

# **“Generating an everyone a changemaker world through cultivating Social Entrepreneurship among young people”**

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## **I. Introduction**

This document is a summary of why and how young people could be engaged as changemakers globally. With the increase in the scope and relevance of the citizen sector over the last two decades, social entrepreneurship has become one of the most popular areas in the nonprofit sector.

Because this text aims to convey the importance of promoting social entrepreneurship, changemaking, and social business among young people, a brief explanation of these terms is appropriate. As New York University professor Paul Light explains, social entrepreneurship is a widely misunderstood term. It has been used by some people to make a new case for an old idea, by others to describe any type of moneymaking enterprise with a social mission, and by still others as a blanket term for any form of nonprofit organization that is new to them<sup>[1]</sup>.

For the purposes of this conference I will use Dees' and Drayton's original definition of social entrepreneurship. Ashoka's founder Bill Drayton is thought to have coined the term 'social entrepreneur' several decades ago. He recognized that "social entrepreneurs have the same core temperament as their industry-creating, business entrepreneur peers but instead use their talents to solve social problems on a society-wide scale -- why children are not learning, why technology is not accessed equally, why pollution is increasing, etc. The essence, however, is the same. Both types of entrepreneur recognize when a part of society is stuck and provide new ways to get it unstuck. Each type of entrepreneur envisages a systemic change, identifies the jujitsu points that will allow him or her to tip the whole society onto this new path, and then persists and persists until the job is done."<sup>[2]</sup>

Dees, now professor of social entrepreneurship at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, in his classic definition of the term says that social entrepreneurs play the role of change agents in the social sector, by adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value), recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission, engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning, acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand, and exhibiting a heightened sense of accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created.<sup>[3]</sup>

A young changemaker according to Ashoka's definition is someone between 12 and 21 years old who wants to make a difference using their passions and making social change happen. Young changemakers sometimes adopt and spread the innovations of social entrepreneurs entering the new field, building on the new idea, and multiplying change. They have clear, attainable goals, a credible plan, and are sustainable in the mid term, mostly through successful fundraising strategies and through strategies to incorporate new team members to their teams.

Emanuel, for instance, is 15 years old and his team launched a Dengue prevention program in northeast Argentina, in a region where 70% of the population lives in poverty and Dengue outbreaks occur every summer. His team arranged informal house to house visits, distributing brochures and even performing in the streets to inform people about preventive measures against the virus. Their approach was so useful that it was replicated by Red Cross and UNICEF in their province in 2010, and they also were hired to train a local organization in Paraguay to replicate their methodology.

Youth social enterprises are youth-led organizations that combine generation of resources with positive social impact. The core product, service or process directly contributes to solving social problems and generates sufficient income to cover both existing operations costs and hopefully, contributing to the future growth of the initiative. Uriel, 20 years old, is from an extremely poor community in Mexico City and created a social enterprise. Uriel wanted to teach youth in his community how to cook nutritious meals with a limited budget. For this reason he created “Young Chefs” and prepared 40 young Mexican people to cook more nutritious food, and additionally provided them with skills to enter the job market. In addition “Young Chefs” caters at events employing students from its courses and developed its own line of highly nutritious cookies for children.

### **III. Why do we need to foster a culture of young changemakers?**

In reviewing the more than 2500 leading social entrepreneurs that Ashoka selected to provide with living stipends and professional support, the organization discovered that a significant proportion of them had first experienced the power of being changemakers at a young age.

This experience of starting a social initiative during their adolescence helped shape them to the social entrepreneurs they are today. Rodrigo Baggio, for example, founded a successful technology consulting company while still in school in Rio de Janeiro. Eager to erase the digital divide and help disadvantaged people use technology to improve their communities and their lives, he created a citizens rights and technology school in a slum in Rio de Janeiro in 1995, the area's first. The Committee for Democracy in Information Technology (CDI) network now includes 753 technology and civic engagement schools in ten countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. CDI has helped transform more than 1 million lives. Additionally, Rodrigo was president of the youth group of his local methodist church, worked in a child care center in one of the city's favelas, and did volunteered with street children through another church-linked organization.

