

# Ashoka Changemaking Networks & INREM Foundation's Case Study



## CHANGEMAKING NETWORKS BASICS

- ✓ A Changemaking Network (CMN) is a timeless ecosystem of interdependent communities, united by shared vision and values, which has harnessed changemaking network effects to outsmart and outpace systemic social problems.
- ✓ The network is built because there is a need, a work to be done, a vision to be achieved. These networks are about serving others – this premise is important for the building and sustaining of it.
- ✓ CM Networks become game changers for the entire society because they upgrade and support changemaking of many more players, giving them a way to participate towards social good.
- ✓ CM Networks are a force for social equity not simply a marketplace to enable and scale an exchange of value
- ✓ Data becomes the “soft currency” of a CM Network that motivates participation and ensures accountability. Sharing data openly fosters trust and strengthens collaboration, creating more resilient and effective networks.





## CHANGEMAKING NETWORKS

Changemaking Networks serve as transformative agents within society, elevating and bolstering the changemaking capacities of a broader spectrum of participants. They offer an avenue for individuals to actively contribute to social betterment by reconfiguring orchestrated systems to address some of the most urgent challenges. Changemaking Networks serve as champions of social equity, transcending their role as mere platforms for enabling and amplifying value exchange. They prioritize coming together, knowledge sharing and collective learning for the good of all.

The “nut to crack” is to design an enabling architecture and a culture that inspires and enables the entire network to do the work of achieving the shared goal. To achieve this, Changemaking Networks employ an entirely innovative variation of network effect principles (so gainfully leveraged by businesses) from the point of view of purpose, architecture, community culture, and values.



*“Once you have a big vision, you need to create the operating system that brings people together, connecting the activities and various systems to achieve the shared goal”*

Rosanne Haggerty - Ashoka Fellow

Every system and actor in a Changemaking Network enable others to be disproportionately powerful, rather than simply conduct individual transactions at scale (the prime driver of network effects in the tech world). Scalable, open, and purposive teamsmanship matters.

Networks in our sector are about serving others. They become game changers for the entire society because they upgrade and support changemaking of many more players, giving them a way to participate towards social good. The social and emotional components of building networks and movements are important to pay attention to, because if people don’t feel that they are valued, it’s not going to work.

The network needs to empower individuals to discover pathways for deeper engagement, learning, and ascending to higher levels of changemaking. These pathways not only bolster individuals' capacity to collaborate and innovate but also commemorate even the smallest triumphs along the way. Sharing accomplishments and acknowledging the contributions of its members is very important.



## *CHANGEMAKING NETWORKS*

Orchestrating an ecosystem so that one can change the game and become its biggest draw, is entirely achievable. It entails a network-building approach that includes framing of a bold vision, imagining an ecosystem of players needed to implement it, aligning each of their incentives to collaborate around the shared vision, keeping track of progress, and becoming the reference point for the intended change. If done properly, one can create an ecosystem so dense and magnetic that it would be inefficient to try to re-create it.



It's got to be fun! Pathways from engagement to fulfilment need to be created. Ladders of achievement and recognition to help members evolve their ability to collaborate and innovate are also critical.

Once the network has sparked people's imaginations regarding what's achievable and involved them in the pursuit of a significant objective, it must facilitate a dynamic increase in their capabilities and influence.

Changemaking requires learning and practice. It starts with members to self identify as changemakers and go through a ladder of learning and engagement to unleash the changemaking potential of all. It requires a system to support its genesis and growth – this is the systemic gap that the network addresses – it provides the system for mass changemaking. By helping those that one is trying to serve to become active participants vs passive recipients of change, is fundamental to unleash changemaking and power.

Beyond activating individual changemaking, the network also needs to spark collective agency with a goal that everyone can relate to. If there isn't inspiration and relatability, there won't be mass action. It is very important to establish a shared goal that all can relate to and share.

Then the orchestrator needs to show a clear roadmap (sharing a vision is not enough) with many pathways and entry points so all can come into the roadmap - providing a sense of we are in this together.



## *CHANGEMAKING NETWORKS*

Another key aspect to establish in the network is the practice of a shared progress measurement, ideally as an open, transparent community scoreboard, that highlights a common goal for all the network members to contribute towards. It provides a sense of urgency, facilitates real-time collective learning and introduces an element of competition and dynamic knowledge crucial for urgent mass changemaking. It also shares progress, keeping people motivated towards the goal, showing how the work is outpacing the problem. The objective is to deepen and expand horizontally. Over time, it strengthens the foundation rather than relying on a narrow entry point. Engaging with a diverse group enhances resilience, ensuring that even with turnover, the connection and momentum persist.

