the main level of impact for Ashoka Fellows.

These dimensions allow us to test broader concepts mentioned above which are at the core of 'Everyone a Changemaker'. They are operationalizations of open-sourcing solutions through independent replication; working in a fluid team of teams through partnerships and collaborations; and a deeper level of impact in the form of mindset shifting. These elements can be tied to the concept of resilience – defined as “positive adaptation in the face of significant adversity”<sup>14</sup> – as they represent different ways of managing organizations and conducting social work. Crises such as COVID-19 create circumstances that strongly test these mechanisms and the principles behind social entrepreneurs' approaches. In our research, we aimed to better understand the effects they can have on fostering resilience.

## **Methodology**

The paper investigates the relationship between several dimensions of the 'Everyone a Changemaker' vision reflected in Ashoka Fellows' work and the extent to which COVID-19 affected Ashoka Fellows. Specifically, the dimensions of the vision considered are:

- the independent replication of the Fellows' model and solutions by other organizations;
- the number of stakeholders the Fellows partnered with;
- the number of other Ashoka Fellows they collaborated with;
- and the focus on Fellows on changing the mindsets of people, on top of providing direct services and working towards system change.

We inquired how these dimensions affected the capacity of Ashoka Fellows to deliver their solutions in terms of implementing activities; the financial situation of the Fellows and whether this translated into a reduction in revenues and funding; and the evolution of their model by developing novel ideas triggered by the crisis. More specifically, we tested the following hypotheses:

Table 1: Hypotheses for the study

<b>‘Everyone a Changemaker’ VISION DIMENSION</b>	<b>HYPOTHESIS</b>
1. REPLICATION	1. Fellows who have their solution replicated by other organizations are less likely to be affected by COVID-19 in terms of their capacity to achieve impact and secure funding.
	2. Fellows who have their solution replicated by other organizations are more likely to change their model and develop new ideas due to COVID-19.
2. PARTNERSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS	1. Fellows who collaborate with a higher number of different partners are less likely to be affected by COVID-19 in terms of their capacity to achieve impact and secure funding.
	2. Fellows who collaborate with many different partners are more likely to change their model and develop new ideas due to COVID-19.
3. COLLABORATION WITH OTHER FELLOWS	1. Fellows who collaborate with a higher number of other Ashoka Fellows are less likely to be affected by COVID-19 in terms of their capacity to achieve impact and secure funding.
	2. Fellows who collaborate with a higher number of other Ashoka Fellows are more likely to change their model and develop new ideas due to COVID-19.
4. MINDSET SHIFT	1. Fellows whose activities focus on changing the mindset of a broader audience are less likely to be affected by COVID-19 in terms of their capacity to achieve impact and secure funding.
	2. Fellows whose activities focus on changing the mindset of a broader audience are more likely to change their model and develop new ideas due to COVID-19.

The paper leverages the data collected in the Global Fellows Study through the survey and interviews. The following are questions we asked in the Fellows survey on the topic of resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. How are the COVID–19 developments affecting how you create impact? (Within three timeframes: since breakout until now; expected in 1-6 months; expected in 6-12 months). The answer options for this question are included in Table 2.

Table 2: Answer options

Operating as before	Slightly changed operations (changed to virtual work, delayed parts of work, without major consequences to our impact)	Significantly changed operations (changed focus, dropped programs, staff, with major consequences to our scope of impact)	Developed new ideas as a result of the pandemic, are implementing them (new programs, extended to new target groups.)
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2. Did you experience a reduction in your total funding, as a consequence of the pandemic?
3. Did you experience a reduction in your revenues from selling products/services, as a consequence of the pandemic?

This article employs quantitative data as the primary source for the findings, which were then complemented by qualitative data analysis to enhance the overall validity of the results.