Drayton and others at Ashoka came to believe that the development of high caliber social entrepreneurs was largely linked to taking initiative at a young age. In addition, it became clear that society needed a higher percentage of society taking initiative and solving social problems from their root causes. Society needs not just the leading social entrepreneurs like Muhammad Yunus, but also more people spreading the innovations of social entrepreneurs. The Grameen Bank was realized by the vision of Mr. Yunus, and today there are more than 7,000 microfinance institutions that have built on and multiplied this new idea. What if we increase the percentage of people who give themselves the permission and purpose in life to solve society's problems and create hundred of new institutions around the ideas of each high caliber social entrepreneur?

Youth social enterprises should be encouraged because there is a global need to both generate employment for youth and help new companies become socially conscious from their origins. Ashoka's Latin America team, for example, found that incubating young changemakers led to the positive development of youth social enterprises. Ashoka Latin America and its partners, such as Artemisia<sup>[4]</sup>, discovered that these kind of programs prepared youth not only to be positive agents of social change but also to start the process of being independent business owners that

were able to cover at least their operating costs through delivering their product, service, or process and therefore created economic and social value for themselves and other young people.

What Ashoka found in South America is that young people who were supported in starting their own social enterprises from scratch obtained surprising results compared to other young people from similar socioeconomic backgrounds who had experienced helping others through a Changemaker initiative.

#### **IV. How can we cultivate Young changemakers globally?**

Having established the importance of helping adolescents become changemakers, our prevailing challenge is how to foster an entrepreneurial culture globally that encourages and supports young people to have the transformative experience of leading their own social venture. Though there is no a simple blueprint or formula, we have learned significant lessons over the last six years about what does and does not work in the promotion of youth changemakers. Given these caveats, let me suggest three key steps to nurture a culture of youth social entrepreneurship:

1. To engage adolescents in social change, we need to put them in charge. Several years ago, Ashoka, after learning from some 500 leading social entrepreneurs, recognized that the dominant method of engaging young people in development needed to be replaced. They met this challenge with major innovations in the area of children and youth. They engaged adolescents in the learning process putting them in charge and developed their entrepreneurial skills by encouraging problem solving, team work, decision making and creativity.

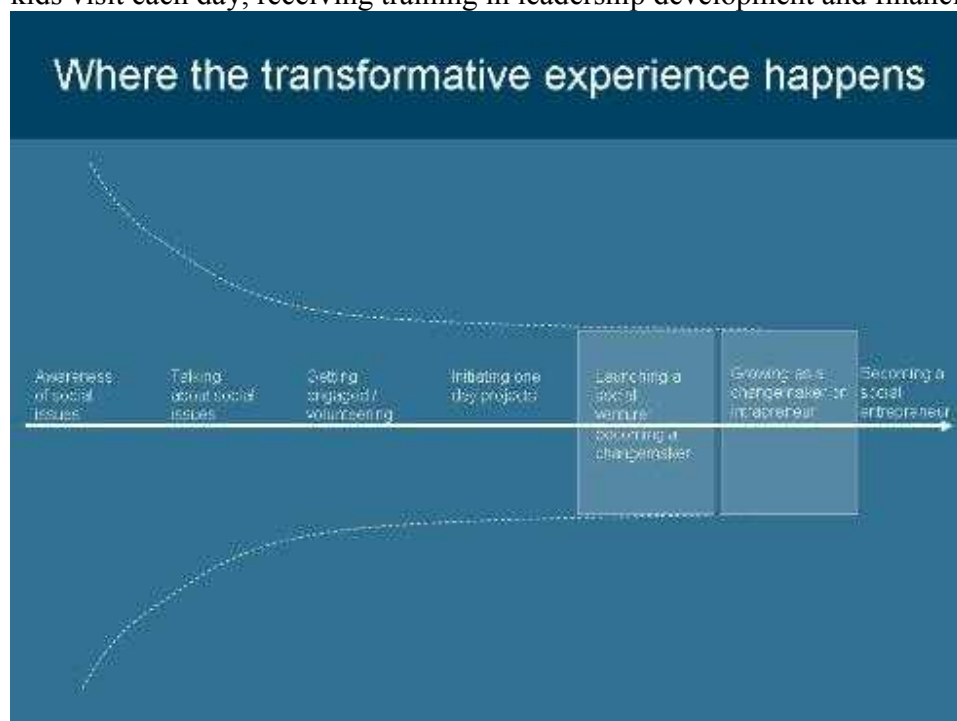
Ashoka Fellows have shown that creating space and support for youth self initiative leads to dramatic improvement in adolescent development, as well as real social impact. In case after case, Ashoka has found that “young people, often the only substantial resource available in many parts of the world, mature rapidly through their practical, competence-building involvement in these projects.”[\[5\]](#)

By allowing and encouraging young people to create their own vision instead of following an adult’s formulaic program, these social entrepreneurs gave young people confidence in their autonomy and capacity to affect change. These kind of initiatives took the next step by challenging--indeed, expecting--young people to lead the way by deciding what needs to address, and by acting decisively to address them.

