

Evaluation of the Ashoka News & Knowledge Program

A Partnership between Ashoka and Knight Foundation

Final Report

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Prepared For

Ashoka: *Innovators for the Public*
and
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Prepared By

LFA Group, *Learning for Action*
170 Capp Street, Suite C
San Francisco, CA 94110
(415) 392-2850
www.LFAGroup.com



Executive Summary

Around the world, the way people get, share, and use information is in rapid, almost cataclysmic flux. It is not just that we can use Facebook to start or join a revolution; or that Twitter and geomapping can help us understand what's happening in moments of crisis; or that mobile phones can instantly connect anyone with anyone else. It is all that, of course – but even more, it is about the stunning democratization of the production of distribution of content, and the corresponding weakening of institutions that historically have determined what we see, read, and listen to.

Predictably, this flux has sparked an explosion of entrepreneurship aimed at capitalizing on new technologies and changing user needs and exploiting the vulnerability of old media. The promise of this innovation is that it will advance information freedom, access, and quality, and catalyze new ways for people to use information to change their lives and society. The risk is that rapid entrepreneurship will actually diminish information citizenship, allowing a cacophony of voices at the expense of relevance and privacy.

In 2008, Ashoka: Innovators for the Public, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation embarked on a partnership intended to target this opportunity. With financial support from Knight, Ashoka committed to identifying and advance the work of social entrepreneurs – innovators applying entrepreneurial principles to social change – whose work promised to create system-changing impact by dramatically improving the way people get and use information. In the three years since, Ashoka has elected 30 Fellows to the News & Knowledge program in an effort to increase the free flow of and access to quality news and information that can support citizenship globally. Fellows receive financial support and connection to a global community of like-minded entrepreneurs.

This report summarizes the findings, key conclusions and recommendations developed by LFA Group: *Learning for Action*, an independent research, evaluation and strategy consulting firm hired by Ashoka and the Knight Foundation to assess the News & Knowledge Fellows program. LFA conducted this study in late 2010 and early 2011, at the end of the program's third year. Employing extensive surveys, stakeholder interviews, documentation review as well as four multi-day site visits with representative Fellows on three continents, the LFA team looked at the work of 27 individuals elected to the News & Knowledge Fellowship by the start of the study, and assessed the group as a whole to build a nuanced understanding of the program's successes, challenges and opportunities for increasing impact.

Impact

Are Ashoka Fellows actually changing the game in news and information? Of the 27 projects studied, 25 are producing expected *outputs* (e.g., number of subscribers, number of journalists trained) suggesting that the vast majority of Fellows are successfully implementing their planned work. The assessment of *outcomes*, changes that are expected to be achieved as a result of this work, is more nuanced: 8 Fellows are demonstrating significant results and are clearly on track to achieve long-term impact; 12 have some evidence they are beginning to produce desired outcomes, but existing data are insufficient to be conclusive; 4 are too early in their development to be meaningfully assessed for impact; and 2 Fellows are not likely to achieve desired outcomes, based on available evidence.

The evaluation team, in consultation with Ashoka, developed a framework for understanding the content of Fellows' work. All News & Knowledge Fellows are working to create change along at least two or more of the following four dimensions of information, which can be thought of as the

building blocks of “full information citizenship:”

- Increase information **quality**. 12 Fellows are working to change existing news and information practices in order to improve the quality of public interest information available to citizens. Their projects are designed to drive journalism that is accurate, in-depth, contextual, balanced, well-sourced and well-written. *To date, 70% of projects focusing on increasing information quality are demonstrating impact in this dimension.*¹
- Increase information **supply**. 25 Fellows—nearly the entire cohort studied—are working to increase the quantity of public interest news and information produced. They offer innovative approaches to address cultural and institutional obstacles that have historically minimized the supply of news to citizens (e.g., government or corporate control of the media). *To date, 61% of projects focusing on increasing information supply are demonstrating impact in this dimension.*³
- Increase information **access**. 19 Fellows seek to address limitations placed on information distribution, either due to regulatory and government policies or because of market deficiencies such as monopolies or underdeveloped distribution infrastructure. *To date, 46% of projects focusing on increasing information access are demonstrating impact in this dimension.*
- Enhance information **use**. 20 Fellows are focused on supporting individuals and communities in using information to better understand their own and others’ communities, hold governments, corporations and other societal actors accountable, and engage in community problem-solving. *To date, 53% of projects focusing on enhancing information use are demonstrating impact in this dimension.*

Success Factors and Challenges

The most significant contributor to the success of the initiative is the quality of Fellows selected. Fellows demonstrate a strong entrepreneurial mindset, the determination to leverage scarce resources to manifest their vision, and credibility in the communities in which they are working. Their strategies are well matched to the systemic changes they seek, and they resonate with stakeholders and sponsors. The projects are also timely: new technologies—the increasingly low-cost and widespread availability of internet access, mobile phones and other digital technologies—offer a platform for innovations that would not have been possible even five years ago.

Simultaneously, the Fellows broadly share a number of significant challenges. Most struggle to find business models for financial sustainability and lack organizational development and management skills. External barriers for many Fellows include a hostile political landscape, resistance from established media, and the social, cultural and economic hurdles inherent in any effort to engage historically marginalized and disempowered communities.

Ashoka’s Added Value

Ashoka has offered five primary types of benefits to News & Knowledge Fellows: access to a network of thinkers, collaborators and supporters; credibility; inspiration; professional and technical support; and financial support. More than half of the 2008 and 2009 Fellows say Ashoka made a “critical difference” in their ability to connect with investors, gain positive media coverage, and strengthen and develop their thinking. Fellows report that the strength and diversity of their relationships across many sectors have improved since election by Ashoka. The strongest and most consistently reported benefits of the Fellowship are increased credibility as well as a boost in Fellows’ motivation and inspiration resulting

¹ Within each thematic area, the evaluation team sought evidence of impact only for projects of Fellows elected in 2008 and 2009; independent validation of 2010 Fellows’ work was not conducted.

from the positive recognition. The perceived value of Ashoka's other contributions, including the stipend and technical support for building capacity, varies significantly from Fellow to Fellow. There is evidence that News & Knowledge Fellows have had their careers strengthened and have deepened their capacity as entrepreneurs, but it is less clear how much Ashoka's investment is contributing to the ultimate scaling and sustainability of the Fellows' innovations.

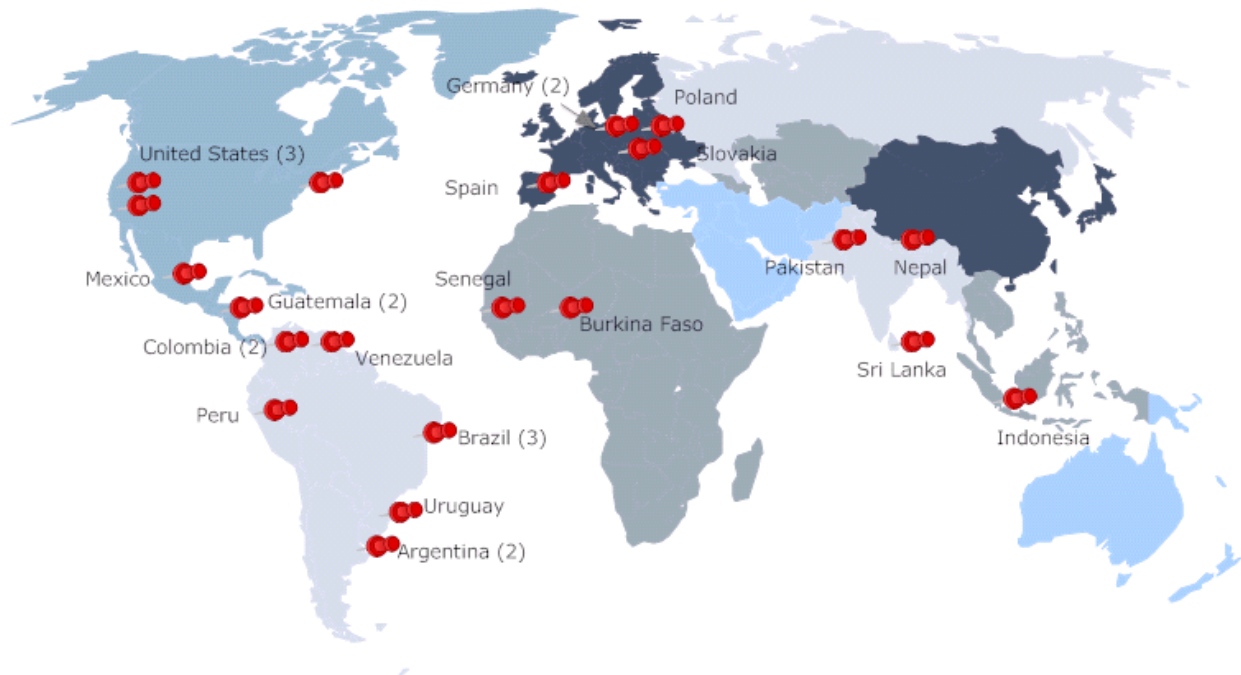
Conclusion

In the context of a new and rapidly changing media landscape, the study provides insights into the emergence of a new generation of media entrepreneurs who are reinventing the way news is created, distributed and consumed. The question: Is this group of social entrepreneurs actually changing systems in ways that will dramatically advance information citizenship? LFA's findings confirm that, as a cohort, a majority of Fellows are having early successes creating systemic change in a variety of contexts: within the journalism profession, in government, academia and business, and among citizens themselves. Their work is reshaping the way news and information is produced and consumed, often in the face of serious political, financial and institutional resistance and with scarce resources. Although the types of complex change most Fellows are pursuing will be fully achieved only after many years of effort, there is growing evidence that most Fellows' projects are being implemented successfully, and that many are on track to drive to deep, sustainable systems change.

