Small Businesses = Big Environmental Impact
Covering the G-20’s major new economic initiative with a focus on green business

When people talk about innovation being the solution to global warming, what they really mean is that entrepreneurs are the solution to global warming. Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are at the forefront of saving the environment. The G-20’s major initiative to find and support solutions to help SMEs thrive is therefore part of the key to our environment’s future. The best of these solutions, sourced through Ashoka Changemakers G-20 SME Finance Challenge, will be showcased and launched globally at the G-20 summit in Korea on November 11-12.

Green businesses are, by and large, SMEs. Alternative energy companies, green retail outlets, organic food growers, low-impact processing plants, locally sourced craft sellers – these all tend to be SMEs. And whether they have a specific green mission or not, SMEs typically have a deep connection to their communities’ and environments’ needs, and therefore often have an incentive to be good stewards of their surrounding environment. Ashoka and the Ashoka Changemakers community include thought leaders and innovators who are proving the power and potential of green businesses.

Here are some potential angles and interviews for unique, interesting coverage of green businesses globally, for the G-20 Summit and beyond:

**Green SMEs = Growth** – contrary to popular criticism of environmentalism, green business practices and economic growth are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they often go hand-in-hand.

- **Example:** The Corporacion Oro Verde Fundacion Amigos del Choco, for example, has put people to work and improved the surrounding environment. We can put you in touch with the company’s founder, Ashoka Fellow, Catalina Cock Duple [14].

**Green SMEs = Development Opportunity** – In the aftermath of Haiti’s earthquake, green energy SMEs are playing a major role in providing needed power while rebuilding the electrical infrastructure in an environmentally friendly way.

- **Example:** REpower Haiti [20], an entrant in the G-20 SME Challenge, is offering long-term fixed price contracts to renewable energy startups and SMEs that are repairing the power grid, creating jobs, and supporting the businesses that will help stabilize Haiti’s economy.

**Green SMEs = Investment Opportunity** – Forward-thinking investors are proving that cleaner energy in developing countries is a sound investment.

- **Example:** E+Co has garnered an average 8.7 percent return for investors while reducing 4.6 million tons of carbon. The fund’s successes around the world prove that job growth, economic stability and environmental stewardship can thrive with a concerted effort to support SMEs. E+Co is an entrant [27] in the G-20 SME Challenge.

**Green SMEs = High tech** – Pro-environment businesses are not anti-technology. In fact, some of the most advanced ideas for stemming global warming come from small and growing technology firms.

- **Example:** One financing innovator in Korea hopes to tap into that advanced technology as an alternative to credit ratings and collateral. By using a sophisticated rating system to assess a technology’s chances for success, INNOBIZ Loans [22] hopes to shift the conversation about investment risk away from an SME’s finances and toward the power of the innovation itself. High-tech sustainable energy solutions are among the businesses INNOBIZ Loans supports.

**Green SMEs = Low tech** – On the flip side, green solutions are not all about photovoltaic panels and biofuels. Green SMEs can and do succeed on a more human scale.

- **Example:** The Solar Sisters [23] in Uganda is an SME that employs rural women to sell solar-powered LED lamps for residential use. This SME has increased women’s employment and earning power while also reducing dependence on polluting and inefficient forms of lighting. We can connect you with Solar Sisters founder Katerine Lucey, a recent winner of a Changemakers competition.

**Green SMEs = Cutting Edge** – Mobile phones and cloud computing are revolutionizing the opportunities for environmentally conscious entrepreneurs to do business.

- **Example:** Two SME Challenge entrants, both Africa-based, are programs that allow renewable energy SMEs to track supply, demand, and sales information of its customers via cell phone or a cloud computing platform, thus simplifying bookkeeping, making key business information available to potential investors, improving credit ratings, and speeding up the credit application process. The SME Records Bank [24] and the Green Energy Project [25] are two entrants in the G-20 SME Finance Challenge.

This is just a small fraction of the resources available through Ashoka and Changemakers. For further information and to access our global community of more than 140,000 changemakers around the world, please contact:

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