Leveraging low tech for keeping score and generate data, that the stakeholders in the network can keep reviewing, is hugely important. Real-time information on how the problem is being experienced on the ground is critical.



Keeping score & opening up network data to stay ahead of the game is key. Share progress thru real time data, keep track of learnings, keep people motivated towards the goal, show how the work is outpacing the problem

The teams must be guided by the data on what is happening, constantly learning their way forward by rapidly testing and assessing what's working and moving the effort closer to the aim. Data and training others to use it is key (a lot of work goes into upskilling the network in data collection and analysis, because network members need to collect the right kind of data to track real-time progress).

Systems change efforts have urgency because intractable problems tend to ossify if not corrected as quickly and firmly as possible. It's a constant race between problems and solutions that the latter needs to win. Therefore, shared measurement of progress generates real-time collective learning for the network. And an open community scoreboard—which keeps track of community learning and of who's ahead in the game—provides the gamesmanship and dynamic knowledge required in urgent mass changemaking.



## CHANGEMAKING NETWORKS

Network effects are the secret behind the exponential growth of a network. And what we learned is that to harness them, three things need to happen:

1. The exchange of value should be sticky and lend itself to repeated use and creation of new kinds of value
1. There needs to be an architecture to support intentional/ purposive and exponential growth
2. The users should be incentivized to do the work needed to grow the network and make it bigger and bigger so it becomes magnetic.

Network effects are important to ensure timelessness, which is what is wanted to ensure, so the vision and work continues well beyond one's own organization. Figuring out how to endure the work well after the organization stops working, how to create such a powerful ecosystem that endures timelessness, is another goal for this approach.



The secret behind enabling a network to grow exponentially is nailing the ability to harness “network effects”—that is, the phenomenon that comes into play when the transactional value of a network is so clear that it becomes the most efficient way for its users to achieve their goals

Network effects are also critical to enable many people and institutions in the network to participate and engage. In a world of constant change, there needs to be an abundance of changemakers —people who initiate and drive change— in a given community/country to drive prosperity, health and wellbeing. Based on informal research it was revealed that those communities with a high changemaker density rate had consistently above average social outcomes and stronger community sustainable development. Having a high density of changemakers in an organization or community helps that community or organization to succeed. Changemakers are the ones who can identify problems, come up with solutions, and lead the implementation of those solutions.



## CHANGEMAKING NETWORKS

People have been building towards Ashoka's core vision of "everyone a changemaker" ("EACH") future for several millennia, but the pace has hastened dramatically over the recent centuries. One group after another has sought collective and individual freedom, and most people have developed, remarkably quickly, the sophisticated skills necessary to be contributors or, as Bill Drayton prefers to say, givers. Once the ability to give becomes universal, the consequences will be profound and wonderful:

- When everyone is a changemaker and we know how to work together, problems will never outrun solutions.
- A giver's deepest desire is to give—and the greatest gift one can give is the power to give itself



*"If one is not able to be a giver, one cannot have a life. That's why we believe that the most fundamental right is the right to give. This means that everyone must have the requisite changemaking abilities. That's why Ashoka's mission is "everyone a changemaker.""*

Bill Drayton - Ashoka Founder & CEO

Imagine a world where everyone seeks to elevate others to their highest possible capacity to give. That's a united world. It's also a world that dynamically generates equality, collective wisdom, and shared consciousness. It strengthens us all and gives us an unparalleled opportunity to contribute to the universe in meaningful ways.