For the quantitative analysis, we used both descriptive statistics and regression-based estimations. To gain an in-depth comprehension of the determinants of significant correlations and trends, we ran a set of logistic regressions adjusted to the specific nature of survey data with appropriate commands on the Stata estimation software. We also conducted appropriate post-estimations tests to check the fitness of our different models, namely the Hosmer–Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test. As for the qualitative analysis, data from 32 in-depth semi-structured interviews was analyzed through a mix of deductive and inductive coding processes and thematic analyses. The interviews focused on how Ashoka Fellows understand and put in practice the ‘Everyone a Changemaker’ vision. The deductive codes were based on the survey and interview questions, and they were complemented by inductive open-coding that allowed other themes to emerge from the interviews.

Adopting a mixed methodology helped take advantage of the complementary use of qualitative and quantitative approaches throughout the study. It provided a greater range of insights and perspectives, allowing the triangulation of findings through different methods. This improves the overall validity of results and makes the study more useful to the constituencies it addresses.<sup>15</sup>

We acknowledge the limitations of this research article. All the data used us self-reported by Ashoka Fellows and is thus subject to bias. Moreover, Ashoka Fellows are social entrepreneurs selected based on standard criteria, making them a particular sample that is not necessarily representative of the already documented diversity of social entrepreneurs and/or social enterprises worldwide. Some of the questions asked were also prospective questions – i.e., social entrepreneurs were asked about their estimations for the future – so the inferences we can draw from them are also estimative. The ultimate goal is to see which of these expectations were fulfilled and how. Finally, we are aware that the data was gathered during a situation in constant flux, as the pandemic is still evolving. This continuously influences people's responses, reflections, and conclusions. Therefore, our data captures only a snapshot in time during this entire complexity.

## **Findings**

### *Descriptive statistics*

At the time of the completion of the survey in April 2021, more than 90% of respondents reported that COVID-19 had an impact on their activities and their capacity to generate impact by slightly (e.g., changed to virtual work, delayed parts of the work, without major consequences to our impact) or significantly changing operations (e.g., changed focus, dropped programs, staff, with major consequences for type or scope of impact). This percentage slightly decreased to 88% and 76% when respondents were asked to estimate these effects in the future. When asked to estimate longer-term effects (between 6-12 months after

survey completion), 24% of responding Ashoka Fellows predict being able to return to operate as before the crisis, compared to only 7% seeing this option at the time of survey completion. The immediate effect of the pandemic on the capacity to operate and achieve impact is slightly lower in North America (22% over an average of 37%) and Europe (30% over an average of 37%), higher in Africa (47% over an average of 37%) and for younger Fellows (32% over an average of 37%). Moreover, the Fellows whose operations had not been so significantly affected are also those who did not experience a reduction in funding. This illustrates that as time goes by and as we all adjust to the new context and realities posed by the pandemic; Ashoka Fellows also expect to experience fewer challenges in their operations.

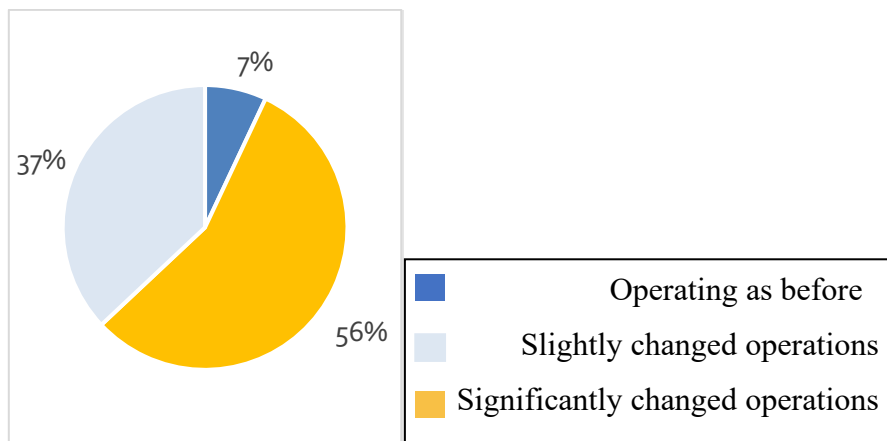


Figure 1: COVID-19 effect on Fellows' activities at the moment of survey completion

