

Foreword

Bill Drayton

The past two and a half decades have witnessed a rapid and profound change in human history. Health, the environment, human rights, development, education, emergency relief, housing, energy, and other social issues have become as entrepreneurial and competitive as business. Several consequences have flowed directly from this phenomenon. There are now major new career and part-time opportunities for men and women of all ages and backgrounds to become involved in the citizen sector on a paid or volunteer basis.¹ In fact, the citizen sector is by far the fastest growing economic sector. It generates jobs at three times the rate of the rest of the economy. From 1990 to 2000 alone, the number of registered international citizen groups increased 450 percent,² and there has been an explosion of such groups since. Social entrepreneurs – individuals with innovative, system-changing solutions to society’s most pressing social problems – have become both more competitive and more collaborative with one another and with business, increasing productivity and quality. Indeed, the productivity of citizen groups is rising so quickly that the productivity gap with business is decreasing by half every 10 to 12 years in countries and regions where the citizen sector is large and active.

Social entrepreneurs change society by seizing opportunities, improving systems, inventing new approaches, and creating solutions. It is about finding what is not working and persuading entire societies to take new leaps. There is nothing more powerful than the combination of a big idea with a good entrepreneur. We are in the middle of the biggest structural change since the Agricultural Revolution, and social entrepreneurs are right at the heart of it.

Recognizing that most people are not yet aware of these significant changes, this book offers concrete illustrations of social entrepreneurs in action. It demystifies who they are and how they succeed. *Social Entrepreneurship in the Age of Atrocities: Changing Our World* helps reveal that magic moment when entrepreneurs have not only conceived an idea that sparked the next step in the field, but also learned how to cause major structural social change in order to do so.

Ashoka is the global association of the world’s leading social entrepreneurs. When we started, the concept of ‘social entrepreneurs’ was so new that we had to invent the very phrase. Since 1981, we have implemented a five-

step selection process (focusing on pattern-change ideas, creativity, entrepreneurial quality, social impact, and ethical fiber) to find and launch over 3,000 leading social entrepreneurs as Ashoka Fellows. We help them fly by providing them with living stipends, professional support, and welcome into a global network of peers in more than 70 countries.³ Over half have changed national policy within five years of their launch. Three-quarters have changed the patterns of their field nationally.

Ashoka's core belief is 'Everyone a Changemaker™.' Beyond simply building an entrepreneurial, competitive citizen sector, our mission is to create a world where everyone has the freedom, confidence, and ability to turn challenges into solutions. The world now needs nothing short of a democratic revolution: a transformative, contagious movement that not only impacts the citizen sector, but all other spheres, including government, business, academia, and journalism.

Young people – the focus of this book – are critical. Because of their age, motivation, and, for some, a counterintuitively high level of competence and responsibility, young people can be powerful, long-term changemakers – people with the confidence and skills to take initiative and create change. For any society to succeed in a world increasingly defined by accelerating change, it must now ensure that all of its young people do develop this confidence and the skills that must underpin it: empathy, teamwork, leadership, and change-making. To be a changemaker in life, one must first be and practice being a changemaker in one's youth. Society urgently needs to help, but the chief responsibility rests with every young person. He or she must be able to give him/herself permission – permission to see a problem knowing that he or she will be able to solve it, permission to change how the world works.

If young people do not give themselves such permission and then act, it is all too easy to slip into a life of powerlessness. That was sad before; soon it will be a tragedy. By the time today's young people reach their thirties, there will be very little demand for anyone who cannot contribute to change.

Without a high level of empathetic skills, for example, one will hurt people and groups and be thrown out of the game. How can one be a team member without both teamwork and leadership skills serving changemaking? How can one develop complex, learned skills required to be a changemaker without a lot of practice?

Young people standing up, organizing a team, and solving the problems around them is now essential. For them and for their futures. To solve the problems. And to ensure, in the only way possible, that we will soon be living in a society of changemakers. This is critical to opening the way to our 'Everyone a Changemaker™' future. That world will be fundamentally different and far safer, happier, more equal, and more successful. There is no way that the problems can outrun the solutions.