Fellow & Organizational Characteristics

The majority (85%) of Fellows in the News & Knowledge program are male. The Fellows represented in this report come from 19 countries, with Brazil and the United States each electing three Fellows, and Argentina, Columbia, Guatemala, and Germany each electing two Fellows (see Exhibit 2 below).

**Exhibit 2:
News & Knowledge Fellows by Country**



Fellows' Prior Work Experience

A critical design feature of the News & Knowledge program is that Fellows are elected based on their entrepreneurial characteristics rather than their experience or accomplishments in the field of journalism. In fact, only 10 of the 27 Fellows came directly from the field of journalism. Given the profound impact that technology continues to have on the evolving media landscape, the inclusion of Fellows from sectors such as technology and social benefit is significant.

* **Other** includes Documentary Film Making, Public Sector, Graduate Studies, and Communications

Current Annual Budget of Fellows (USD)

The annual budgets of Fellows' initiatives range significantly, from \$1,350 to just over \$2.7 million. The average budget Fellows operate on is equivalent to \$477,140 per year. The median operating budget falls at \$204,115, with half of Fellows' budgets falling above and half falling below this amount.

Impacts on News and Information Flows

News & Knowledge Fellows are changing news and information systems and practices in four principle ways. Those are:

1. Increasing the **quality** of information;
2. Increasing the **supply** of information;
3. Increasing the **freedom** of and **access** to information; and
4. Improving the **use** of information.

While all four of these impact areas are vital to enhancing and activating news and information flows, they can be understood as the building blocks of “full information citizenship,” which build on each other in a sequential way. For example, quality is a foundational characteristic of effective information flows. Once high quality information exists, it must find its way to the citizen to be of use; both supply and access (which are interdependent) must be attended to. Finally, once the information reaches the citizen, it is sometimes necessary or helpful to support the activation of the information, whether through efforts to support media literacy, or directly supporting citizens in advocacy or other avenues for creating systemic change. Exhibit 10 below depicts this hierarchy of news and information impacts.

Exhibit 10:
Impact Framework: Building Blocks of “Full Information Citizenship”



Meaningful clusters of Fellows are effecting change in each of these areas. All Fellows are implementing project strategies to affect change in at least two of the four areas.

Increasing the Quality of Information Available

Fellows have increased the **quality of news and information** in the following ways:

- *Increasing the capacity of professional journalists;*
 - *Defining or improving standards in media;*
 - *Providing training and resources to build skills;*
 - *Building an infrastructure to highlight quality and increase accountability; and*
- *Changing systems of quality.*



FELLOWS PURSUING QUALITY (12):

Alicia Cytrynblum (Argentina), Carlos Correa (Venezuela), Dominik (Poland), Fabrice Florin (USA), Gregor Hackmack (Germany), Hamadou Tidiane Sy (Senegal), Juanita León (Columbia), Kara Andrade (Guatemala), Michael Gleich (Germany), Pau Llop (Spain), Shafqat Munir Ahmad (Pakistan), Štefan Hríb (Slovak Republic)

Ashoka News & Knowledge Fellows are implementing a wide variety of strategies to build the capacity of professional and citizen journalists² to produce high quality news and information; to articulate and support standards of quality; and to establish an infrastructure to ensure the accountability, transparency and accessibility of media. High quality journalism produces information that is accurate, in-depth, contextual, balanced, well-written, and well-sourced, providing the public with information that can be reliably used to inform decisions and actions.

Increasing the Capacity of Professional Journalists

A prominent strategy for increasing the quality of available news and information is the direct provision of training and supports to increase the capacity of the people who are creating and distributing content. By training a cadre of professional journalists to produce high quality, non-partisan, public interest news and information, the Fellows simultaneously articulate and uphold standards of professional journalism. Many of the journalists trained by Ashoka Fellows go on to share these skills and standards with others in the news and information field, resulting in the widespread adoption and expectation of high quality standards in journalism, news, and media by both professional journalists and citizens consuming news and information.

Three common strategies emerge from their efforts to build the capacity and quality of the field:

- *Defining or improving standards in media;*
- *Providing training and resources to build skills; and*
- *Building an infrastructure to highlight quality and increase accountability.*

Defining or improving standards in media

Fellows are increasing the quality of news and information available to citizens by articulating and embodying standards of professional journalism. Many Fellows are raising standards in professional journalism by providing high quality news and information themselves. Simply by

² This section focuses on increasing the capacity of professional journalists as a mechanism for increasing quality. Building the capacity of citizen journalists is related more directly to flow than quality and is discussed further in the “Increasing the Supply of Information” section of this chapter.

exposing citizens to nonpartisan, pro-people news that adheres to professional standards, the Fellows are raising the standard of quality for news media across the board. Citizens and journalists bearing witness to these increases in standards put pressure on local media sources to improve the quality of their coverage and content.

Juanita León (Columbia) has created an interactive web-based platform for investigative political journalism in a country where most media are colored by government and business interests. Her website, **La Silla Vacía**, encourages interactive discussion and debate, partnering with academics, think tanks, NGOs, and policymakers to engage in discourse with each other as well as with readers. The practice of including multiple perspectives in a debate that is accountable to fact-checking, sourcing, and public scrutiny has raised the bar for journalism in Colombia and also created an alternative to the establish media groups. Her website is increasingly quoted in mainstream media and citizens and policymakers alike turn to the website as a primary source of information on Colombian politics. The way that La Silla Vacía simultaneously develops the advocacy capacity of social sector organizations and trains journalists in public interest reporting increases the likelihood that all elements of the system—not just individual citizens—will bring pressure to bear on government to be transparent with the public. Also, to the extent that La Silla Vacía is building permanent capacity of the media and social sector to play a role in promoting transparency, progress will continue even if La Silla Vacía were to cease to exist. Mainstream media have started covering stories uncovered and reported on by La Silla Vacía and have also begun using some reporting formats pioneered by the organization in Colombia. Journalists have used La Silla Vacía as an example and basis for developing similar projects in Guatemala and Argentina.

We are becoming an example for young journalists—a new way of exercising the profession that is not necessarily going through these big media groups.
Juanita León, 2009 Fellow

By upholding and embodying standards of the field of journalism, Fellows inspire and inform the next generation of journalists. The Fellows' and their projects are benchmarks against which other journalists can measure the quality of their work and citizens who are exposed to high quality journalism will be better equipped to understand information and participate in public affairs.

Providing training and resources to build skills

Many of the Fellows also provide direct training to journalists to build capacity to adhere to high-quality journalism standards.

Michael Gleich (Germany) has articulated a new standard of high quality journalism that he bolsters by offering trainings and workshops to journalists in conflict zones in Africa, South America, and Asia. He concept of “constructive journalism” focuses on increasing an emphasis on peace and solutions in coverage of conflict zones. Michael works with partner organizations in conflict regions to train journalists in standards of accuracy, fairness, and sourcing. Trainings and workshops focus on providing balanced information, including examples of how conflicts have been resolved in other areas, in order to provide citizens with a voice and information for approaching peaceful solutions.

As a result of Michael's trainings and workshops, news coverage in these locales not only better reflects the challenges people face as a result of conflict, but also shares with a wider audience the accomplishments, approaches, and lessons learned of peace builders working to end conflict. Stories written to highlight peoples' experiences in conflict zones diminish the divisions presented by other media outlets and provide a more in-depth window into conflicts than is generally available. Michael then works with his network to place these stories in the largest media outlets in Germany and Europe. To date, Peace Count stories have reached 45 million readers and viewers through the network.

Building an infrastructure to highlight quality and increase accountability

Five Fellows are developing platforms, networks, and other structures that provide opportunities for journalists and citizens to learn about, support and participate in high-quality journalism. For example, a few of these Fellows are partnering with key organizations like NGOs, think tanks and universities to expand the reach of their training. In this way, an increasing number of staff, students, and aspiring journalists are media literate and able to identify and adhere to standards in the field.

Some Fellows are building networks or associations of professional journalists to exchange contacts and resources that contribute to higher quality reporting. Two Fellows, **Alicia Cytrynblum** (Argentina) and **Dominik Księżski**, (Poland) are coordinating networks of newspapers with processes for creating, validating, and distributing content. By establishing collective agreement on standards for quality coverage, these associations are building the capacity and quality of the field to produce and aspire to high quality, independent journalism. In the case of **Cytrynblum's**

Periodismo Social, there is evidence of better current practices including a measurable decrease in pejorative terms describing social problems in the media and an increase in the citation of sources. There is also evidence of systems change within the field of journalism: two of Argentina's four major public universities, plus one private university have integrated social journalism in their journalism degrees.

Each partner is different and provides us with the expertise and knowledge necessary to accomplish our work. We could not realistically hope to be experts in every field, so we must draw upon the knowledge of our partners to provide the reliable information that helps drive our organization.

Alicia Crytyrnlum, 2009 Fellow

Fellows Changing Systems of Quality

The evaluation team identified four Fellows who have improved the quality of news and information systems. **Shafqat Munir Ahmad (Pakistan)**, **Juanita León (Columbia)**, and **Štefan Hríb (Slovak Republic)** have made significant progress in this area and **Alicia Cytrynblum (Argentina)** has begun to lay the groundwork for an infrastructure that is likely to lead to systems change. Shafqat, Juanita, and Štefan, who have each made strides toward systems change, are leading groundbreaking efforts to raise the quality of news and information in countries where standards of journalism have been historically low. Their work has not only proven that high quality, independent journalism is a possibility in their respective countries, but also that it can be sustainable.

For example, **Štefan Hríb** is leading systemic improvements to the quality of Slovakian news and media and citizens' engagement with it by developing new forms of independent news coverage. There is broad distrust of mainstream media in Slovakia, an artifact of communist restrictions on press. Štefan's weekly magazine, **Týždeň**, has broken stories to expose inaccuracies reported by the government and other media sources and has resulted in clear changes in public perceptions of specific events and issues in at least a few cases. These instances have shown Slovaks that news can provide relevant, ethical, and objective information that helps them understand and participate in public affairs.