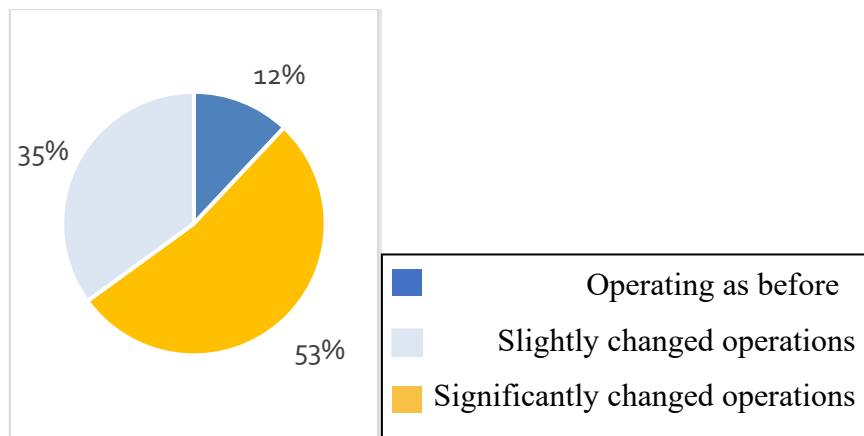


Figure 2: Expected COVID-19 effect on Fellows' activities within 1-6 months from the moment of survey completion



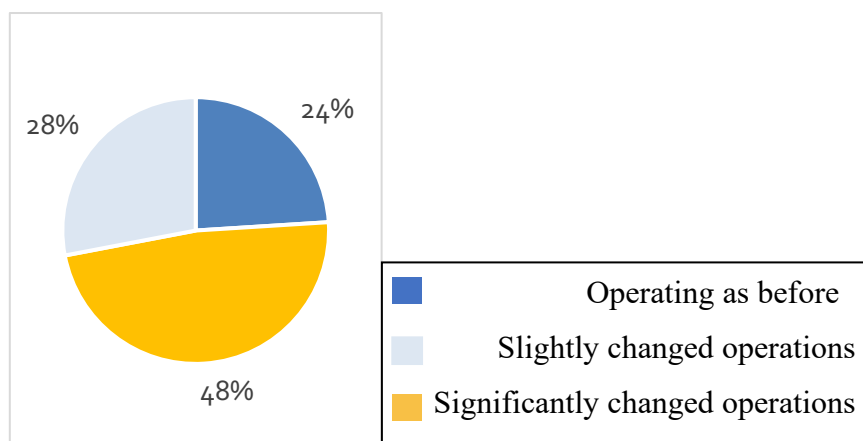


Figure 3: Expected COVID-19 effect on Fellows' activities within 6-12 months from the moment of survey completion

Moreover, the percentage of Fellows who see the opportunity of innovating their model or strategy by developing new ideas in the aftermath of the pandemic increased in the long term. 39% of the responding Ashoka Fellows report that they have already developed a new idea between the beginning of the pandemic and the time of the survey completion. A slightly higher percentage (40%) expect to do this within 1-6 months of the survey completion, and 52% expect to develop a new idea within 6-12 months from the moment of the survey completion. This suggests that the Fellows think that the pandemic might also have a learning effect. They see avenues to keep innovating in response to the evolving social issues they identify.