To this end, Ashoka and many partners are building Ashoka's Youth Venture, a global movement of young changemakers.⁴ We hope it will spark changes analogous to those triggered earlier by the women's movement and the civil rights movement. All young people need to be changemakers now so that they can be changemakers later in life.

Inspired by and utilizing a liberal education that has made them knowledgeable and committed to shaping themselves and the world around them, the contributors to this book, many of whom are current or recent students, embody the ideal of the modern young social entrepreneur. Through their studies and travels, these proactive, critical thinkers saw problems around them, began to experience and appreciate needs and opportunities in the flesh, and felt compelled to act.

Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or to teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry. The chapters ahead illustrate the needs of particular 'industries' and communities and then describe how these activities and groups are being revolutionized: whether through the promotion of creative outlets for those surviving recent horrors in Sierra Leone; the offering of legal assistance to asylum seekers; the creation of Rwanda's first public library; the partnership with Rwandan women's collectives to sell their goods abroad and to return profits and skills training; the provision of scholarships and services for socially vulnerable youth in Rwanda; the easing of the educational and healthcare needs of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS worldwide; the facilitation of young Americans in confronting global challenges; and efforts to ease the dysfunctional and destructive interrelations between Muslim and Jewish youth. Indeed, atrocity responses, the subject matter of this book, have been especially impacted by the citizen sector. For example, the primary reason we now have the International Criminal Court (ICC), the world's first permanent tribunal for war crimes, and other crimes against humanity, is that 2,000 citizen groups got together and blasted it out of the attic where the nation states had kept it locked up for over 50 years.⁵

This book demonstrates some key lessons about the modern era generally, and social entrepreneurship specifically. First, many of the world's problems must be addressed at the global level. Today's needs, exemplified in this book by atrocities, are often so complicated and challenging that they demand international collaboration on solutions. Second, entrepreneurship is often most successful when it is driven by values-based faith. From motivating the individual to engage in the entrepreneurial activity in the first place, to persuading others around her to support the initiative and trust the entrepreneur, deeply rooted and life-defining values inspire and compel. Third, social entrepreneurs must and do catalyze new local changemakers into being. To be truly self-sustaining and expansive, a movement must become more than its originator

and have local ownership and commitment. Finally, social entrepreneurship can be the rule, not the exception. The individuals profiled in this book are not astrophysicists. They are good people, and they gave themselves permission to change the world where it needed change. They then went to work and succeeded by solving problems as they came into sight. You could do this. I hope these stories of caring and creativity will serve as a beacon and encourage many, many others to care and to take initiative.

Though increasingly popular and clearly most necessary, social entrepreneurship is still in the early stages of focused scholarship. This book helps fill a gap in the study and practice of the field by providing in-depth profiles written by young social entrepreneurs themselves. Congratulations and thanks to Dr. Zachary Kaufman for assembling, editing, and contributing to this valuable collection – and also for his own work changing the world.

Everyone can indeed be a changemaker, like those whose work is featured in this book. Please consider it. The world needs you, the changemaker. And there is no more rewarding life.

NOTES

1. Ashoka and a growing number of other organizations ask that everyone stop defining us as ‘non-profit’ or ‘non-governmental’ organizations. We instead suggest the use of ‘citizen sector’ and ‘citizen organization.’ Citizens – people who care and take action to serve others and cause needed change – are the essence of the sector. We believe that when one or several people get together to cause positive social change, they instantly become citizens in the fullest sense of the word. As I have argued elsewhere, these linguistic differences matter. See Bill Drayton, *Words Matter: Time to Switch*, ALLIANCE, Sept. 2007, at 22.
2. Bill Drayton, *Where the Real Power Lies*, ALLIANCE, Mar. 2005, at 29–30.
3. For the official website of Ashoka, see <http://www.ashoka.org/>.
4. For the official website of Ashoka’s Youth Venture, see <http://www.ashoka.org/youthventure/>.
5. For the official website of the ICC, see <http://www.icc-cpi.int/>.