

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**There is vigorous debate about the shortcomings of philanthropy and various private initiatives emerging in the social sector, including social entrepreneurship.**

Authors have raised questions regarding accountability, democratic practice, and equity in addressing social challenges. Criticisms also include mission drift, not engaging perpetrators, building parallel structures to government institutions, and others.

**With this report, the Ashoka Learning and Action Center and the Ashoka Globalizer teams show how social entrepreneurs can contribute to meaningful social change in a way that counters common criticisms.**


Without diminishing the importance and the relevance of the critical points raised, we highlight practitioners that—through their core work—show how social change can be promoted by private actors in a way that meets critics' demands for equity and accountability. The goal of this report is to use these concrete examples to better equip the social sector to address the shortcomings of organizational practices that critics articulate.

The social entrepreneurs featured in this report engage whole societal groups to apply empathy in new ways, to self-organize, and to

play a more active role for the common good. At Ashoka we call people with these qualities *changemakers*. The case studies highlight an important insight:

**Promoting social change in a way that stands up to current criticisms of philanthrocapitalism goes hand in hand with enabling people to be changemakers and connecting them within systemic approaches. Empowering others to be changemakers is a powerful principle for creating legitimacy and accountability for systems change work.**

As intermediary organizations, practitioners, funders, and philanthropists, we all must reflect on our current practices and the long-term negative impact that some of them can trigger. We can learn from the best practices of social entrepreneurs and embed them in our own thinking and acting.



**The five case studies in this report show how we can:**

- **Adopt a systemic approach** in developing our programs, activities and funding practices;
- **Use the power of “everyone a change-maker”** as a guiding principle for systems change work;
- **Ensure accountability and legitimacy** of our work by closely engaging a variety of actors in our fields—citizens, government bodies, non-profits and companies—and making our work and processes as transparent, inclusive, and responsive to feedback as possible;
- **Shift power dynamics** between the social groups that we are working with to benefit a more equitable power distribution;
- **Leverage data and scientific research** in addressing embedded power imbalances in various industries;
- **Transform a potential perpetrator group** into and ally and part of the solution for a social problem;
- **Improve existing public systems**, rather than building parallel structures, by providing expertise, ensuring alignment of stakeholders, and using technology.

**We invite you to reflect on these seven principles when making decisions about how you engage with social problems.** Avoid the pitfalls at the core of critical discussions about

the current state of philanthropy and private solutions in the social sector by applying these principles.