Reflecting on Improving Quality

Among the Fellows who are working to increase the quality of information available to citizens by

defining or improving standards in media, impact has varied. In countries where the field of journalism is underdeveloped, the emergence of a high quality news source is groundbreaking in itself, though the impact is difficult to measure. For the Fellows who focus on producing high quality news and information as their primary strategy for increasing quality, it is unclear whether consumers are able to discern and articulate the standards of quality that they are consuming.

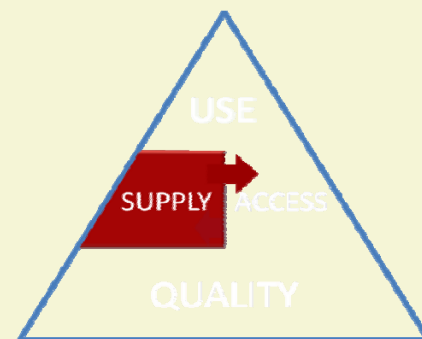
The Fellows who have combined the presentation of high quality news with a strategy to train journalists or to increase the capacity of citizens to identify and consume high quality news have been able to achieve more tangible outputs and outcomes that speak to their success in raising and supporting standards of journalism. The significance of providing a nonpartisan, high quality news source where one did not exist is undeniable. But going further and also offering a way for both journalists and citizens to understand how and why news does or does not meet standards of quality underscores the importance of independent journalism and makes a case for its sustainability and use.

Increasing the Supply of Information

*This section of the report highlights Fellows' impacts on the **supply of news and information available to citizens** and changes resulting from the increased supply of information.*

Fellows increased the supply of news and information in the following ways:

- *Expanding the flow of public interest news;*
- *Supplying information via new platforms that make use of new (and old) technologies;*
- *Developing networks of journalists devoted to public interest news;*
- *Increasing capacity for and practice of citizen journalism; and*
- *Changing systems of supply.*



FELLOWS PURSUING SUPPLY (25):

Alicia Cytrynblum (Argentina), Carlos Correa (Venezuela), Cleodon Silva (Brazil), Damián Osta (Uruguay), Dominik (Poland), Felipe Heusser (Chile), Gregor Hackmack (Germany), Hamadou Tidiane Sy (Senegal), Jake Shapiro (USA), Jocelyne Kompaore (Burkino Faso), Juanita León (Colombia), Kara Andrade (Guatemala), Lexy Rambadeta (Indonesia), Luis Aguilar (Guatemala), Michael Gleich (Germany), Nicholas Reville (USA), Pau Llop (Spain), Paulo Rogério Nunes (Brazil), Reinaldo Pamponet (Brazil), Sanjana Hattotuwa (Sri Lanka), Shafqat Munir Ahmad (Pakistan), Som Nath Aryal (Nepal), Štefan Hríb (Slovak Republic), Stefan Kaspar (Peru)

An increased supply of news and information that reflects the issues facing communities and offers perspectives of common citizens is vital to active participation in community and civic life. Nearly all Fellows are working toward this end, employing multiple strategies, and all with the goal of increasing the supply of news and information citizens can rely upon and use to make informed decisions in their lives.

Expanding the Flow of Public Interest News

Fellows focused on expanding the flow of news and information strategies that respond to cultural, institutional, or educational obstacles. Their projects offer innovative solutions to structural

barriers that have historically minimized the supply of public interest news to citizens. For example, in Colombia where Fellow **Juanita León** works, close ties between government, business, and news media inhibit the existence of nonpartisan public interest news. In other countries, Fellows are aiming to overcome cultural histories that minimize the role that people play in civic life. For example, Fellow **Štefan Hríb** is working to promote independent news in Slovakia, a country with no history of free press.

By expanding the flow of public interest news, Fellows are offering voice to people and communities too frequently left out of news and information arenas, and not able to successfully find information to make informed decisions. In some cases, work to expand the supply of news and information is occurring within traditional media outlets, and in several other cases Fellows are providing new platforms for people to gain access to pro-people news and information.

Two strategies commonly employed by Fellows increasing the flow of news and information are:

- Increasing the supply of information via new platforms; and
- Developing networks of journalists devoted to public interest news.

Supplying Information via New Platforms that Make Use of New (and Old) Technologies

Fellows are increasing the supply of information by reaching citizens through new pathways. Many Fellows are relying on new technologies that are increasingly available across populations, regardless of socio-economic standing. For instance, **Kara Andrade (Guatemala)** is working to create localized news and information hubs to provide information via SMS technology. The vast majority of Guatemalans do not have Internet access, so Kara has created a mobile-phone platform where citizens can submit and share stories about local issues and occurrences. The shared mobile information is transmitted to the online site, **HabloCentro**, where those outside Guatemala can access local information. Those without cell phones can contribute stories as well, and the audio files from their radio submission are posted to the website. The success of **HabloCentro** has led to expansion in Costa Rica; El Salvador; Honduras; and Venezuela, allowing citizens of these Central American countries and beyond to access local community information in a convenient way. This increased access is also generating a new culture of citizen journalism and civic participation across Central America.

I'd like to see something like an ecosystem emerge where reporters are there at the beginning, throughout the process, and at the end because it will produce a different type of reporting and have a lot more depth.

Kara Andrade, 2010 Fellow

Developing Networks of Journalists Devoted to Public Interest News

Key to meaningfully increasing the quantity of news and information is the development of networks of professional journalists and editors who produce and distribute content that would otherwise be absent. In Pakistan, **Shafqat Munir Ahmad** formed the **Child Labor Media Forum**, a network of journalists shining a light on child labor in an effort to instigate a reduction in the practice. Initially meeting in person, the network has grown to over 300 member journalists and moved to an online platform that shares story ideas, contacts, data sources and information. The productivity and commitment of this far-reaching group is impressive: a grant report by **Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights** notes that “more than 50 story ideas were shared, 6 case studies were written by the group members as model stories, over 140 research articles and newspaper clippings and weblinks based on small and medium researches on child labor issues from home and abroad were shared.”

Increasing Capacity for and Practice of Citizen Content Generation

Fellows are also recruiting, training and supporting citizen journalists to report on and disseminate news and information that increases the supply and a type of content not previously available. Often these content providers are giving voice to populations that have long been left out of the news and information landscape.

Key to strategies intended to achieve this impact are the identification of social issues that need attention and a system for empowering citizens to have a voice. In many instances, the Fellows implementing a strategy tap into the collective desire of individuals and communities to play a role in effecting change in their lives.

In Nepal, **Som Nath Aryal**, has created 152 “**Friends of Radio**” clubs that bring together people and provide them with the tools and expertise to generate and develop program ideas that are then produced and aired on his two community radio stations, which reach over 800,000 rural villagers, many of them illiterate. The topics featured in the radio programs are community-driven and include agricultural techniques and discussions, women’s health, medical advice, and youth issues. Friends of Radio also fundraise for the radio stations, ensuring their community ties and sustainability. The programming is dictated by the community and all its operations are transparent to allow full community buy-in. Everything from local community interests like birthdays or composting how-to’s to national issues like government corruption are broadcast on the community radio stations. Through **Community Radio Madanpokhara and Radio Rampur**, listeners now have access to locally relevant news and information that was simply not available before.

Som Nath’s power to communicate at the grassroots [level] and engage communities is not comparable even among development workers of Nepal.

Stakeholder

Changing Systems of Supply

The evaluation team identified three Fellows who have affected the news and information supply systems. **Shafqat Munir Ahmad (Pakistan)**, **Gregor Hackmack Germany)**, and **Alicia Cytrynblum (Argentina)** have made significant progress in this area. Shafqat, Gregor, and Alicia, have each made strides toward systems change, and are leading efforts that are changing the supply of information into the news and information landscape. Their work provides information that was previously unavailable and is a significant source for both citizens and journalists. It is expected that their impact is likely to grow as their projects continue to expand their reach and influence.

For example, **Shafqat Munir Ahmad** is working to build what he describes as a “media-civil society interface” in Pakistan to increase the profile of public interest issues. To do this, he has established two organizations to impact the supply of news and information within Pakistan’s historically controlled media environment. **Infochange Pakistan** is a registered online media agency that produces public interest stories intended to be picked up and run by mainstream media outlets. The organization also trains young reporters, in the art of public interest reporting. In addition, Shafqat started the **Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights** to work with government information officials, NGOs, and media to simultaneously capacitate each sector to improve the data and information supplied to the public about social issues.

The system is producing a regular flow of public interest news and information. Coverage by **Infochange** on the anniversary of the Attabad landslide in Kashmir, for example, highlighted that government relief efforts had ceased and significant problems persisted. The story, picked up first

by newspapers then by cable television, prompted the government to send a fleet of helicopters with aid supplies the next day.

Reflections on Increasing the Flow of Public Interest News

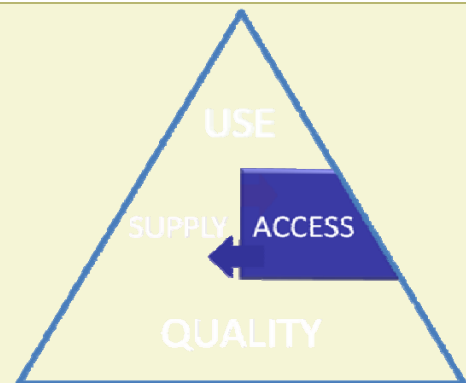
Among Fellows who are working to increase the supply of news and information, the impact as measured simply by content development and distribution numbers is quite high. In some way, nearly all the Fellows have increased the supply of news and information that is representative and reflective of people otherwise not fully represented in the existing media outlets. The changes occurring as a result of this increased flow of news and information, however, are less well known across Fellows. There are instances of impact, where a story leads to a response and change, but there are also some Fellows who quite clearly see their role as producing high-quality, in-depth content, and what happens is not for them to dictate.

