

## **Everyone a Changemaker: A Strategic Lens**

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### **Abstract**

This article frames and offers an overview of the journal issue which includes a series of articles based on data from 817 social entrepreneurs who are part of Ashoka's Fellow network from across the globe. The sequence of articles in this publication builds a narrative thread of how social entrepreneurs have managed to achieve systemic changes at local, national, and international levels. The articles look at a range of issues and trends surfaced in the data including gender factors, how diversity matters, young peoples' influences, policy change, and new roles for corporations and technology in social change. Other articles report new practices, new merging insights, and new research helping social entrepreneurs maximize impact. What is common across all the articles is how fellows are realizing systems change and mindset change by enabling many more changemakers and thus helping to enable an "Everyone a Changemaker" world.

### **Introduction**

Ashoka's vision is summarized as "Everyone a Changemaker." The phrase offers a strategic lens for how society can better organize itself for a world of increasingly rapid change. It is a framework which serves the good of all, not simply good for a privileged few. Over the last forty years it is a reality we have witnessed expand across our global network of nearly 4,000 social entrepreneurs, their teams, and networks. "Everyone a Changemaker" for the good of all is the new paradigm we see at play in Ashoka Fellows' work and is what Ashoka's core work seeks to accelerate.

What does an "Everyone a Changemaker" world look like? It is a world where we find young people and adults from all walks of life who reflect on the question: How do I change the world for the better – even beyond my own community? Then, they act.

In the journey to realize this vision, we asked the question: What have we learned from creating the social entrepreneurship ecosystem over the last four decades? The answer is simple: We have learned that social entrepreneurs are innovators who change systems for the good of all and create many more changemakers along the way.

Ashoka's global network shows us how social entrepreneurs create social impact; they change policy, market dynamics, industry norms and their ideas inspire others to independently replicate and adapt solutions.<sup>1</sup> But they all do something else as well. They demonstrate that change *is* possible, and in so doing, they inspire others to act, to join

them in their organizations and movement, becoming the changemaking force behind new ideas for global change.

*What is a Changemaker?*<sup>2</sup>

We define a changemaker as someone who envisions a better reality, builds a team to realize this purpose, and takes action to bring this reality into being, while continuously learning and adjusting for the good of all.<sup>3</sup> We believe that changemakers come in all ages and excel at the following abilities:

- **Conscious Empathy** is the ability to be aware of and understand our own, other individuals' and groups' perspectives, and to use that understanding to recognize patterns over time and guide one's actions toward a purpose that contributes to the good of all.
- **Teamwork** is the ability to contribute to and thrive in a fluid ecosystem of teams that mobilizes around each new problem or opportunity.
- **Changemaking Leadership** is a leadership mindset that recognizes that in a world of constant change, the role is to envision, enable, and then ensure that every player is an initiator and sees the big picture.
- **Changemaking Action** is the process of creating a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, and more just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society rather than to private individuals.<sup>4</sup>

Because we no longer live in a world defined by repetition,<sup>5</sup> these abilities are fundamental to the well-being and prosperity of society. Consequently, Ashoka seeks to further accelerate the rate at which every individual has the opportunity to become a changemaker. We are working to help others realize the strategic significance of a new paradigm where *everyone* is a changemaker and can contribute to the good of all. In this new paradigm success is determined by changemaker density and a culture where changemakers thrive.

We do not do this by teaching one-by-one. We started by connecting social entrepreneurs in all regions of the world. By engaging young changemakers and multiple key partners including universities, schools of education, teachers' unions, publishers and others we are working together, to envision, enable and ensure this new paradigm.

Here is one example of how this works. In the Amazon, a carefully selected network of young people is creating change by engaging their peers and the entire society to realize a world where everyone is a changemaker. Motivated by the idea of a sustainable and cleaner world, Rhenan Cauê Barbosa Batista organized a team of schoolmates to clear the banks of one of the tributaries of the Araguaia River in the Amazon. The initial result of their collective work was the removal of nearly one ton of waste from the riverbank. Many other examples follow, from Jakarta to Atlanta. Rhenan, like other changemakers, succeeds because he can and did engage his whole community.<sup>6</sup>

In 2021, Ashoka conducted a Global Fellows Study to understand how Ashoka Fellows are changing systems and mindsets. The survey captures data from 817 Fellows. It was

followed by 32 qualitative interviews with social entrepreneurs which focused on the strategies that Fellows use to build an “Everyone a Changemaker” world. These conversations and the ensuing analysis revealed that social entrepreneurs employ strategies focus on the individual, on stakeholders in their field, and on the ecosystem more broadly. They develop people’s belief in one’s own individual capacity, they redefine strengths and contribution potential and create a long-term identity based on the value of engagement in the process. Ashoka Fellows also play a facilitator role, supporting people in finding their voice and goals, they develop multipliers for addressing a social issue, and they engage citizens everywhere. Social entrepreneurs create enabling physical and emotional environments for people to act and they foster ecosystems to support ongoing engagement. You can find more details and examples of how these strategies work in practice in Ashoka’s 2021 Global Impact Report.