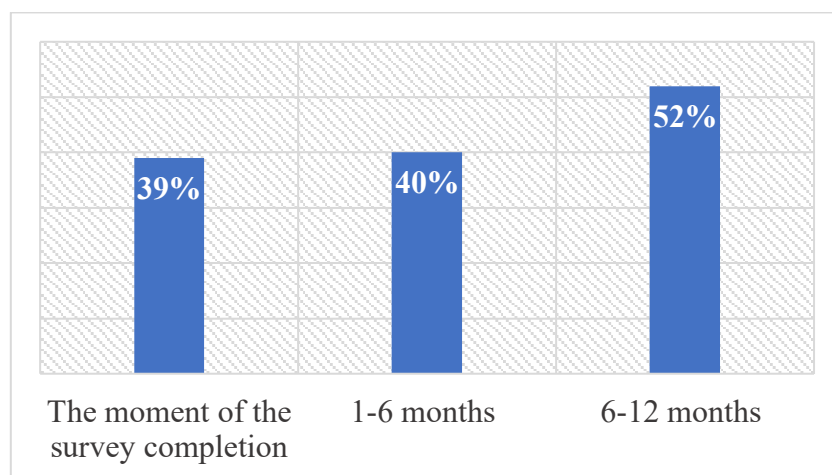


Figure 4: Percentage of responding Fellows who have developed new ideas due to the pandemic and are implementing them

Interestingly, when it comes to how the pandemic affected access to funding and revenue generation, the results are distributed relatively evenly between those experiencing a reduction in funding (46%) and those who did not face any constraint in their funding (Figure 5). The same holds regarding the revenues by selling products and services: 49% of Fellows saw a decrease in their revenues, but 51% did not (Figure 6). Fewer European Fellows and more South-Asian Fellows experienced a reduction of funding, highlighting once again the effect of the regional context. Older Fellows have also been affected more by both a reduction

in funding and in self-generated revenues. Although slightly more Fellows of the ones who responded in the survey have experienced difficulties overall, the survey results illustrate that the specific context and financial model play a significant role in how Fellows have been affected. We cannot generalize the negative or positive financial effects of the pandemic.

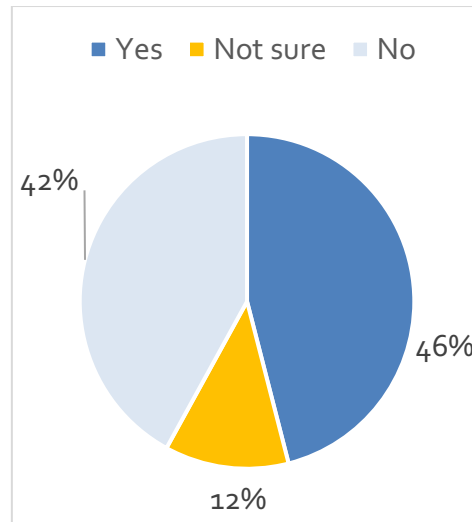


Figure 5: COVID-19 effect on Fellows' funding

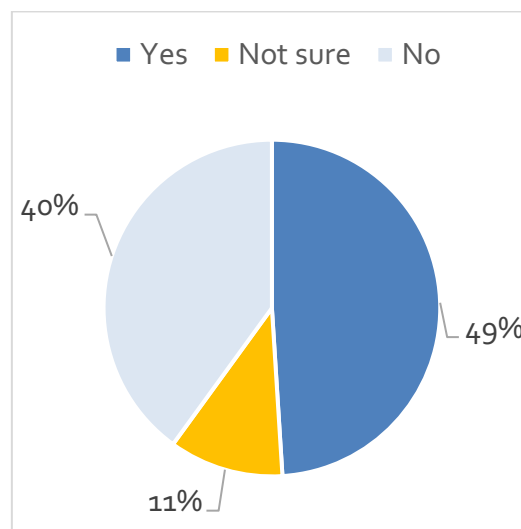


Figure 6: COVID-19 impact on Fellows' revenues from selling products and services

### *Logistic Regressions*

In the regression analysis, we ran several sets of regressions employing, in each group, as the dependent variable either: having been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the short (at the time of survey completion), medium (1-6 months after the survey completion), and long-term (6-12 months after the survey completion); or experiencing a reduction in revenues or funding due to the pandemic; or the tendency of Ashoka Fellows to develop novel ideas or solutions due to the pandemic to be included in their model or strategy. The independent variables are linked to the different dimensions of the 'Everyone a Changemaker' vision



presented above: replication, partnerships with other stakeholders, collaboration among Ashoka Fellows, and focus on mindset shift.