Fellows who control news distribution outlets as part of their project model appear more likely to sustain the traction they've gained toward achieving change. In instances where Fellows are generating content without their own outlet, measuring and assessing change is more difficult. A similar measurement challenge exists when examining Fellows' efforts to increase citizen journalism. Most Fellows can track evidence of users and numbers of stories, but are too often limited to anecdotal evidence of change.

Increasing Freedom of and Access to Information

Fellows increased **the freedom of press and access to information** in the following ways:

- Increasing transparency and accountability of government and/or corporations;
 - Producing high-quality journalism to reveal government and business practices;
 - Creating interactive infrastructure to illuminate corporate and government actions;
 - Training community members to understand corporate and government violations;
- Empowering freedom of speech/press;
- Improving the access of historically information-marginalized groups to information via technology or other new distribution models;
 - Using technology to make information accessible to disconnected communities;
 - Adapting communication tools to increase access to marginalized communities; and
- Changing systems of access to and freedom of information.



FELLOWS PURSUING ACCESS/FREEDOM STRATEGIES (19):

Ben Cokelet (Mexico), Carlos Correa (Venezuela), Cleodon Silva (Brazil), Dominik (Poland), Felipe Heusser (Chile), Gregor Hackmack (Germany), Jake Shapiro (USA), Jocelyne Kompaore (Burkina Faso), Juanita León (Columbia), Kara Andrade (Guatemala), Lexy Rambadeta (Indonesia), Luis Aguilar (Guatemala), Nicholas Reville (USA), Sanjana Hattotuwa (Sri Lanka), Shafqat Munir Ahmad (Pakistan), Som Nath Aryal (Nepal), Štefan Hríb (Slovak Republic), Stefan Kaspar (Peru)

Many Fellows are working toward increasing citizen access to information in order to achieve

meaningful civic participation. The communities where Fellows are working are impeded by regulatory restrictions, barriers to press freedom, and a lack of modalities for information distribution. As a result, there is a growing body of citizens who do not have the information needed to make informed decisions for themselves, their families and their communities and a growing divide between the informed elite and the uninformed majority.

The following analysis presents in-depth examples of the diversity of approaches Fellows are taking to increase access to information and provides evidence of the impacts in the three outcome areas:

- Increasing transparency and accountability of government and/or corporations;
- Empowering freedom of speech/press; and
- Improving the access of historically information-marginalized groups to information via technology or other new distribution models.

Increasing Transparency & Accountability of Government and/or Corporations

Government policies and commercial business practices shape the political and economic environment in which individuals and communities operate. Providing citizens with access to information is critical for them to accumulate the knowledge and resources needed to make informed decisions about their lives. In the communities where Fellows are working, however, many citizens do not have access to information about government officials' corporate affiliations, voting records, or corrupt practices. Similarly, citizens in many of these communities are not privy to news of businesses planning to expand into their communities or aware of the exploitation of local resources or community members.

Fellows are using three primary strategies to connect community members to news and information that provide can help them change corporate and/or government behavior:

- Producing high-quality journalism to reveal government and business practices;
- Creating interactive infrastructure to illuminate corporate and government actions; and
- Training community members to understand corporate and government violations.

Producing High Quality Journalism to Reveal Government and Business Practices

The capacity for journalists to connect citizens to information that informs their experiences can be subverted by political and economic powers that control the type of information available to the public. Challenges with financing, distribution, and intimidation force journalists to cave in to the status quo and report biased news.

Ashoka Fellows are bucking this trend in their countries by writing independent, thought-provoking news and making this news available to citizens in their respective countries. **Štefan Hríb's Týžden magazine**, for instance, is one of the sole sources of non-conformist journalism in Slovakia. By directing his efforts towards the apparent decline in access to public interest news, Štefan encourages citizens to think independently and critically about everything from democracy to state-run orphanages.

Creating Interactive Infrastructure to Illuminate Corporate and Government Actions

New technology has allowed Fellows to take creative approaches to impacting transparency and accountability. The use of technology is an attractive tool for Fellows as it allows them to reach and inform a wider spectrum of citizens about the practices of their elected officials and business leaders.

Fellow **Felipe Heusser** (Chile) is using web 2.0 tools to track, monitor, and publish politicians' voting records and affiliations. His **Vota Inteligente** published "Transparency Rankings" of candidates running for office during the 2009 election cycle, based on the amount of public information they made available to voters. Traditional news outlets began running the rankings, culminating in a "rank race," in which candidates began releasing more information to increase their rank. Vota Inteligente played an important role in encouraging candidates to become more transparent with their constituents and provided Chileans an example of how access to information could shape the campaign process.

Training Community Members to Understand Corporate and Government Violations

Some Fellows are revealing government and corporate practices and increasing citizens' access to this information. The results of their initiatives provide examples of how citizens equipped with new and better information can be harnessed to shape corporate and government behavior.

Through **PODER**, **Ben Cokelet** (Mexico) is cultivating a network of activists, community members, government officials, and business leaders to identify companies with harmful business practices that endangering local communities. PODER members train local community members and citizen organizations on methodologies to research corporate affairs and use this information strategically to change corporate behavior.

What we are trying to do is strengthen and improve corporate accountability. [People] are getting new information about a corporation in their backyard actively violating human labor and environmental rights.

Ben Cokelet (Mexico), 2010 Fellow

Empowering Freedom of Speech/Press

A key aspect of increasing access to information is increasing the sharing of information through free speech and press. The silencing of critical commentary or dissenting views imposes barriers to accessing the type of information that citizens need to expand their understanding of political, economic, and social issues affecting their lives.

The following examples provide an illustration of the range of innovative strategies Fellows are using to empower freedom of speech in different communities, such as adopting technology as a tool against censorship, creating financial stability to maintain press freedom, and providing legal aid to protect freedom of speech.

One Fellow is tackling freedom of expression issues directly in Venezuela by supporting legal challenges to violations of free speech. Based on the premise that freedom of speech and information are human rights, **Carlos Correa's Espacio Público** closely monitors freedom of expression issues and offers a legal defense fund and legal advice to support individuals embroiled in freedom of speech trials. It also works to build the capacity of journalists, academics, and community members to use legal mechanisms available to protect their freedom of speech rights. Espacio Público has directly contributed to the passage of new ordinances, state laws, and municipal laws that guarantee citizen's and professional journalist's rights to free expression.

Improving the Access of Historically Information-Marginalized Groups to Information via Technology or Other New Distribution Models

The value of abundant information is often tempered by the inability of some groups to access this information. This may occur because citizens cannot afford the cost or time associated with using traditional means to access information. It may also be a function of language barriers or distance.

Many of the techniques Fellows are using to address political transparency and freedom of speech are also supporting efforts to improve access to information for groups who have traditionally been marginalized. Two additional strategies that warrant highlighting include:

- Using technology to make information accessible for disconnected communities; and
- Adapting communication tools to increase access to marginalized communities.

Using Technology to Make Information Accessible to Disconnected Communities

Inadequacies in information access are salient when families and communities are unable to connect and share news information with each other.

One Fellow in Guatemala is using technology to bring families together to share and use information. Years of emigration by young Guatemalans have left many families disconnected from their sole source of support living abroad and have left those living abroad without knowledge of important community news, creating a cultural and generational gap. **Luis Aguilar** has created an online platform, **Noticias de mi Gente**, which allows families in rural villages of Guatemala to share local news on the social, economic, and cultural issues of the community with relatives living abroad. Luis also aims to facilitate resource-sharing across the Guatemalan Diaspora and each month connects over 7,000 Guatemalans in 43 different countries.

Luis' work has been instrumental in making the voices of more Guatemalans public. Specifically, *Noticias de mi Gente* influenced government regulations around motor-taxis requiring license plates. After a young man was killed in by a motor-taxi and members of the community were able to share this story with family living abroad, the pressure from U.S.-based Guatemalans prompted the local government to consider a policy change.

Adapting Communication Tools to Increase Access

Even as more regions around the world are seeing Internet use grow exponentially, many countries are yet to see these advances take hold. In these communities, Fellows are recognizing the value of using the prevalent communication methods of the locality to tackle issues to access.

In Nepal, the high illiteracy rate has excluded many from getting news and information through the newspaper. As a result, **Som Nath Aryal** uses community radio to provide members of the community with information on local events and issues. The programming is dictated by the community and all its operations are transparent to allow full community buy-in. Through **Community Radio Madanpokhara and Radio Rampur**, over 800,000 rural villagers, many of whom are illiterate, now have access to locally relevant news and information that was simply not available before.

Changing Systems of Access to and Freedom of Information

The evaluation team found five Fellows whose programs were changing the system of information access. Of the five Fellows, **Som Nath Aryal**, **Štefan Hrib**, **Carlos Correa**, and **Sanjana Hattotuwa** displayed evidence of definite change. **Kara Andrade** was assessed as in the process of creating systemic change.

Sanjana Hattotuwa is introducing a new kind of journalism to Sri Lanka that is changing the news and information landscape. In Sri Lanka, the news is heavily censored and other media outlets are afraid to publish any dissenting news due to fear and intimidation in the country. In addition,

citizens are not encouraged to engage in critical discourse about issues affecting their communities thereby upholding very narrowly formed views on these issues. Through his organization, **Groundviews**, Sanjana delivers high quality, independent, public interest news on social justice issues critical to peace building, human rights and democratic governance in Sri Lanka. Sanjana also produces Groundviews stories in English, Tamil, and Sinhala inviting a wider range of news consumers to be informed. Articles on the site are regularly republished in mainstream print media, thereby ensuring access to this information through mainstream news sources.