The study evidence also shows that the work of social entrepreneurs activates millions of individuals to build their own agency and self-permission to become changemakers across every continent. This vast mobilization of changemakers for an “Everyone a Changemaker” world requires new paradigms, one where kids grow up practicing changemaker skills and where every young person self-identifies as a changemaker. In fact, it is urgent we do so, as nothing will more quickly prepare young people for the world they are growing up in. While literacy was critical for an industrial revolution, we believe that changemaking abilities are an equivalent imperative for this century.

Engaging the systems that are part of young peoples’ growing-up years, as well as the adults working with young people is part of how the ripple effect starts. It begins with several thousand open-sourced ideas from social entrepreneurs, selected and engaged to develop new system change. Once the new system change ideas are developed by social entrepreneurs, we start identifying patterns where change is working and then engage multiple categories of partners to work together around a common purpose to change collective mindsets.

We have learned that social entrepreneurs apply the principle of putting youth in charge. This is a key element of an “Everyone a Changemaker” world because over time, every subsequent change builds on the previous changemaking experiences. When the study asked if they put young people in charge of leading change, a majority of Ashoka Fellows responded “yes”. They do so by encouraging people to think differently, especially those involved in their programs. They also engage them in leading campaigns and other communication strategies aimed at reaching large numbers of people.

We start by looking at how the Ashoka selection process influenced the work of the social entrepreneurs. 91% of respondents reported that the selection process itself helped them articulate their core idea better and to strengthen it.

During the study, we also asked questions about the Fellowship itself: How Ashoka Fellows are best supported now through system change thinking, changemaking leadership skills and wellbeing, and how they can best be supported in the future. 77% of Ashoka Fellows reported having benefited from the strategic guidance of the Ashoka mutual support network, and the focus moving forward should be on strengthening collective action support.

We also dig deeper into how social entrepreneurs generate systems change. They see their work spreading and creating impact when their ideas are replicated by other groups or institutions, or when they change market-based economic systems or influencing public policy. In the 2021 Ashoka Global Fellows Study, 93% of social entrepreneurs reported they achieved change in public policy since they became an Ashoka Fellow.

The study also looks at how social entrepreneurs have fared during the global COVID-19 pandemic. 56% of participants of the survey report to have been slightly affected by the crisis, while 37% were significantly impacted both in their operational model, as well as in reduction of funding. On the other hand, the survey also shows that 52% of responding social entrepreneurs faced the pandemic by developing new ideas for their organizations and target groups. In this article, we further look at what influenced the resilience and response of Ashoka Fellows to the pandemic.

We inquire about the importance of leading at a young age and the main allies of social entrepreneurs in those early stages. We find that parents and family members, educators, and other social entrepreneurs play an important inspirational role, but that the role models also vary across geographies.

Some of our articles also place emphasis on aspects of inclusion and equity. Whether it is about the resources and opportunities that female social entrepreneurs can access or about the diversity of the Ashoka Fellowship, the data from the 2021 Global Fellows Study help us identify better paths to advance on these issues. We find that Ashoka Fellows who self-identify with a minority group also benefit more from the Fellowship support and that they bring unique skills and solutions to the peer network. At the same time, we see that female social entrepreneurs still have more difficulties in ensuring funding than male social entrepreneurs, although they see a stronger relevance of the “Everyone a Changemaker” vision for their work than their male counterparts.

We also look at the role of technology in the work of Ashoka Fellows and highlight the importance of digitalization in achieving impact at mindset shift level through campaigns and extensive communications, as well as impact in terms of systems change through market and policy changes that can be achieved more effectively with the support of technology.

Finally, we look into new partnership models with corporations which can advance social entrepreneurs’ missions. 67% of the Ashoka Fellows taking part in the global survey develop partnerships with companies and through the Changemaker Companies program Ashoka is looking to advance these cross-sectoral collaborations.

As one of the participants in the survey says, social entrepreneurs want to change the cultural narrative, want to influence decision makers and civil society, business, and government. We all have work to do. Starting by practicing changemaking and by putting young people at the center as the contributors that they should be. That is essential if we want to get everyone to change the world for the good of all.

This series of articles is not simply a presentation of data from our 2021 study but is also a picture of an emergent new world: one where the solutions outrun problems and the decision-making architecture allows for everyone to become a changemaker.

## References

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6. For more details on Rhenan's work, please see:  
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