The results of the set of regressions that have proven to be statistically significant are reported in Table 3. The tests of all the regression models and the post-estimation tests can be provided upon request.

Table 3: Regression results

Hypothesis	Results	Interpretation
<b>1B.</b> Fellows who have their solution replicated by other organizations are more likely to change their model and develop new ideas due to COVID-19.	Positive Coefficient	The probability of the Fellows developing a new idea after COVID-19 <b>in the long-term</b> (6-12 months after survey completion) is positively correlated with having their solution replicated.
<b>2A.</b> Fellows who collaborate with a higher number of different partners are less likely to be affected by COVID-19 in terms of their capacity to achieve impact.	Negative Coefficient	The probability of the Fellows being negatively affected by COVID-19 <b>in the long term</b> (6-12 months) is negatively correlated with the number of partners.
<b>2B.</b> Fellows who collaborate with a higher number of different partners are more likely to change their model and develop new ideas due to COVID-19.	Positive Coefficient	The probability of the Fellows developing a new idea after COVID-19 <b>in the long term</b> (6-12 months) is positively correlated with the number of partners.
<b>3B.</b> Fellows who collaborate with a higher number of other Ashoka Fellows are more likely to change their model and develop new ideas due to COVID-19.	Positive Coefficient	The probability of the Fellows developing a new idea after COVID-19 <b>in the medium</b> (1-6 months) <b>and long term</b> (6-12 months) is positively correlated with the number of other Ashoka Fellows they collaborated with.
<b>4A.</b> Fellows whose activities focus on changing the mindset of a broader audience are less likely to be affected by COVID-19 in terms of their capacity to achieve impact and secure funding.	Positive Coefficient	The probability of the Fellows being affected by COVID-19 in terms of reducing funds is positively correlated with performing activities focused on changing mindsets.

Considering the first dimension, the replication of a Fellow's model by others increases the likelihood that the Fellow expects to use opportunities triggered by the pandemic to develop new ideas to advance their model in a longer time horizon (6-12 months).

The second element of the 'Everyone a Changemaker' vision included in the analysis is the number of partners of the Fellows. The data shows that Fellows who are embedded in a broader network, i.e., with a higher number of partners, are less likely to have had their activities and capacity to create impact hampered by the COVID-19 crisis in the long term (6-12 months after survey completion). Furthermore, a higher number of partners meant Fellows

had more partners to support them in developing new ideas and implementing them in the medium (1-6 months after the survey completion) and long term.

We also tested this relationship by using the collaborations with other Ashoka Fellows as an independent variable. In this case, a positive relationship emerges: the more collaborations Ashoka Fellows have with other Ashoka Fellows, the more likely they are to expect to develop new ideas in the medium (1-6 months after survey completion) and long term (6-12 months after survey completion).

In the last set of regressions, the only statistically significant relationship was linking a reduction in funding due to the pandemic with implementing activities that focus on changing people's mindsets. Fellows centred on changing mindsets are more likely to have experienced a reduction in their funding during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, a first interpretation of our results suggests that being supported by a broad and heterogeneous network – comprised of external stakeholders, other Ashoka Fellows, or other social innovators keen to replicate the Fellows' models – helped social entrepreneurs view COVID-19 as a learning experience to make their solutions more impactful. This, of course, is still an ongoing process, and the result of this transition will only become more apparent in the next few years.

#### *Triangulation of results*

As mentioned in the methodological section, the quantitative analysis was complemented by the data collected through the interviews and examined using in-depth qualitative methods.

The Fellows interviewed reported that the pandemic posed an enormous challenge for activities in the social sector, especially when daily operations suddenly stopped. However, they also confirmed the results from the quantitative analysis concerning the opportunity to develop new ideas and evolve their model. Indeed, after the first emergency response phase, the situation opened opportunities for some of them to create novel solutions to the social needs arising or being exacerbated by the pandemic. This situation compelled Fellows to structurally modify their interaction with target groups, funders, partners, and other stakeholders in a short period. Some Fellows mentioned that they have used the slowdown of activities during the COVID-19 pandemic as a space for reflection, rest, and strategic planning. They see this time as conducive to developing new social impact areas in the medium and long term.