In addition to delivering news, Sanjana provides other journalists a safe and secure method to share similar stories with Groundviews. Through an encryption software Groundviews has developed, journalists can send news pieces to the website without detection from the government, opening the door for more journalists to participate in civic and socially-minded reporting. In addition, articles written by the journalists are bylined as Groundviews rather than with the author's name to protect their identity. Sanjana also used Web 2.0 technology and social networking technologies like Facebook and Twitter to contextualize news stories and connect individuals to current events.

Groundviews' articles have been picked up by BBC News, Al Jazeera, and New York Times. It has also received the Award of Excellence in New Communications from the Society for New Communications Research, one of the most prestigious journalism and media awards. Sanjana is positioning media in a unique way, "circumventing the current system of censorship through new media," according to a stakeholder, to open up discussion and critical thinking about government, human rights, and democracy.

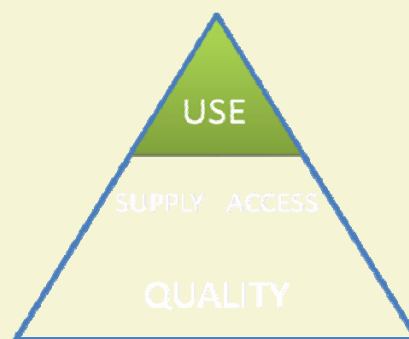
Enhanced Use of Information

Fellows enhanced the use of information in the following ways:

- *Increasing the use of information for social change;*
- *Improving media literacy and demand for relevant, high quality information; and*
- *Changing systems of information use.*

FELLOWS PURSUING ENHANCED USE OF INFO STRATEGIES (20):

Alicia Cytrynblum (Argentina), Ben Cokelet (Mexico), Carlos Correa (Venezuela), Cleodon Silva (Brazil), Damián Osta (Uruguay), Fabrice Florin (USA), Gregor Hackmack (Germany), Jocelyne Kompaore (Burkina Faso), Juanita León (Columbia), Lexy Rambadeta (Indonesia), Luis Aguilar (Guatemala), Nicholas Reville (USA), Pau Llop (Spain), Paulo Rogério Nunes (Brazil), Reinaldo Pamponet (Brazil), Sanjana Hattotuwa (Sri Lanka), Shafqat Munir Ahmad (Pakistan), Som Nath Aryal (Nepal), Štefan Hríb (Slovak Republic), Stefan Kaspar (Peru)



The news and information landscape is one in which citizens are often not equipped or empowered to use information to their advantage. To help address this, Ashoka News & Knowledge Fellows are providing tools and guidance to support individuals and communities in a variety of ways:

- using information to hold governments and corporations accountable,
- better understand sources of power and injustice,
- better understand their own communities and other's communities, and

- engage in community problem solving.

Fellows are enhancing information use in two distinct ways:

- Increasing the sharing and use of information for social change; and
- Improving media literacy and demand for relevant, high quality information.

Increasing the Use of Information for Social Change

Of those working explicitly to increase the use of information for social change, nearly half are employing classic community organizing and empowerment approaches – albeit with a twist afforded by modern technology – that do not necessarily involve journalism practices or systems. In these instances, deficiencies in community information flows and knowledge management have been identified as a core barrier to community development, and positive change at the community level is the outcome that is sought.

In rural Africa, illiteracy and limited access to educational materials, as well as a breakdown in the traditional oral transmission of knowledge, is creating barriers for individuals and citizen groups to articulate and capture their stories. To ensure the inclusion of the voices of rural citizens in decisions that affect them, and to promote a richer sense of pan-African identity, Fellow **Jocelyne Kompaore** is helping to ensure that the “information capital” of rural Burkina Faso is both captured and disseminated to rural and urban citizens as well as the development organizations that are struggling to provide effective support to rural Africans.

Because we educate people, the way they see themselves and the way other people see them is changing. Together, we are bringing this change.

Jocelyne Kompaore (Burkina Faso), 2009 Fellow

Jocelyne deploys “synthesizers” – staff and volunteers with video and voice recorders – to rural villages to document the stories and local knowledge of the people; she also introduces people to audio and video recording technologies as media, and engages them in a process of co-creating their stories. These stories are shared in the village, in other villages, in African urban centers, and finally with NGOs and government entities that are interested in understanding and applying the unique knowledge that otherwise is siloed in villages. Jocelyne has extended this practice of “information capitalization” as a consulting service to NGOs and community-based initiatives that are in desperate need of marketing and communications input and capacity.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that this practice is being embraced, as there is a reported increase in the number of NGOs in Burkina Faso that are including information capitalization in their budgets. Other less formal groups appear to be captivated by this approach, evidenced by increasing numbers of farmers’ groups approaching Jocelyne for her services.

Improving Media Literacy and Demand for Relevant, High-Quality Information

Of the Fellows working in this impact area, some take the very straightforward approach of producing high quality journalism as a model, then adding media literacy supports such as public workshops or analysis of media coverage of social issues.

Another subset of Fellows working to promote media literacy is creating platforms for providing a higher quality of information, or for more easily discerning the level of quality of existing news and information. **NewsTrust** was created by **Fabrice Florin** (USA) to encourage citizens to think more critically about news, and use their improved awareness to become more civically engaged. This

project was conceived to address the growing challenge in discriminating between high quality news and amateur journalism, which is proliferating on the Internet. Articles posted on NewsTrust are rated by online reviewers based on a variety of quality indicators. The current reach of NewsTrust is 118,000 unique users a month and growing, suggesting that some news consumers are eager to engage in this approach to promoting media literacy.

A final – and quite different – category of media literacy work is focused on improving media literacy of constituencies who have had minimal education or exposure to media of any kind. These Fellows typically take an approach of going out into the field to work with constituency groups to produce their own media as a vehicle for helping them develop an appreciation for its meaning and value as a communications tool. In these cases, the content is usually by and for the community.

Changing Systems of Information Use

Fellows **Som Nath Aryal, Gregor Hackmack, Štefan Hríb, and Reinaldo Pamponet** were identified by the evaluation team as having enhanced the use of information in a systemic way. These Fellows are making significant strides in enhancing information use among communities, businesses, governments, and social sector organizations.

Gregor Hackmack has designed an online portal in Germany by which users can learn about their elected officials and track metrics delineating their voting records and key speeches. The site also allows citizens to interact with politicians by posting questions that politicians can respond to, the answers to which are published for the public to see. Citizens can search voting records, speeches, and answered questions to monitor their political officials and hold them accountable to their actions. **Parliament Watch** along with its sister site, Candidate Watch, which focuses on candidates during an election period, played a significant role in the country's state elections process, garnering over 2.5 million users and 12,000 questions from constituents.

The impact of **Parliament Watch** has been considerable. German citizens are demanding more accountability of elected officials and media is examining politicians' decisions and actions more closely. Several German states have amended their constitutions to allow for more direct voting of members of parliament. The adoption and acceptance by members of parliament has resulted in a simple solution that is quickly dismantling the distance between the general public and elected officials. The ability to build effective partnerships with major media outlets in Germany has led to increased coverage of the political process, official decisions, and an increased transparency of public records. **Parliament Watch** is creating a digital voter's memory that is increasing political accountability and civic engagement.

Reflections on Enhancing the Use of Information

Among the Fellows who are increasing the flow of information or improving media literacy to stimulate community development, there are insufficient data to prove that improvements to the community are actually happening. This would require a longer-term evaluation that tracks community indicators over time and establishes connections between the interventions and the change experienced. Measured by engagement, however, it appears these types of interventions are being embraced by the communities in which they are happening, and that would bode well for community-level impact. At the same time, the potential for impact in the case of interventions that are based on a one-time engagement is far more limited.

For Fellows who are targeting specific sectors or populations, there are typically more output measures available to help predict impact, because the impact by definition is more narrowly defined. For Fellows who are producing information and news content that is expected to catalyze

policy or other systems change based simply on increased media literacy or awareness of issues, the connection is far more difficult to prove. While illustrative examples can be identified in the case of articles that have triggered citizen or government action, it would be extremely challenging to determine or predict the frequency or scope of that type of impact.

Contributors to Success

The most significant contributor to the success of the News & Knowledge initiative overall to date is the quality of the Fellows selected, indicating that the selection process worked well to identify effective social entrepreneurs around the globe in the News & Knowledge arena.

Most News & Knowledge Fellows possess a critical combination of the following attributes: entrepreneurialism, an ability to leverage resources (including technology), and personal credibility (which often extends to their organizations). In addition, most Fellows have conceived of effective project designs that are highly likely to achieve intended impact. It is the co-occurrence of these personal and project design factors that supports the success of individual Fellows and contributes to the overall impact of the News & Knowledge initiative.

Fellow Qualities Contributing to Project Success

News & Knowledge Fellows have several key skills and attributes that significantly contribute to their success: entrepreneurialism, an ability to leverage resources, credibility, and charisma.

Entrepreneurial Qualities Drive Success

News & Knowledge Fellows are entrepreneurs in the purest sense of the word: they see a problem or a need, and they go about conceptualizing a new, albeit untested, approach to addressing it. Furthermore, they possess a deep drive to see it through to completion, even if that means adjusting their approach along the way.

It is this entrepreneurial mindset – combined with a deep and abiding concern for the welfare of others – that led each Fellow to identify a particular need that was not being fulfilled. For **Luis Aguilar**, the isolation of communities in rural Guatemala, exacerbated by the lack of relevant news and information available, was greatly troubling. He saw no resources being applied to the problem. He recognized the eagerness on the part of villagers to engage with locally relevant information, and knew that the only thing missing was an accessible medium in terms of both format and language. He knew his task: to organize resources to produce the needed information so that people could embrace begin to take ownership of it.

