

# Addressing Africa's biggest social challenges

NAIROBI, Kenya - Acumen, in partnership with GE, kicked off its fourth annual Collaboration Summit in Nairobi. Acumen, a nonprofit impact investor, created the summit to bring social enterprises and international corporations together to catalyse inclusive business models that address Africa's biggest social challenges.



Since 2001, [Acumen has invested more than \\$35 million in 31 companies in East and West Africa](#) working in agriculture, energy, health care, clean water and sanitation to better serve each region's poor. The Collaboration Summit is a key part of Acumen's [Technical Assistance Initiative](#), a five-year \$1 million program that aims to accelerate the growth and impact of its portfolio companies so they become sustainable, financially viable and inclusive of poor and marginalised communities.

"At Acumen, we believe there is much for social enterprises and large businesses to learn from each other and achieve together," said Duncan Onyango, Acumen's East Africa director. "With GE's support, we are working to cultivate an environment that enables companies, big and small, to understand the shared value of partnerships, strategically integrate social and environmental values into their models and ensure the success of all stakeholders."

For this year's Collaboration Summit, held at the Villa Rosa Kempinski Hotel, Acumen gathered a select number of committed multinationals and more than 15 of its social enterprises to work together on redefining business's role in driving social impact and growing inclusive emerging markets. GE offered its support as the sole Summit Partner while [Dow](#) supported as a technical assistance initiative partner and [Intellectap](#) as a knowledge partner, leading a summit session on partnerships to improve healthcare access.

"We're delighted to be part of this year's Collaboration Summit to share ideas and learnings on doing business that drives social impact and inclusive growth in Africa," said GE Africa's President and CEO Jay Ireland. "We see GE as partners in building Africa's sustainable future and I'm looking forward to working with the participating social entrepreneurs to explore innovative solutions to Africa's challenges."

[This year's summit](#) focuses on the challenges holding emerging markets back—including those obstacles facing individual companies as well as entire industries like agriculture or renewable energy—and solutions that involve players from across big and small business, government, and civil society. For example, [Unilever is partnering with Acumen and portfolio company BURN Manufacturing—a clean cookstove manufacturer](#) - to improve the livelihoods of Africa's smallholder farmers and build sustainable supply chains that source from these vulnerable rural communities. Collaborations in healthcare and agriculture were also highlighted.

Some of Acumen's participating investments include: [Esoko](#), a mobile platform that provides Africa's rural farmers with agronomic tips and market access that will improve their incomes; [Devergy](#), a social enterprise that delivers affordable, reliable solar energy to low-income communities living off the grid; and [Sanergy](#), a company that provides residents of Kenya's slums with affordable sanitation, and produces organic fertiliser to improve soil quality for Kenyan farms. Additional participating corporations involved include [Unilever](#) and [Barclays](#), both partners of the technical assistance initiative, and [EY](#), which provides professional services to some of Acumen's portfolio companies in the region.

"When we started this initiative we hoped that leading global corporations could help social enterprises to scale," said Yasmina Zaidman, Acumen's director of strategic partnerships. "Now we know that these enterprises, through their focus on underserved markets and breakthrough innovation, can be powerful allies to corporations as well."

Since its founding, Acumen has invested more than \$101 million in 92 companies in East and West Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America and the United States to support a wide range of sustainable, scalable businesses using market-based approaches to deliver products and services to the poor. Though the Collaboration Summit, Acumen and the summit participants are working to find ways to expand these innovations to impact millions of lives across East and West Africa.

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