As the Beacon Capital Partners Fellow at Unitus, I have been exposed to some of the toughest challenges of working in a non profit and in the microfinance industry. For the last three months, I have worked closely with the senior team on strategic planning. Microfinance is one of the fastest changing industries today. Traditionally a development- / not-for-profit-run industry, microfinance is becoming more commercially oriented. We are seeing commercial start-ups, private equity funds, investment banks and even telecommunication companies entering the space. To make sure Unitus remains relevant, I have had to wrestle with the changing dynamics of all these new players and understand how Unitus can have the greatest leverage to propagate its mission: increase access of financial products to the unbanked.

Unlike the private sector, our success is hard to measure. Most companies can look to profits or return on equity /assets. Unitus, however, has a goal of helping microfinance institutions become sustainable (profitable), as well as reducing poverty. Furthermore, the people paying for our work (donors) aren’t the ones who are benefiting from our services (the poor). As we go through the process of strategic planning, I have had to consider the needs of our donors and the needs of the poor – and sometimes they are in opposition. These are issues one would never encounter in the private sector, yet it requires all the skills of a business manager and more!

The Beacon Capital Partners Fellowship Program has really pushed me to understand the business principals and market forces in the industry and understand how to use them to advance a social mission. The skills I am developing are invaluable to becoming a socially-minded global leader of tomorrow.