*"It limited us in the beginning in the first wave of COVID-19 (...) But after that, when things stabilized a bit, we pushed more forwards."* - Fellow 1

*"...because we are in the drug development space, it has also opened up opportunities, and we actually have filled a patent for one of our treatments that have a potential in treating long COVID and also can help in the cardiac aspect of COVID."* – Fellow 2

*"One of the things that last year also left us is time to do research. I was leading, reviewing and building up our next five-year strategy."* – Fellow 3

Some interviewees stated that the increased awareness of some issues and the perceived importance of social entrepreneurship also created more interest and demand for their work and more interest from people to get engaged personally, as they see and understand the urgency of reacting to the emergency.

*"Well, we got busier than ever. And the interest in our program actually increased."* – Fellow 4

The qualitative analysis also supported the idea that the pandemic has offered a learning opportunity for the Fellows, especially those strongly embedded in a network of partners and peers. Moreover, in general, the necessity of partnerships and coalitions to achieve system change was perceived even more urgently by the Fellows during the crisis. For instance, some Fellows reported:

*"I think what I would have done differently is I would have started partnerships earlier. So, in the beginning, you know, I did a lot, just me and the team, you know, but I would have started working on making sure that we had that more collective approach and doing partnerships."* – Fellow 5

*"So, it was very, very, very long and so but to tell you that we were fortunate enough to have a very good local partner so [...] we managed to keep going."* – Fellow 6

*"Pre COVID, we had followed that heavily decentralised model, where we create all of these materials in house, the training, the curriculum, a whole bunch of different explanatory videos to help people set up their own programmes. And we were on a fairly lengthy growth path to keep growing that especially in Canada, when COVID happened, a lot of those organisations shut down temporarily. And we started running programmes ourselves, doing things online and gathering as many people as we could."* – Fellow 7

Regarding fundraising, the qualitative analysis seems to convey the same image of mixed effects on the financial situation of Fellows. Some insights from the interviews were:

*"In terms of fundraising, to give you an idea, on average, we were raising 1.5 million philanthropic funding per year. And it went down to, I think, 200,000 in 2020."* – Fellow 8

*"Of course, it affected us a lot. Sponsors went out because they told us: no, we have to allocate the money that we promised you for the coming year for campaigns to fight against COVID."* – Fellow 9

*"And it just seems like, now there's a lot of incoming interest, as opposed to us always pulling out, that's been a big shift. So, we're also trying to manage that, but the team is exhausted from all of this pivoting and opportunity and trying to figure out things. We need*

*more people, but also just like decision making around of all these  
paths - which one is the big one?" – Fellow 10*

Most of the Fellows interviewed stated that their financial situation was negatively affected during the first phase of the emergency, leaving their organizations to deal with limited or lack of funds. But at the same time, as the initial shock of the situation passed, some were also faced with more offers and opportunities than they could process. One possible explanation of these results can be found in the heterogeneity of organizational and financial structures of Ashoka Fellow organizations, as well as in the varied conditions of their regions and countries in terms of support, as previously mentioned. The survey data shows that 40% of the respondents rely on revenues from selling products and services, and 21% have a hybrid or for-profit structure. At the same time, health and economic development are the second and third most represented sectors in which Ashoka Fellow in the sample operate. Due to the nature of the crisis, we can hypothesize that they were less affected by the funding withdrawal from other social sectors.

## **Discussion**

Based on these findings and analyses, we can highlight the following developments for Ashoka Fellows during the pandemic.

1. A focus on idea replication can also encourage social entrepreneurs to innovate further.

Especially in the longer timeframe (6-12 months from survey completion), Ashoka Fellows estimate that they will develop new ideas due to the pandemic. The fact that other organizations have replicated their current work represents a security element that the social impact of their current work will continue. This frees up space for innovations and new approaches necessary in the aftermath of the pandemic. Moreover, organizations that have replicated so far might themselves be a source of inspiration and trigger innovations and novel collaborations in the Fellows' work toward achieving system change.

