Market-based innovations to serve the poor

Since 2013, the Cartier Charitable Foundation has partnered with Acumen to support social enterprises that improve the quality of life of people in low-income communities. The partnership began with a focus on improving the quality of and access to education for the poor. In 2014, the Foundation will also start supporting Acumen’s work to bring clean energy solutions to low-income communities. Together, the Foundation and Acumen will leverage the opportunity to explore how businesses that serve the poor can positively impact women in particular.

**DURATION**: 2013-2016  
**CHALLENGE**: Women’s Social and Economic Development, Access to Basic Services  
**COUNTRY**: India  
**PARTNER**: Acumen

**CONTEXT**

The way traditional public aid systems and development organisations tackle poverty has been questioned in past decades. Acumen proposes a radically new approach to unlocking the poverty trap for millions of people by investing in companies that provide reliable and affordable access to critical goods and basic services for low-income communities all around the world. Acumen invests in early-stage enterprises with proven positive impact in agriculture, health, safe drinking water, housing, clean energy and education for low-income communities. The Foundation has chosen to currently focus on Acumen’s education and clean energy portfolios, dedicating special attention to gender inclusion and positive impacts on women and girls.

**ACTION**

- *Support the education portfolio*: The Foundation’s support is enabling Acumen to invest in and scale up enterprises that improve quality of and access to education for
the poor as well as improve economic opportunities and employability through skills training.

- **Support the clean energy portfolio**: With support from the Foundation, Acumen is investing in and scaling up social enterprises that provide clean energy solutions to underserved markets, bringing changes to community households together with positive social and environmental impacts.

- Fund research on social enterprise investment with a gender lens to learn how the social enterprise sector can engage with and empower women. The research will be conducted by the International Center for Research on Women.

**EXPECTED RESULTS**

Acumen foresees that over the next 3 to 4 years all the social enterprises supported in the education and energy portfolio will scale up and will globally impact hundreds of thousands of people positively in the following ways:

- **Education portfolio**: Impact over 800,000 people with high quality, low-cost education and job-related skills and help create tens of thousands of jobs, with a focus on children, underemployed youth, and women.

- **Clean energy portfolio**: Provide access to clean energy to more than 300,000 individuals, helping improve quality of life for low-income communities through outcomes including increased productive hours and decreased pollution, with an emphasis on women and girls.

- The research will enable improved understanding of the impact that the social enterprise sector and Acumen’s portfolio can have on women and girls in particular.

**LONG-TERM STRATEGY**

Through our partnership with Acumen, we aim to achieve long-term socio-economic impact by empowering the poor to improve the quality of their lives, with a focus on education and clean energy. Special attention is focused on how social enterprises can promote the empowerment of women. Support from the Foundation will enable Acumen to demonstrate the potential of entrepreneurial models to address critical challenges.