

Akola Project



Empowerment Through Enterprise



Uganda
EXTREME POVERTY
LACK OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS
7+ DEPENDENTS TO SUPPORT



Dallas, Texas
HUMAN TRAFFICKING
BARRIERS TO FINANCIAL STABILITY
TRAUMA-RELATED DISORDERS

Phillips Foundation’s first direct impact investment was a \$500,000 loan to Akola Project, a social business, jewelry brand and nonprofit that employs hundreds of women in Dallas, Texas, and rural Uganda. In 2013, Akola needed immediate capital to respond to a purchase order from its first national department store. The Foundation structured a Mission-Related Investment (MRI) in the form of a bridge loan to cover the cost of raw materials, double the number of women hired for production, expand manufacturing, and secure another round of funding for continued scaling. These funds were a fixed-income allocation out of the Foundation’s corpus, and the investment was a success financially and in achieving strong social impact.

WHY WE ARE INVOLVED

In Uganda, Akola trains and employs marginalized women to craft high-quality jewelry and woven handbags and textiles that are sold in the U.S. both online and through over 350 retail locations, including Neiman Marcus stores. In addition to earning a living wage, the women receive training in financial literacy, strategic planning, entrepreneurship, communications and other supports to enable them to serve as change agents of their lives and their villages. In Dallas, Akola trains and employs formerly trafficked and other marginalized women to make jewelry and to process and fulfill product orders received via the Akola website and directly from stores. As in Uganda, Akola provides or facilitates Dallas participants' personal and professional development through training in interpersonal communications, financial planning and saving, and other tailored supports to empower the women to transform their lives and communities.

WHAT WE'RE DOING

Phillips Foundation became Akola's first impact investor in 2014 when the organization was seeking capital to scale. Phillips Foundation offered a loan structured over three years at 5 percent interest. Capital was deployed to raw material costs and wages for employees in Uganda and Dallas, which supported hiring 141 additional Ugandan women for jewelry-making and weaving positions and 22 additional women for jewelry-making and order-fulfillment positions in Dallas. This impact investment allowed for increased production capacity to support purchase orders from national department stores, resulting in approximately \$2.5 million of revenue growth over three years.

WHAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED AND WHAT COMES NEXT

Over the course of a year, Akola fully deployed the \$500,000 investment, then leveraged our successful pilot impact investment to secure significant additional debt capital and grant resources. After just 13 months, Akola was able to repay our 3-year loan in full and reported strong short-term results including:



163 NEWLY TRAINED AND EMPLOYED WOMEN



34% INCREASE IN PRODUCTION



98% OF WOMEN ESTABLISHED FINANCIAL SAVINGS



INCREASED SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND IMPROVED HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR EMPLOYEES AND DEPENDENTS



AKOLA WOMEN USED INCOME TO LAUNCH THEIR OWN MICRO-ENTERPRISES RANGING FROM SELLING PRODUCE AND MILK TO ESTABLISHING A HAIRSTYLING BUSINESS

The organization continues to scale its retail presence to employ more women in Uganda and Dallas.