

We miss opportunities when we don't apply a gender lens

Photo credit: TDi



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Anna Moeggerlein
Pacific Programs Manager
The Difference Incubator (TDi)

Overview

The Different Incubator's (TDi) head of Pacific programs, Anna Moeggerlein, believes that Pacific businesses can be a powerful tool for change. Anna has seen this first hand, having worked in the Pacific since 2015 identifying and helping businesses to become more financially sustainable and less reliant on aid funding and grants through access to impact investment opportunities. She, along with TDi's CEO, Anthea Smit, has reviewed over 80 Pacific-based businesses. Of these 80 they identified that six have potential to become investable, at this time. They have worked intensively with these six, and so far, have secured impact investment deals for two.

What drives Anna and Anthea is collaborating with social enterprise businesses in the Pacific and supporting them so that they become not only more commercially viable, but they also have more significant social impacts on their local communities.

When the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) launched Pacific RISE in 2017 it was a natural fit to bring TDi – who had been partnering with DFAT since 2016 – and Pacific RISE to work together as both were working towards driving social impact investments in the Pacific.

A key objective of Pacific RISE is to identify, assess and improve social enterprises and the impact investing network using gender lens investing principles and concept and this concept was introduced to TDi as an important element of the partnership

“Gender lens investing first came to our attention when Pacific RISE launched”, says Anna. “To be honest, when we first heard about it we thought that it was about pointing capital or primarily investing in women-led businesses. Then we did the gender lens investing toolkit training with Pacific RISE and had the opportunity to learn about applying a gender lens across our work in the South Pacific.”

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One of TDi's most recent experiences has helped them further cement their understanding of gender lens investing. Anna and Anthea were working in Vanuatu with a fishing business whose primary business focus was selling fresh fish to restaurants and high-income earners. A secondary part of its business was selling fish to female micro-entrepreneurs who then add value by cooking the fish and, later, sell to bars or roadside stores.

Anna explains, "When we first had a look at the business we thought that the part of the company that sold to the female entrepreneurs was probably a significant social component because these women were running stable businesses and looking after their families. We assumed that if we ran the numbers, it would break even at best. However, after applying a gender lens and reassessing our assumptions and checking our bias, we had made a significant assumption. We had assumed that female entrepreneurs could not afford to buy fish. In our minds, they fell into the category of 'female and poor'. We had discounted their value as a viable customer segment. Applying a gender lens, helped us to see that selling to these women: 1) makes money, 2) does good, by enabling the female entrepreneurs to sell a desirable product, which generates income for their households and 3) provides a better trade for the fishing business because it diversifies their income so that if there is a slump in tourism, then they have an alternative income stream".

"What this highlighted to us is if we don't apply a gender lens we can miss opportunities, and this can often be the case as there is little data or working examples for these Pacific businesses."



Photo credit: Pacific RISE

Now each time they work with a business TDi debrief as a team to test their assumptions and bias and how they may have played out with their interactions with that business.

Through this, they get a better understanding of where they may have undervalued or overvalued return and therefore may have under assessed risk or missed an opportunity.

TDi feels it is important to acknowledge that they are at the start of their gender lens investing journey as it is a new way of

understanding and thinking about the world of business. To entirely shift their approach will take time, but it is something that they are working to achieve.

They continue to work closely with Pacific RISE to, as Anna says, "Unpack how we see the world and then put it back together to create more sustainable and positive outcomes for Pacific communities".

For more information about gender lens investing and Pacific RISE contact info@pacificrise.org or visit our website pacificrise.org.

