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As education systems worldwide struggle with fragmentation and inequality, social entrepreneur and public-health anthropologist [Séverine de Sadeleer](#) is reshaping how children learn to understand themselves and others. In this Interview, led by ASN Global Communication Manager Yuliya Koroleva, Séverine introduces [AMA la Girafe](#), the fast-growing initiative connecting classrooms across continents to build empathy, curiosity, and emotional intelligence. Drawing on her years in African public health missions and her leadership roles across Europe—Séverine merges scientific insight with a deep commitment to inclusive education.

Why have you chosen anthropology and intercultural dialogue as your focus — and how your ASN journey began?

I've always been very close to education. For me, everything starts at a very early age — that's when you can truly shape mindsets. My conviction comes from my years working with Enabel, first in Niger and then in Burundi. I was working on public health projects, spending a lot of time supporting hospitals, health centers, and communities. Being around children every day, watching them play, interact, and navigate their worlds, made something very clear to me: **children need to understand from a young age that the world is vast, diverse, and full of different ways of living.** That seed stayed with me. I knew I wanted to build something that would help children develop flexibility, empathy, and openness early in life so they could grow into better citizens. My connection to Ashoka came later. The first time I heard Fellows speak in London, I thought: *"This is genius."* Social entrepreneurship resonated deeply with me: one idea, one passion, one systemic impact. I knew I wanted to be part of that movement. That's how my ASN journey began.

What is your role as an ASN Today?

As an ASN member, I open my network whenever I can. I connect Fellows with opportunities, with companies, with people who can help them grow. I participate in meetings and retreats, and I try to be an active contributor — even if, like everyone, I sometimes feel I could do more. But I've also supported Ashoka in concrete ways. For example, I connected Ashoka with one of my family company, [Aliaxis](#), which led to funding a [Fellow, Murendi Mafumo](#), in South Africa working on water issue. These bridges matter.

How would you introduce AMA la Girafe, and what is your mission?

AMA la Girafe is an EdTech platform that connects classrooms around the world. We provide teachers with educational content on themes like citizenship, culture, creativity, emotional intelligence, and the environment. Teachers choose activities to do with their students, and then share pictures, videos, and reflections on the platform. Classrooms are grouped in clusters of five — for example, a class in Canada connected with classes in Belgium, France, Rwanda, and Senegal. They exchange glimpses of their daily lives and projects. It's a simple but powerful way for children to understand each other and the world. Our educational solution also includes a tangible element: a soft-toy giraffe named **AMA** (from the Spanish *amar*, "to love"). When AMA enters a classroom, something magical happens. Teachers tell us that shy children suddenly open up, speak, and participate. It builds confidence, enthusiasm, and connection. Today we work with around **600 schools worldwide (17 countries)**, and my ambition is to reach many more. Some things in life don't feel like choices — they feel like impulses that are stronger than you. AMA la Girafe came to me like that. It spoke so loudly that I had no choice but to act. My work focuses on connecting diverse schools, in Europe, Africa, Canada, including mainstream schools and special-needs schools, we also engage with some street children association. I want to break down walls and create interactions that help children understand that life is bigger than their daily environment, and to support schools in opening up and reaching out to local communities.

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What results have you observed so far, and how can ASN members support you in strengthening them?

We see children becoming more curious, more confident, more empathetic. They open their eyes to other cultures — and also to diversity within their own country. In Belgium, for example, a school in Brussels South and a school in Arlon can have completely different daily realities. Connecting them is already powerful. Teachers also tell us that AMA helps them break out of rigid curricula. In some African schools, learning is still very traditional — memorization, little room for creativity or project-based learning. AMA gives them a way to introduce new methods, new challenges, new forms of expression. One example I love: A school in Burundi participated in our “solidarity challenge.” The students collected wood in their neighbourhood and offered it to elderly women who had lost their husbands, so they could cook and stay warm. They shared pictures and videos with their partner schools. It created strong bonds within their community and across borders.

How ASN members can help:

- Connect us with networks of schools — anywhere in the world.
- Help us build more systematic impact within education systems, which are often slow to adopt innovation.
- Co-create educational content on our themes (citizenship, culture, creativity, emotional intelligence, environment).

What barriers do you face in scaling AMA, and how could ASNs help?

Education systems can be quite static and slow to change. Funding is a major barrier — schools often have no budget, so we rely heavily on grants. Ideally, I would love to see solutions like AMA fully integrated into official education systems. Another challenge is access: scaling globally requires connections with ministries, school networks, and institutions. This is where ASN members and Ashoka Fellows, especially those connected to businesses and CSR initiatives, can play a crucial role — by opening doors, supporting funding, and connecting us to new networks of schools and associations.

You’ve collaborated with Fellows. Can you share an example of a win-win collaboration?

For me, “win-win” doesn’t mean direct exchange. It’s more like contributing to a network and trusting that it will come back in some form. One example: I worked with a Fellow, Hénoc Muhindo Muthethe in the Democratic Republic of Congo who supports the Twa* (Pygmy) communities. He connected me with schools there, and we launched AMA despite limited internet access. As a workaround, they send me pictures and videos via WhatsApp, which I then upload for them. It’s work in progress, but it’s meaningful. What I give back is access to AMA — and a way for children to learn through projects, creativity, and community action. It’s a different kind of education, and it stays with them for longer.

** The Twa communities in the DRC are Indigenous Forest peoples who have faced historical marginalization, land loss, and conflict. They are culturally rich, deeply connected to their environment, and increasingly supported by peacebuilding and human rights initiatives.*

You have a foot in both worlds — ASNs and Fellows. Where do you see the biggest opportunities to collaborate?

There is so much potential. Both groups are incredibly complementary, but we don’t leverage that collective intelligence enough. Everyone is fighting for their own cause across different fields and communities. All these causes are extremely



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valuable but imagine if we identified **one big idea** that overlaps all our missions and worked on it together. We would be much stronger. Ashoka is uniquely positioned to make this happen.

Ashoka's mission is "Everyone a Changemaker." How does this connect with AMA?

The connection is very strong. One of the core goals of AMA is to show every child that they can have an impact — in their family, classroom, school, community. **Every child is unique, talented, and capable of contributing.** If we plant that seed early, it stays with them forever. That's exactly the spirit of Ashoka.

What do you appreciate most about the Ashoka community, and where do you see room for improvement?

Ashoka already does a lot — gatherings, meaningful trainings, opportunities to connect. But I think we could go further. First, we need to identify the essence of each Fellow's and ASN member's work. Then find **a common theme that** everyone can relate to. Once that's clear, participation must be extremely simple — otherwise people disengage. It could be as easy as a shared online space where everyone contributes how they can support the common goal. No micromanagement. Just a clear vision and open creativity. That's where the magic happens.

I am curious now, what could be that "one big bold idea"?

Love, well-being, happiness — these are universal and deeply human values. If we focus on spreading more happiness and helping people reconnect with their purpose, everything else will follow. Supporting people — especially children — in discovering their purpose and their ability to make a positive impact can be truly transformative.

If you had a magic wand and could change one thing in society, what would it be?

I would ensure that every child grows up knowing they have a purpose — that they belong, that they matter, and that they can make a difference. AMA was created to spread what I call "love bubbles" — particularly to children growing up in challenging or dysfunctional environments — so they feel part of something bigger. If children can connect to that deep sense of purpose and belonging early on, they can truly thrive, contribute positively to our society, and grow into well-rounded citizens. That would be a meaningful step forward, what do you think?