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Ensuring Sustainability for Philanthropic Investments with Data

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Since 2008, Bloomberg Philanthropies has been working to increase women's economic opportunities in sub-Saharan Africa. With partners such as Women for Women International (WfWI), for example, women in Rwanda and Congo are taught organic farming techniques geared toward commercial production; and food processing, textiles and artisan crafts to bring to local and international markets. As a result, these women — all of whom have survived the hardships due to conflicts and war — are learning life-changing education and technical skills to move from being survivors to active citizens.

Building on the success of our partnership with WfWI, we have worked to establish strong partnerships with local communities and governments in order to increase collaboration and create more opportunities to ensure the greatest outcomes. Bringing together people, ideas and resources from across sectors toward a common purpose can amplify the impact.

Over the course of the years we have worked in the sub-Sahara, we have always felt the desire to do even more. When we joined other colleagues working in post-conflict areas, we discovered that many of us did not know what the other was doing. There were reports that had been written, and studies completed about best practices, but they had not been

shared or read by all. Those of us working in the region were finding our own patterns of success within silos.

We all knew we were investing time and resources, but were funding and serving people and addressing critical issues with limited resource information — and we didn't have access to information that could be shared to increase the impact we were making. More importantly, we didn't know what kind of milestones — if any — were being achieved.

The solution to help us answer these questions was right in front of us: data.

At [Bloomberg Philanthropies](#), we're a metrics-driven organization that believes data is vital to help identify, address and help overcome global challenges. In our economic development program, data drives our success. We measure our participants' outcomes two years post-graduation. From the start of the program each woman receives individualized educational and vocational plans, which track a number of metrics ranging from the enrollment of her children's education, to the health and wellness of her family, and more.

So, as a response to a range of challenges experienced by funders actively working in the region — such as a limited information on funding, underutilized research about successful efforts, and missed opportunities for collaboration — Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Brussels-based [King Baudouin Foundation](#), partnered to support the [Foundation Center](#), the leading authority on philanthropy worldwide and a trusted collaborator to organizations working on the ground. Together we recently launched [Equal Footing](#), a Web portal of philanthropic funding that provides tools to enable NGOs to see what types of development projects are underway, what solutions have had a measurable impact, and what needs are currently underserved.

Equal Footing is a first-of-its-kind solution to the wide range of challenges experienced by organizations like ours that are actively working in Central Africa. And, the site serves as an online repository of best practices across the NGOs working in Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi (with a plan for expansion), including research, maps detailing funding activities and case studies.

Equal Footing is the most comprehensive philanthropic resource about the region, and for the first time, philanthropists, NGOs and others will have a platform to learn, collaborate with each other and leverage resources for maximum impact. It is certain to be a powerful tool that will help us and other organizations build on the positive momentum in sub-Saharan Africa and, eventually, other regions in the world.