

Gender lens investing brings good returns

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Regional Manager,
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Good Return



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Overview

Jessie Fisher and Michelle Freer are passionate about gender lens investing which is a central tenant of the impact investing program at Good Return. Good Return is a social purpose organisation that is working to create a world without poverty. Good Return works in the Asia-Pacific, working with low-income households, financial service providers, social enterprises, NGOs, governments, and social investors to research, design, and implement game-changing initiatives to support financial inclusion.

For Jessie, gender mainstreaming is a passion of hers and something that she is working hard to continue to practice in her dual roles as a gender focal point and Pacific Regional Manager for Good Return. Michelle Freer is the Impact Investment Manager and is dedicated to harnessing the potential of gender lens investing to address gender inequities in the Asia Pacific region.

Through Pacific RISE, a pilot initiative funded by the Australian Government designed to facilitate a social impact investment market in the Pacific, Jessie and Michelle were able to broaden their understanding of how the two fields of gender and finance intersect to bring about social change.

Gender lens investing is a practice baked into Pacific RISE’s systems, processes and support to promote a gender analysis which eliminates gender disparities and fosters

investment in women within the region. The finance industry has tended to relegate women and girls to an ‘issue area’ rather than seeing gender as a critical analytical factor for all investments. Gender lens investing allows the discrete parts of an investment deal be broken down into components to see what they are and how they can be reframed or re-engineered to influence systems in a way that brings about social change.

An essential requirement of Pacific RISE is that all intermediaries receiving funding for scoping proposals and subsequent investment readiness work with social enterprises must demonstrate how they will apply the principles and practices of gender lens investing. To do this, Pacific RISE is partnering with the Criterion Institute, one of the global leaders in gender lens investing.

Applying a gender lens

Pacific RISE works with the intermediaries to introduce them to the method and provides continual support throughout their interactions with the initiative.

The more Good Return have learned about using a gender lens analysis across investments the more they see the considerable opportunities to improve productivity, profit, performance and brand image both internally, but also externally across their programs.

Says Jessie, 'We had always applied a gender analysis in our programs, but the gender lens investing analysis enables us to go beyond counting women in business, and examine the gender norms, leadership and authority challenges that women face in a value chain. Just because a woman is present doesn't mean she is active in the decision-making process'.

Using gender lens investing leverage points, Good Return is 'shifting or expanding what enterprises get investments' and 'changing power dynamics through structures and terms'. Continues Michelle, 'Gender lens investing has strong alignment with Good Return's mission and as such we have found receptive audiences when discussing our approach to sourcing and supporting businesses that incorporate gender equitable practices into their business models'.

Shifting or expanding what enterprises get investments

Since joining Good Return, Michelle has been working with Jessie to refine Good Return's gender lens investing tools through their scoping and investment readiness activities under Pacific RISE.

'The main influence for us has been to actively consider how to incorporate the ideas of gender lens investing into our impact investment process and tools in an upfront and explicit way,' says Michelle,

'As a result, we will only consider businesses that commit to addressing gender inequity and opportunities as part of their social mission, especially when it comes to gender-equitable employment opportunities for upstream value chain actors. These requirements are baked-in to our prequalification tools'.

Good Return is one of several intermediaries working with Pacific RISE. Good Return works across the Asia Pacific region to strengthen financial inclusion, and through local partnerships



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has provided 870,000 people with access to better banking, supported 50,000 people through financial education and livelihood skills training, and reached 2 million people through financial consumer awareness campaigns.

Good Return by Pacific RISE for two scoping missions to the Pacific. They have also been funded for Investment Readiness and are with two social enterprises awaiting investments.