Further, these teams, especially teams composed of youth, commit to projects that will have a lasting impact most often when team members select their own topic of interest. The transformation happens when young people commit to solutions that are as diverse as the needs they care about - ranging from tutoring services to virtual radio stations, from bike stores to dance academies, from video festivals to youth diabetes support groups. What turns these diverse activities into Youth Ventures is that the young people themselves come up with the ideas and control the projects.

2. The transformative process of becoming changemakers occurs only when young people finds an issue they care about, take initiative and mobilize others around it. Young people do not become changemakers when they become fans of a cause such as “Stop poverty in Africa” in social networks. They do not learn how to generate lasting change throughout their lives by volunteering a few days in a community program.

Only the process of starting and leading their own community-benefiting ventures allows young people to learn the critical entrepreneurial, leadership, team, empathy and business skills that help them to excel at whatever vocation they pursue. For instance Divine Bradley, at the age of 17, with a child of his own, founded Team Revolution in the porch of his mom’s house in Brooklyn with the idea of helping young people imagine a better future for themselves. His initiative has grown and today they have a community center in the heart of Brooklyn where 300 kids visit each day, receiving training in leadership development and financial literacy.



### 3. Teams need initial and ongoing support

Fortunately, many young people have already created such organizations. However, many more can and would if they could overcome resource constraints and receive ongoing support.

The startup support is crucial. Many of Ashoka's high caliber social entrepreneurs started their organizations when they were young because they had a unique, internal conviction to go beyond the resources at hand. But in order to scale these programs, raising awareness and initial support to teams is needed up to the moment that teams develop the capacity to generate resources and attract more team members by their own means.

The journey from identifying an innovative idea to transforming it into a young changemaker initiative is also critical. Young people need support to develop a strategic and integrated vision

around their long and short term objectives and strategic plans. After launch, the probability that they will continue having impact will increase if they receive ongoing support in the form of competitions, collaborations with other young leaders, and local and global meetings.

Crucial knowledge and interaction can flow via communication technologies but there must be enough personal contact through local organizations or recurrent meetings to make their experience real, tangible, personal and lasting.

#### **IV. Creating a positive circle: towards a youth social entrepreneurship culture for social development.**

One of the most difficult challenges is overcoming the widespread invisibility of youth commitment. Problematic teenagers, often using violence, are much more likely to become media subjects than a young person, such as Uriel, the founder of “Young Chefs” that promotes youth employment and children nutrition. If such young people are more visible, it will have a compounding and inspirational effect on other young people. They immediately become walking examples of how one can apply one's talents in alternative, powerful ways.

Another challenge of youth unemployment is improving the ways we measure and convey why young people who have the experience of creating lasting change are better equipped not only to grow as a changemaker, but also as a micro business entrepreneur or as an intrapreneur in an organization.

As David Bornstein[6] says in “How to Change the World” (probably the most popular book on social entrepreneurship) the movement is taking root across the age spectrum and right now an incredible amount of young changemakers are generating positive impact in our world. The engagement of young people in social entrepreneurship requires, as Brodbar suggests[7], our immediate action to build and sustain the infrastructure that's required for these ideas to take root and flourish.

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[1] Paul Light, “Reshaping Social Entrepreneurship” in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Fall 2006

[2] William Drayton, “The Citizen Sector: Becoming as Competitive and Entrepreneurial as Business,” in *California Management Journal*, 2002.

[3] J. Gregory Dees and Peter Economy “Social Entrepreneurship,” in J. Gregory Dees, Jed Emerson, and Peter Economy (eds.), *Enterprising Nonprofits: A Toolkit for Social Entrepreneurs*, John Wiley & Sons, 2001.

[4] See <http://www.artemis-international.org>

[5] Susan Davis, “SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: TOWARDS AN ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT” presented in the Youth Employment Summit, September 7-11, 2002

[6] David Bornstein, *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*, Oxford University Press, USA

[7] Gabriel Brodbar, New York University Reynolds Program Founding Director, “[Not Everyone's a Social Entrepreneur](#)” *Beyond Profit*, 2007.