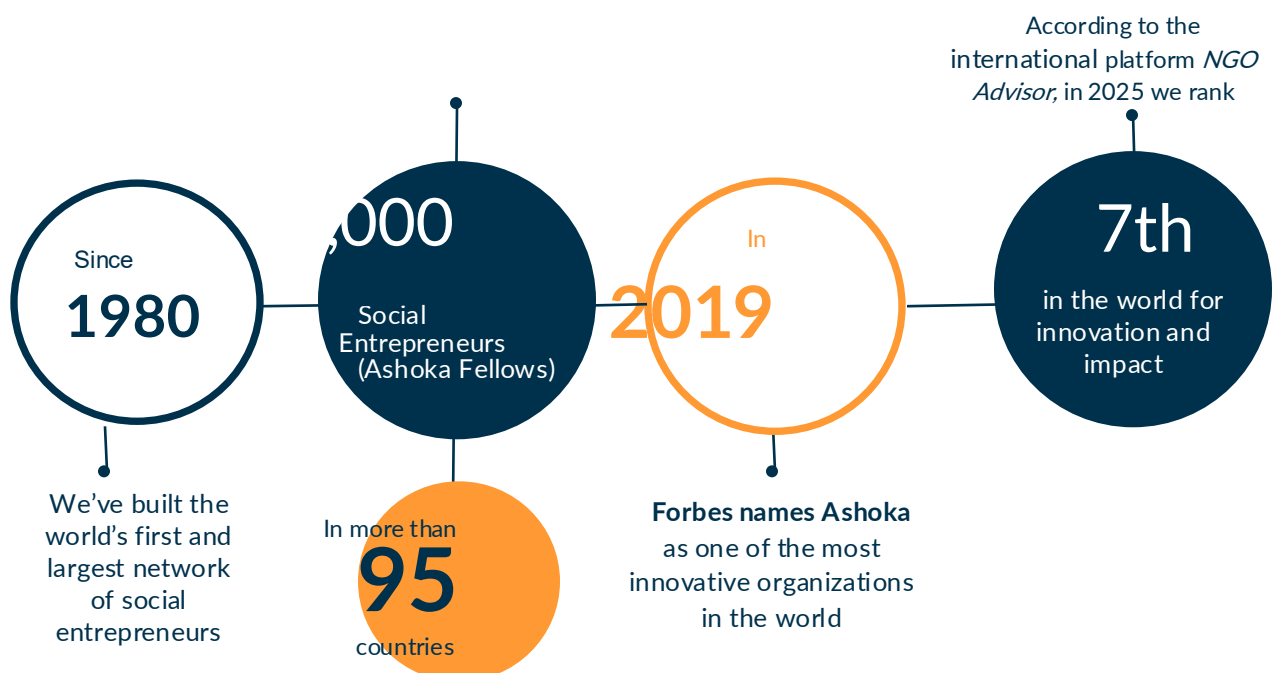
## CHANGEMAKING NETWORKS

### About Ashoka

Founded in 1980, Ashoka coined the term and created the field of social entrepreneurship. Today it is the largest network of social innovators : 4000+ Ashoka Fellows in 98 countries reaching 650 million people/year. Four of our Fellows are recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize (Muhammed Yunus, Kailash Satyarthi, Jerry White, and Carlos Nobre). Forbes named Ashoka one of the most innovative organisations in the world. Ashoka has 1+ million followers on LinkedIn, X, Instagram and Facebook

Drawing from five years of experience through the ASPIRe program, collaborating with over 50+ Ashoka Fellows, 120+ Mission Allies and great partners (like Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies and Cisco Foundation), Changemaking Networks has become one of Ashoka's global initiatives. Its mission: to learn and share how changemaking networks can help every group or organization operate in today's rapidly changing and interconnected world. How to organize societal behavior toward an "Everyone a Changemaker" world. CMN developed practical tools, frameworks, and approaches that help Ashoka teams, Ashoka Fellows and partners map their ecosystems, engage key players, and design the "operating system" that will enable collaboration and continuous learning among stakeholders.

### Ashoka Credentials







## CHANGEMAKING NETWORKS

### CASE STUDY : INREM PIONEERING THIS APPROACH FOR WATER SAFE COMMUNITIES IN INDIA

Ashoka Fellow Sunderrajan Krishnan started in 2010, focusing on vulnerable communities affected by water contamination and malnutrition, highlighting the need to address local realities instead of relying on global averages. Working with one family in a remote location of India - Jhabua, MP - and getting a child to learn walking was literally the beginning of the journey.

His participation in ASPIRe (Ashoka's Accelerator that supports fellows in designing for exponential change) was a turning point for him and his organization, INREM Foundation. During the Accelerator, Sunder began designing his changemaking network - a timeless ecosystem of interdependent communities, united by shared vision and values, demonstrating how a network in action can drive systemic social change at scale. His approach evolved from fostering collaboration among diverse actors to tackle water issues, to designing a network, where all critical stakeholders work towards a shared vision. Empowering communities to solve water-related problems by leveraging data and networks - involving experts, practitioners, and citizens - and leveraging technology, has become a cornerstone of this model.





## CHANGEMAKING NETWORKS

During the Ashoka ASPIRe Accelerator, Sunder became aware of his important role the orchestrator of the network, creating the architecture, roles, rituals, and value flows that enable collaboration and continuous learning among key stakeholders. Through the visualization of this new “operating system”, Sunder engaged many others in his vision by convening “circles of doing” — bringing together activists, NGOs, government officials, engineers, chemists, and community members to tackle India’s water safety challenges. Through cycles of experimentation, these circles evolved into “circles of trust” where information is accepted and acted upon. His team introduced “Jal exchanges”—structured quarterly cycles for reporting and resolving issues—building transparency and accountability in the network.