Mindset and Ability to Leverage Resources

A related quality embodied by most Fellows is the drive to manifest their vision even in the face of numerous and significant obstacles. Given the business model and fundraising challenges associated with news and knowledge entrepreneurialism, a critical feature is a mindset and ability to leverage resources.

One key resource for Fellows is personnel, and many depend heavily on volunteers to keep costs down. This includes core volunteers who donate some or all of their time to manage and execute the project work. It also includes projects that, by design, are largely powered by networks of volunteers, including crowdsourcing as a tool to produce news content.

The inspirational nature of the Fellows' projects appears to drive volunteer participation. Fellows are by and large working on issues and needs that resonate with many others in their societies and communities, and volunteers are often ready and willing to step forward and contribute to a worthy cause. In hiring paid staff, many Fellows demonstrated an ability to identify and recruit competent

and dedicated individuals, further maximizing the limited human resources that can be marshaled in service of their mission.

Credibility Motivates Support and Engagement

Fellows tend to have either brought with them, or established in a short period of time, significant credibility in the News & Knowledge field that has emerged as a critical ingredient to their success.

Many Fellows are from either the field of journalism or technology, and by virtue of their accomplishments and relationships, have a strong foundation of support in place to draw upon in service of their missions. A clear example of this is **Shafqat Munir Ahmad** of **Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights**, who spent over 15 years as an editor for Pakistan's largest English language daily newspaper before launching JDHR. He draws heavily on both his professional reputation and networks in all facets of JDHR's work, especially in his pursuit of a functional "media-civil society interface" in Pakistan. Particularly for those Fellows who are working on systems change, credibility is a vital ingredient for catalyzing both commitment and culture change on the part of mainstream media, government, and business sectors.

Many other Fellows cited – and were described by stakeholders – as having robust networks both within the communities they are working in, and across sectors and international borders. This social capital helps to reinforce, and also serve as an important channel for, their credibility, particularly inasmuch as their work is dependent on linking people and ideas between different sectors and organizations.

Finally, most Fellows have significant credibility with the populations they are trying to help, as a result of the time they have invested conducting on-the-ground outreach and relationship building. Commenting on Fellow **Som Nath Aryal**, founder of **Radio Madanpokhara**, a stakeholder says "He is honest, laborious and hard working fellow at his business. He coordinates with his stakeholders to make his program effective. He collects the feedback and improves his programs on the base of experiences, learning."

Project Design Contributes to Project Success

Strategies that Match

Successful projects appropriately acknowledge both the systemic nature of the problem they are trying to address and the dynamism of the news and information field. In order to create lasting impact, projects must apply the right strategies to the right parts of the system.

Many projects take a decidedly multi-sectoral approach by design, simultaneously engaging public sector, private sector, and/or social sector actors as well as citizens. **Carlos Correa (Venezuela)** of **Espacio Público** builds cross-sector alliances to connect journalistic practices with academic resources and grassroots communities in service of promoting freedom of information, expression, and the press. Espacio Público is part think tank, part capacity builder, and part legal enforcer; this enables it to both simultaneously impact – and build coherence between – the various parts of the system where the issue plays out.

Several projects employ a distinctively adaptive approach to executing their strategies. **Reinaldo Pamponet**, whose innovative yet untested-to-date project **ItsNoon**, describes a "zigging and zagging" approach to implementation of project activities. This type of adaptive capacity – and the

mindset associated with it – is a critical design feature in entrepreneurial ventures that are by definition the first of their kind in their respective markets.

Resonance of the Project with Stakeholders

The resonance projects hold with stakeholders both inspires participation in their projects and enables Fellows to marshal support from stakeholders and sponsors.

In some cases, volunteers and partners were moved to join forces with a project based on the mission alone. In other cases, the skill with which the Fellow communicated the value and purpose of their respective projects, and their ability to connect it to the values and needs of their stakeholders, was a key ingredient. **Stefan Kaspar** (Peru) has developed a nuanced understanding of how to communicate the value of a microcinema to his target communities by portraying it as a real vehicle for addressing the most pressing problems they face.

These examples illustrate News & Knowledge projects that are responsive to perceived needs in the field of news and information. In many cases constituents have been waiting for a person or an entity to provide an effective platform from which they can work towards a mission that aligns with their values and aspirations.

Technology as the Key External Driver of Success

The critical external factor contributing to the success of News & Knowledge Fellows is technology. Specifically, the increasingly low-cost and widespread availability of Internet access, mobile phones, and digital technology is enabling Fellows to reach audiences they could not have – even as recently as five years ago – and to organize and transmit information in ways with greater impact. Seventy-seven percent of Fellows reported in the survey that they ‘strongly agree’ that technology allows their work to reach audiences it was not able to in the past.

In the case of some Fellows, technology is core to their work. **Nicholas Reville’s Participatory Culture Foundation (USA)** uses crowdsourcing, an Internet-dependent technology, to enable the subtitling of videos so they can be much more broadly disseminated, which simply would not be workable without the platform of the Internet.

For others, the Internet serves an important function in allowing them to amplify the distribution of their information in a way that gives them a competitive advantage.

Real-Time Information

Internet and mobile phone technology, which enables instantaneous transmission of information, can give such projects a competitive advantage over their print and electronic media counterparts. According to **Luis Aguilar** (Guatemala) of **Noticias de mi Gente**, “There are many times we publish some news on our website 14 or 16 hours before the newspaper can cover it.”

Real-time publishing capabilities also facilitate instant public discourse about the news, fostering deeper engagement with news and information thereby improving media literacy. **Alicia Cytrynblum (Argentina)** describes a situation in which a newspaper article depicted homeless people as dangerous and criminal. Her **Periodismo Social** immediately published a piece in response, which characterized homelessness as a systemic issue and housing as a right, which had the effect of quickly reframing the issue for readers.

Challenges and Barriers

The most significant overarching barrier to the success of the News & Knowledge program is the challenge of cross-fertilizing ideas, approaches, and resources generated by each of the Fellows and their projects in a way that will contribute to global systemic change in news and information. Fellows are working in far-flung parts of the world pursuing different news and knowledge objectives and using diverse approaches and tools. While this represents an inherent challenge to leveraging the impact, it also is clear that the resources applied by Ashoka in pursuit of this objective – for example networking and convening Fellows –to date have been less intensive than required to make meaningful progress.

The challenges to any news enterprise are well known, well documented and universal whether pursuing a traditional, for-profit business model or one dedicated to social change. Outlined below are the familiar barriers to a successful news and information project complemented by examples of some of the innovative solutions Ashoka Fellows are using to realize their vision.

Internal Barriers to Success

Financial Sustainability

The most significant internal barrier to Fellow's success is the lack of viable, proven business models for news and knowledge innovations that are focused on producing positive social change. Because so many News & Knowledge Fellows are committed to improving access for underserved or disadvantaged populations, projects tend to rely on philanthropic or government support, which are difficult to access. Furthermore, mainstream media organizations that might otherwise be in a position to pay for content generated by Fellows are themselves experiencing severe challenges to their business models on a global level.

No one has really found a business model for online media, nobody in the world. So I spent some time, more time than I wished, trying out different kinds of sustainability.

Juanita León, 2009 Fellow

Even projects that have been underway for ten years or more encounter ongoing struggles to generate revenue, and are seldom in a financial position to expand their scope or reach. Most projects have an acute sense of the limits that this places on their capacity. The risk is that they will pursue creative strategies to capitalize their projects that nonetheless divert them from their core mission.

Reinaldo Pamponet in Brazil is addressing the challenge of financial sustainability by creating a marketplace that links the creative and artistic energy of disempowered, low-income youth to the business and government sectors. In **ItsNoon**, Pamponet has created an online network where youth participant members collaborate to produce multimedia works and explore important civic and social issues. Sponsored competitions or "creation calls," by Brazilian corporations and government institutions are posted on ItsNoon's network and youth members respond with entries. The 17 creation calls to date, some sponsored by Brazil's largest companies, have attracted 15,000 submissions, yielding 2,040 winners and R\$612,000 (~US\$370,000) paid to members. All of ItsNoon's operating costs are fully paid through earned income.

Many Fellows face an additional funding challenge: Private and corporate investors often have reservations about supporting work that could be construed as politically or socially provocative. Other Fellows cannot pursue corporate sponsorship opportunities for fear of compromising their image of strict impartiality. Yet others face reluctance of potential advertisers to support a start-up media project that has not yet demonstrated traction

In Poland, where independent newspapers struggle to survive in the face of competition from government-owned rivals, **Dominik Ksieski** is addressing the need for strong revenue streams. His **Association of Local Newspapers (ALN)**, an cooperative of independent weekly local news providers, aggregates the advertising space of member publications to allow marketers to pay one rate. By leveraging the marketing reach of the collective of publications, he connects ALN members with the financial capital needed to remain independent and competitive in the advertising market – helping to sustain press freedom.

The hardest thing was to not have financial means at all to hire a team of people because I cannot pay their wages. Since I don't have the means to hire qualified people, I will just hire people that are interested in my vision [...] I spend a lot of time coaching and training them.

2010 News & Knowledge Fellow

Organizational and Management Capacity

Many Fellows do not possess skills in organizational management and leadership, and they face financial barriers to hiring qualified staff. Project personnel typically are required to take on business or organizational functions that are outside of the realm of their expertise, notably fundraising and corporate outreach, with obvious implications for the organization's resource engine. Several Fellows were aware that strategic missteps along the way – often resulting from not having applied adequate energy or resources to business planning – had compromised the progress and impact of their work.

Keeping abreast of technological innovations is another area where there are common deficiencies, which is partly unavoidable given the rate at which new technologies are entering the marketplace. According to **Luis Aguilar** of **Noticias de mi Gente**, "We are just learning every day, and at least once a week we make a meeting and start to think how can we acquire new technologies...so we are just every week learning about anything that we can put in our system." Finally, evaluation capacity is lacking in most Fellows' initiatives; some were very conscious of this shortcoming, others simply are not aware of its importance or potential value.