2. Partnerships can stabilize social entrepreneurs' organizations in the long term and contribute to developing new ideas for social impact.

The Ashoka Fellows with higher numbers of partnerships are less likely to expect to have their operations slightly or significantly affected by the crisis of COVID-19 in the long term (6-12 months from survey completion). We believe these partnerships represent an element of stability and confidence of the social entrepreneurs in their community. They can also be a buffer from threats arising from unexpected situations such as the pandemic. The importance of partnerships and collaborations has been emphasized in previous research,<sup>16</sup> and our results strengthen the importance of this dimension.

Partnerships also play an essential role when it comes to innovation. Ashoka Fellows with more partners and collaborators expect to innovate more in the medium (1- 6 months from survey completion) and long term (6-12 months from survey completion). Partnerships can be a source of inspiration and motivation in finding new solutions for the issues arising. The importance of peers, in particular, is highlighted in this regard too. Collaborating with other Ashoka Fellows also strengthens social entrepreneurs' tendency to develop new ideas after the pandemic.

Furthermore, as reported in the qualitative analysis, the pandemic made Fellows realize even more clearly that societal challenges need to be addressed systemically. Creating coalitions might be a feasible and effective strategy towards this.

3. Working on mindset shift level can mean a reduction in funding in crises.

Ashoka Fellows who focus their work on changing mindsets of the broader population are more likely to have experienced a reduction in funding during the pandemic. This can illustrate that the funders focused more on emergency response and direct service level of impact as an immediate solution for the pandemic, leaving work that was not considered essential (at least in the initial stages of the pandemic) less funded.

### **Policy Action Recommendations**

Based on these results, we present the following recommendations and action points for the sector moving forward:

1. A focus on independent replication and working in multiple settings will probably become more common, given the digital acceleration we experience. These replication efforts of the ideas of social entrepreneurs can also be a source of inspiration for new solutions, apart from a source of stability for the implementation and continuation of the rollout of current solutions.
2. In addition to replication, developing multi-stakeholder and multi-partnership models can also bring security for organizational operations and innovation in times of crisis, so we should focus more on developing these organizational models and actions. The critical role of partnerships in the resilience of social enterprises emphasizes once again the bridge role that these play in society. Peer-to-peer connections and encouraging social entrepreneurs to work with each other are a specific type of partnership with potential results on the innovation side that should be more of a focus.
3. Social entrepreneurs work on multiple levels – some more direct with target groups and some more complex on a system and mindset shift level. In times of crisis, it is crucial not to overlook this diversity of interventions and approaches and to support them equally, as they all contribute to the process of social change. Funders in particular need to become more aware of valuable mindset shift work done by social entrepreneurs and incorporate it in their response plans for crises.

### **Conclusion**

Based on extensive analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered through the Global Fellow Study, this article sheds light on how Ashoka Fellows worldwide have been coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. As the effects of the crisis continue to unfold for years to come, this article highlights some elements in the operational models of Ashoka Fellows that played a role in the way they navigated the pandemic so far.

In summary, we notice that the level of replication of their current solutions, the number of partners, and the type of impact aimed for (at mindset level) can play a role in how the pandemic impacted social enterprises. While a high number of partners can mitigate adverse effects on the operations of the social enterprises and their capacity to create impact in the medium and long-term, it can also lead to more openness and stronger intentions to innovate further. Collaborations with other Ashoka Fellows and high levels of replication of the current ideas of the social entrepreneurs foster innovation. However, working in new areas such as mindset shift can also translate into decreases in funding in crises, if the funders refocus on emergency responses.

This article contributes to the evolving knowledge and analysis of what the COVID-19 pandemic means for social enterprises globally. It adds further evidence to the mixed effects we see on the operational and financial levels, but also highlights how different elements of their work can further foster innovation. These findings set the basis for designing better support systems and schemes for social enterprises in preparation for similar crises in the future.



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