*"We aim to strengthen and accelerate our journey for a connected network of Water Quality Champions in order to enable solutions to water quality problems anywhere."*  
Sunderrajan Krishnan – Ashoka Fellow

A network scorecard was designed to be simple and actionable for all involved, while also supporting deeper analytics for researchers and policymakers.

Another major innovation was the “community registry”—a living, digital record of water safety at the village level – that emerged as a central organizing tool - a repository of data, stories, and metrics at the smallest relevant unit (e.g., Anganwadi, school, village). The registry is both a practical tool (for tracking water safety) and a catalyst for collective action and recognition. The registry model is being piloted in Assam and is envisioned as a universal tool for social change—adaptable to any domain, scalable across geographies, and grounded in local realities. It can be as simple or complex as needed, reflecting local priorities (e.g., tracking water for animals as well as people).

Leadership in the network emerged organically through “nodal coordinators”—trusted individuals who connect actors, facilitate dialogue, and drive action. These leaders are recognized not by title, but by their trustworthiness, empathy, and ability to mobilize others. Selection and grooming of these coordinators is critical; they must be both trusted and capable of orchestrating collective action.





## CHANGEMAKING NETWORKS

To sustain engagement, Sunder introduced a badge system to recognize micro-skills, community achievements, and orchestration leadership. Time spent, actions completed, and leadership are all tracked and celebrated.

A new challenge soon became evident for Sunder: the need to deepen citizen participation and distribute the ability to solve if he was to address this vast social problem. Equally important was the generation of data—a kind of “soft currency” within the network—critical for enabling accountability, transparency, and sustained motivation among participants in the network.

In collaboration with another Ashoka Fellow and the Assam government, Sunder led a pilot project in Assam. Through this collaboration, 45,000 teenagers across 8000 villages were trained as “Water Ambassadors,” using a simple, open-source technology platform, Samaaja, to collect and report data on local water sources. They audited water treatment plants, identified water-related issues in their schools and communities, and shared data with local authorities. The platform also helped them take small water-saving actions, which roll up into a Changemaker portfolio, and receive feedback. The pilot generated over 4,100 data points and more than 37,000 community-level actions. These insights were shared with government departments to inform improvements in water and sanitation systems. The program is expanding, with a goal of reaching 100,000 young people and 20,000 community health workers across the state.





Another powerful changemaker activation tool developed by Sunder is his widely recognized Online Onboarding Water Quality Management (WQM) course. Out of approximately 10,000 interested individuals, 5,193 applied and 2,300 successfully graduated. Remarkably, 85% of participants retained key skills even two years after completing the training. Additionally, 10–15% of users remain actively engaged on the IECHO platform, using it for mentoring and collaborative problem-solving.

Sunder's open-source, modular approach is designed for replication. His tools and methods are being explored for use in other sectors. His journey shows that systems change is not just about data or technology—it's about trust, relationships, and learning together.



Sunder's story is one of moving from isolated interventions to building a distributed, networked problem-solving approach for water safety—empowering experts, practitioners, and citizens to collaborate, share knowledge, and solve problems at scale, with technology as an enabler and a focus on equity, trust, and systemic change. INREM's current focus is on building systems, tools, and cultures that outlast any single organization or leader.

Change is seen as emerging from interconnected circles of actors, each with complementary roles and mutual value. Trust, transparency, and recognition are the levers for sustaining action and scaling impact. INREM's approach is iterative, experimental, and open—constantly learning from the field, adapting, and sharing tools and insights with others.

INREM's journey, as articulated by Sunder, is a story of humility, learning, and systemic ambition. From the heartbreak of a single family left behind, to the design of open-source, trust-based community registries, the organization has evolved into a catalyst for distributed change-making. Their model—rooted in circles of trust, orchestrated action, and transparent data—offers a blueprint for tackling complex social problems at scale, not just in water, but across domains.



# Ashoka Changemaking Networks

## About INREM Foundation

INREM Foundation is building a nationwide movement for water-safe communities by equipping local changemakers-especially women, students, and frontline workers-with the tools, data, and mentorship to tackle drinking water contamination. Working at the intersection of water, gender and health, INREM combines community-led action with digital platforms like JalXChange to activate and connect Water Quality Champions across India-ensuring access to clean water with dignity and agency.

INREM has reached over 13 million people across 8 states, with a 22% positive shift in safe water use. Its changemaking network now spans 60% of India's districts, with nearly 60,000 Water Quality Champions leading local action in contamination hotspots. INREM also serves as the National Thematic Lead on water quality under India's flagship Jal Jeevan Mission, helping embed citizen-led, tech-enabled approaches into national programs.

INREM's mission is to enable 1 million Water Quality Champions by 2030 to secure water safe villages across the country.

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