Environmental Barriers to Success

The three environmental factors described below represent significant systemic challenges that are deeply intertwined with the very issues the Fellows' work is trying to address.

Political Landscape

By far the most significant environmental barriers to success are the volatile and often oppressive political situations in the countries where Fellows are working. These dynamics are typically accompanied by significant polarization of the population along political and ideological fault lines, as well as corruption both within government and the broader society.

In Sri Lanka, political influence, state regulation of media and censorship result in a media environment where narrow views and biased reporting are common, and critical discussions of issues are not pursued. **Sanjana Hattotuwa's Groundviews** has created safe channels for citizen to share news and information through data encryption and coding. The safety of anonymity provides citizen journalists a platform to express their views without fear of government persecution. Hattotuwa aims to demonstrate by example that citizen journalism can enable civil, progressive and inclusive discussions on democracy, rights, governance and peace in Sri Lanka.

A related challenge stems from the presence of non-political extremist forces where Fellows are working. **Shafqat Munir Ahmad** of **JDHR/Infochange** and his partners are under constant threat from religious extremists in Pakistan who take issue with the progressive perspectives that appear in their journalism. Once, after the newspaper for which Shafqat was an editor published an article about women who have sex forced on them by their husbands, an armed group of Taliban forced their way into his editorial office, pointed their weapons at him, and threatened to kill him. He offered to publish the assailants' own opinion on the matter on a full page of the newspaper the next day; they declined that offer, and left the premises without physically harming Shafqat.

Finally, political instability creates a very real obstacle to Fellows who are trying to affect government policy and behavior. In Nepal, for example, where **Som Nath Aryal** would like to change the way the government regulates community radio, there is not even a Constitution in place. This type of basic government dysfunction makes it very difficult to convince politicians to take up causes such as improvements to electronic media regulation. A related challenge is the effect of political instability and repression on the willingness of citizens to speak openly or critically about wrongs that they see happening around them.

Resistance of Mainstream Media

Fellows cite resistance from the vested interests who control mainstream media to the sort of news and information they are trying to amplify. Typically, these powerful corporate or political entities have a clear political agenda that influences editorial content and often screens out material that is critical of government. Other times the resistance is driven by the economics of viewer ratings and readership; there is a prevailing belief that coverage of sensational issues or celebrities is better for ratings, and media owners (as well as their investors and advertisers) are keen on ensuring that content is geared to feed this perceived appetite. Alicia Cytrynblum's work with *Periodismo Social*, for one, aims to combat this resistance by spreading risk among member newspapers and by demonstrating the commercial appeal of journalism that focuses on social issues.

The Challenge of Reaching Disconnected Communities

While some Fellows engage communities who are well connected to information, media, and technology, the majority are targeting people who are poor, remote, largely illiterate, are not connected to the Internet, and otherwise have very limited access to news and information.

Basic literacy is a fundamental challenge that some Fellows, like **Som Nath Aryal** of Nepal, seek to overcome through broadcast media such as community radio **Luis Aguilar** conducts informal Internet capacity building and technical support with his constituencies, Where Internet access, not literacy, is the primary barrier, Fellows are forced to invest precious resources in offline distribution strategies to ensure it is published in a form that is accessible. For example, **Damián Osta's La Diaria** not only prints a hard copy newspaper, but also pays for its own newspaper distribution in rural areas at no cost to customers because there is corruption in existing delivery services.

Ashoka's Added Value for Fellows

This section of the report examines the impact of the Ashoka Fellowship on elected News & Knowledge Fellows and their work, as well as Fellows' perceptions of Ashoka. The evaluation team identified the following five areas of Ashoka's added value for Fellows:

- *Network effect;*
- *Increased credibility;*
- *Motivation and inspiration;*
- *Pro bono professional and technical support utilized; and*
- *Direct financial support.*

News & Knowledge Fellows experienced some of the areas of added value from Ashoka more consistently than others, as discussed below.

Network Effect

As there are currently over 2,500 Ashoka Fellows in 72 countries around the world, election as an Ashoka Fellow provides individual social entrepreneurs with access to a large network of potential collaborators, funders, and other stakeholders. Ashoka can be a hub that connects these social entrepreneurs, creating the potential for News & Knowledge Fellows specifically to connect with other social entrepreneurs and individuals invested in their work in a way that could accelerate and enhance progress.

Collaboration and Connections Across Ashoka's Network

Being a part of Ashoka provides Fellows with the possibility of making linkages and forming partnerships both within and outside of the network.

According to survey data, three-quarters (74%) of 2008 and 2009 News & Knowledge Fellows said they had collaborated with another Ashoka Fellow in some manner. Through analysis of survey responses, evaluators identified eight themes regarding the types of collaboration Fellows have engaged in with each other:

• Joint project(s) or event(s)
• Information sharing
• Pursuit of funding
• Media coverage of other Fellow(s)
• Mentorship
• Strategic partnerships
• Technical support
• Video projects

Relationship Building and Cultivating Alliances with People Outside of the Ashoka Fellowship

By virtue of becoming a part of Ashoka, News & Knowledge Fellows' networks expand to include new sets of individuals and organizations within their field, and beyond their geographic location. Survey data reveal that about two-thirds (64%) of Fellows felt that Ashoka made a moderate to critical difference in helping them connect with funders or investors.

Similarly, nearly three-quarters (74%) of Fellows felt Ashoka made a moderate to critical difference in creating connections with others important to their work.

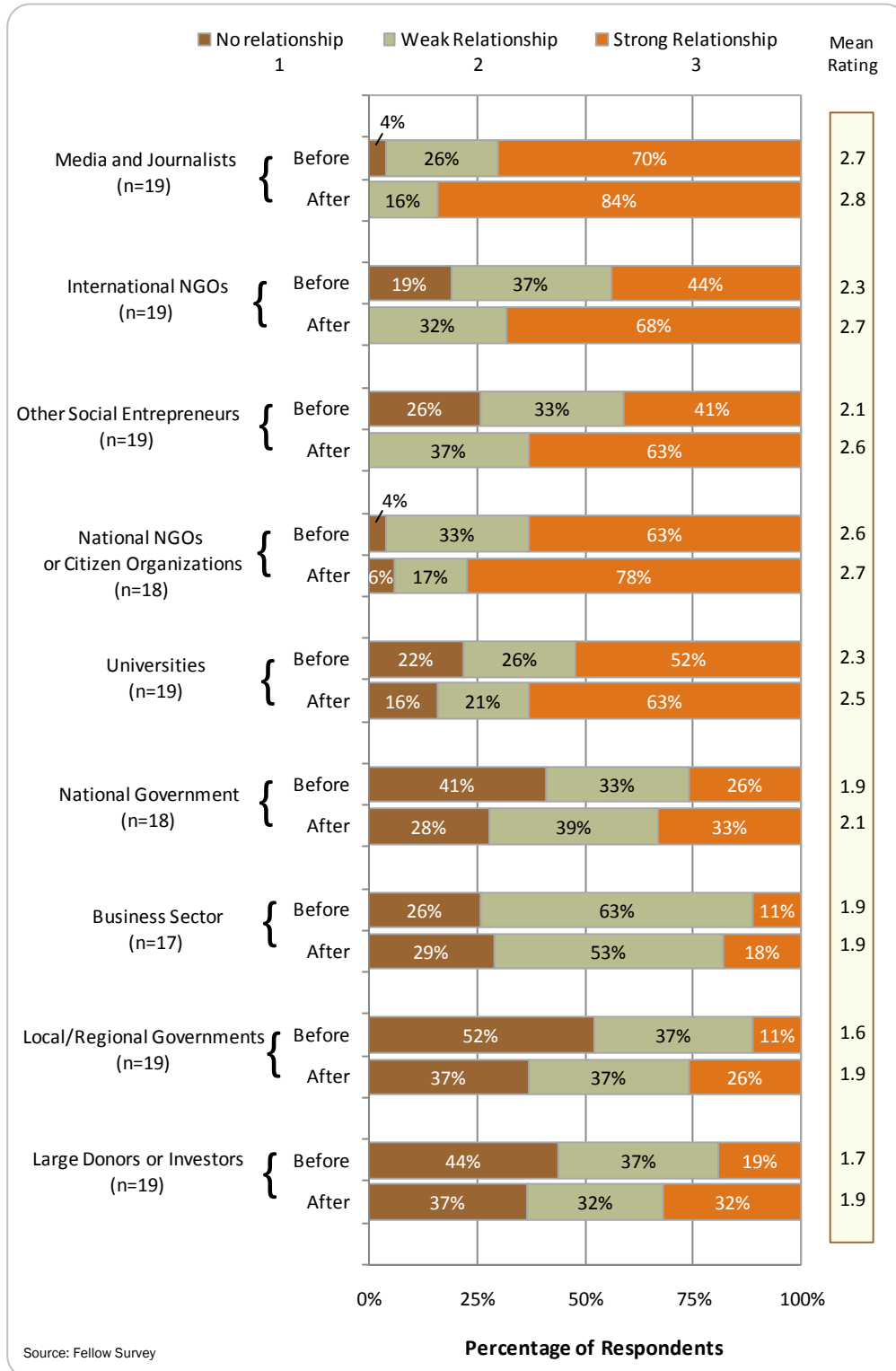
My status as an Ashoka Fellow has helped to open multiple international doors [...] it garnered international attention and helped to forge relationships and spread our message.

2009 Fellow

Most commonly, Fellows have collaborated with each other on a specific project or event, such as citizen journalism training or a topic-oriented news event. Shafqat Munir Ahmed has worked with other Ashoka Fellows to organize media trainings in two major cities in Pakistan. He also has participated with 4 Fellows, through a Knowledge Initiative team in the U.S. and Thailand, in the Asia Media Forum's "Asia Media Conference 2009." Fellows also described sharing information (including formal and informal communications) and aligning funding pursuits as other types of collaborations formed among Fellows.

As shown in the following Exhibit, Fellows reported on the survey that many different types of relationships have strengthened since their election. The most notable increases are in Fellows' relationships with other social entrepreneurs, international NGOs, local/regional governments, national government, universities, and large donors/investors.

Exhibit 18:
Change in Strength of Fellows' Relationships Since Election



The Fellow Survey also explored changes in funding sources that Fellows have experienced since their election. Nearly two-thirds of Fellows report that there is no change in their outside funding

sources since their election as an Ashoka Fellow, while just over a third (36%) report that there is an increase in their outside funding sources since the Ashoka Fellowship.

A few Fellows shared with the evaluation team that such opportunities to connect with others important to their work, especially funders, were indeed a key expectation of the Fellowship, and one of the areas they most value in principle. It is important to note, however, that while there are some examples where this happened, relatively few Fellows in each election year cohort mentioned receiving much guidance about what resources were available or how to access them, suggesting that much of the value of the network has yet to be realized.

Indeed, the added practical value Fellows derive from Ashoka seems largely determined by local capacity and relationships. While it may be that in some countries the capacity simply does not exist, it seems conceivable that Ashoka could launch an effort to address the inconsistencies by tapping into their vast existing global network.

Increased Credibility

Recognition by Ashoka was seen by some Fellows as a significant source of social capital, in that the prestige and credibility that comes with being associated with Ashoka can legitimize their work in the eyes of stakeholders and sponsors, helping them to be taken more seriously. Just over half (53%) of Fellows reported that Ashoka made a critical difference helping with their media coverage, and, nearly half of Fellows (47%) felt their involvement with Ashoka made a critical difference in gaining support and recognition from others working in their field. Interestingly, however, 53% of Fellows reported their status made limited or no difference in strengthening their credibility in the eyes of funders or other key stakeholders; and, only a small fraction (11%) of Fellows felt their status as Ashoka Fellows made a critical difference with funders or other key stakeholders; this discrepancy likely relates back to the finding that Fellows felt Ashoka could better connect them to potential funding sources.

[Ashoka has] a quality stamp that has helped a lot. Being an Ashoka Fellow really helps to get appointments and to get people to listen to me.

2008 Fellow

Motivation and Inspiration

News & Knowledge Fellows are pioneers in their fields and may work in relative isolation from others. Thus, the Ashoka Fellowship provides a meaningful source of validation. Fellows cite the recognition by Ashoka as reinforcing their belief that their work can actually be a source of significant impact, with one citing that recognition as a major source of motivation for them to continue their work. Some Fellows commented on the distinct value in the sense of solidarity they feel in being connected to, and affiliated with, a network of like-minded individuals, all of whom are engaged in similar pursuits and struggles.

Selection to be an Ashoka Fellow is a sophisticated, multi-step process that includes a written application and multiple interviews. The selection process itself was cited by many Fellows as key to helping them clarify and refine their ideas and develop their projects. Half of Fellows surveyed felt the selection process made a critical difference in helping to strengthen and develop their ideas..

One Fellow remarked on the special nature of the selection process to motivate him to aspire to new levels: “During the election process I was asked questions I never got before. These kinds of questions were really inspiring for me.”

Pro Bono Professional and Technical Support

Thirteen of the 27 Fellows surveyed reported using some form of pro bono support offered by Ashoka – participating in Ashoka-sponsored events, support creating business plans as well as accessing legal and technical advice. One Fellow commented that, with the help of Ashoka, they were able to develop their first professional annual report based on social reporting standards.

Direct Financial Support

The amount of direct financial support that Fellows receive from Ashoka over the span of three years ranges widely from Fellow to Fellow. Differences in the amount of the award are accounted for by differences in the cost of living in the Fellows’ region and the Fellows’ need.

According to Ashoka, the stipend is an award to the individual entrepreneur, and not to their organization. It is meant simply to cover the entrepreneur’s living expenses, freeing him/her to pursue the innovation full-time, however, most Fellows appear to assess the importance of the stipend in relation to the overall budget for their work, particularly for the approximate one-third of Fellows (37%) for whom the Ashoka stipend currently represents their only source of funding. Eleven Fellows (41%) report that the majority of their funding (85% or more of overall funding sources) comes from outside of the Ashoka fellowship.

I think what Ashoka provides me with is support for an endeavor that I can commit myself to 100% without my attention divided by something else, and that’s something I haven’t really had in my life so it’s a real privilege.

2010 Fellow

Though the stipend is intended to provide support to the individual Fellows, some Fellows report that they also supplement their organizational budgets with funding from their stipend, and have used this money to help pay staff salaries or provide other organizational support.

Conclusions

This evaluation reflects the work of a group of entrepreneurs at a singular moment, as the media world grapples with its reinvention. Technologies and user needs are changing rapidly, throwing up new barriers to information freedom, access, and quality – but also opening up profound new opportunities. All of this leads to an ultimate assessment of success: Are Ashoka News & Knowledge Fellows seizing on this dynamic environment to alter the way information is produced and consumed in a fundamental way?

The majority of Fellows are, in fact, having early successes creating systemic change in a variety of contexts: within the journalism profession, in government, academia and business, and among citizens themselves. Their work is reshaping the way news and information is produced and consumed, often in the face of serious resistance and with scarce resources. There is growing evidence that most Fellows' projects are being implemented successfully, and that many are on track to drive to deep, sustainable systems change.

The evaluation also reveals that Ashoka's support has "made a critical difference" for many Fellows in their own personal development as social entrepreneurs. By directing support to individuals who are demonstrating visionary, breakthrough leadership, Ashoka is investing in catalysts for change. One Fellow commented, "Being an Ashoka Fellow is being member of a group of people that are trying to re-design the world, with action, purpose and deep thoughts."

The News & Knowledge program is, without question, working at the front lines of change. The innovators it has identified and championed are special. Not all of their game-changing ideas will take root, but the ones that do will leave a lasting impact. The key strategic question for Ashoka is how to support these and other news and knowledge innovators going forward to increase the likelihood and scope of their impact.

News & Knowledge Fellows are helping to drive a new reality: the production and distribution of news and knowledge is no longer the proprietary domain of monolithic media companies. Rather, a new operating model has emerged, that of networked media organizations propelled by trust and shared values that interact collaboratively across sectors. Driving these new dynamic networks are a new breed of entrepreneurs who facilitate rather than command. They leverage relationships and share resources, seeking out partnerships with citizens, community organizations, government, mainstream media. Their work is speeding the creation of flexible news systems that catalyze information citizenship in powerful ways – and that may well be the face of media's future.

APPENDIX

Fellow:	Luis Aguilar
Country:	Guatemala
Year of Election:	2009
Project:	www.NoticiasDeMiGente
Fellow:	Kara Andrade
Country:	Guatemala
Year of Election:	2010
Project:	Habla Centro
Fellow:	Som Nath Aryal
Country:	Nepal
Year of Election:	2008
Project:	Community Radio Madanpokhara Radio Rampur
Fellow:	Ben Cokelet
Country:	Nepal
Year of Election:	2010
Project:	PODER
Fellow:	Carlos Correa
Country:	Venezuela
Year of Election:	2008
Project:	Espacio Público
Fellow:	Alicia Cytrynblym
Country:	Argentina
Year of Election:	2009
Project:	Periodismo Social
Fellow:	Reinaldo Pamponet Filho
Country:	Brazil
Year of Election:	2009
Project:	itsNOON
Fellow:	Fabrice Florin
Country:	USA
Year of Election:	2008
Project:	NewsTrust
Fellow:	Michael Gleich
Country:	Germany
Year of Election:	2008
Project:	Advanced Journalism Academy
Fellow:	Gregor Hackmack
Country:	Germany
Year of Election:	2008
Project:	Abgeordnetenwatch (Parliament Watch)
Fellow:	Sanjana Hattotuwa
Country:	Sri Lanka
Year of Election:	2008
Project:	Groundviews
Fellow:	Felipe I. Heusser
Country:	Chile
Year of Election:	2010
Project:	Vota Inteligente

Fellow: Štefan Hríb
 Country: Slovak Republic
 Year of Election: 2008
 Project: Týžden

Fellow: Stefan Kaspar
 Country: Peru
 Year of Election: 2009
 Project: Grupo Chaski

Fellow: Jocelyne Yennega Kompaore
 Country: Burkina Faso
 Year of Election: 2008
 Project: "Information Capital" collection and dissemination (no formal name)

Fellow: Dominik Księski
 Country: Poland
 Year of Election: 2010
 Project: Association of Local Newspapers

Fellow: Juanita León
 Country: Colombia
 Year of Election: 2009
 Project: La Silla Vacía

Fellow: Pau Llop
 Country: Spain
 Year of Election: (2010)
 Project: Bottop

Fellow: Shafqat Munir Ahmad
 Country: Pakistan
 Year of Election: 2008
 Project: Infochange Pakistan | Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights

Fellow: Paulo Rogério Nunes
 Country: Brazil
 Year of Election: 2009
 Project: Instituto Mídia Étnica

Fellow: Damián Osta
 Country: Uruguay
 Year of Election: 2010
 Project: La Daria

Fellow: Nicholas Reville
 Country: USA
 Year of Election: 2009
 Project: Participatory Culture Foundation

Fellow: Jake Shapiro
 Country: USA
 Year of Election: 2010
 Project: PRX

Fellow: Cleodon Silva
 Country: Brazil
 Year of Election: (2010)
 Project: Instituto Lidas

Fellow: Hamadou Tidiane Sy
 Country: Senegal

Year of Election: 2008
Project: OuestAf

Fellow: *Name withheld, pending final election*
Country: Colombia
Year of Election: pending