

Insights from PEG Africa

#3

AUGUST 2020

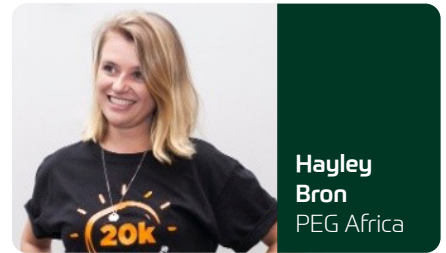
In the third interview of this series, I talk to Hayley Bron and Rahul Jaisingh. Hayley is PEG Africa's former Group Director for People and Culture and spearheaded and implemented its gender policies with the support of Rahul Jaisingh, who is Group Manager for Corporate Finance and Growth. PEG Africa (PEG) was the first of CDC's investments to qualify under the 2X Challenge.

PEG Africa's gender lens investing journey

Hayley starts by outlining PEG's approach. "PEG decided to look at gender lens investing in 2017 when we were contacted by Karen Stefiszyn, Gender Equity Specialist at Power Africa. They are a USAID-funded programme investing in energy initiatives across Sub-Saharan Africa and were looking to develop gender mainstreaming within the Pay As You Go solar industry."

Hayley adds, "PEG is an amazing place because it really allows space for innovation. Our CEO Hugh Whalan is always ready to do something new and immediately bought into the concept of building capacity around gender mainstreaming. He saw it as something that was great for the business – to build our ability to attract and promote underappreciated talent. So, we signed up to the initiative."

Hayley goes on to highlight three essential steps in the PEG gender lens investing journey.



Hayley Bron
PEG Africa



Rahul Jaisingh
PEG Africa



SDG 5
BLOG SERIES

INSIGHTS ON 2X'ING GENDER LENS INVESTING AS WE CONSIDER A 10X CHALLENGE

This insights series aims to unpack a possible 10X gender lens investing opportunity by reflecting on the experiences of investors who have embodied gender equity as 'business as usual'. We look at challenges and solutions to doing more, better. This series identifies approaches for a wider market transition to gender mainstreaming. The questions around what comes next and how we 10X gender lens investing are timely, and these insights are even more pertinent given the success of the 2X Challenge in mobilising \$4.5 billion of capital for women's economic empowerment.



Three steps to success

Step 1. Recruit gender expertise. “We hired expert capacity to support us with this gender work,” Hayley says. “We were bootstrapping the business and did not have our own capacity to do this work. We were fortunate that Engineers Without Borders seconded a fellow and gender expert, Laura Allan, to work with us for a year.”

Step 2. Undertake a baseline gender assessment to support the development of a gender action plan and gender equality policy. Laura's first step was to carry out an assessment in Ghana looking at data using a gender lens. Rahul says, “We set up a focus group, conducted a baseline gender assessment and then developed a gender action plan. This helped us develop our Gender Equality Policy and strategic focus areas.”

Step 3. Use a gender equity toolkit. This was fundamental to PEG's gender mainstreaming success. The toolkit was provided by Power Africa and PEG tweaked it to meet its own requirements.

PEG Africa's three gender mainstreaming focus areas

Rahul lists three focus areas which emerged from the baseline gender assessment:

- Senior management and leadership
- Internal policies and training
- Field operations

Area 1: Senior management and leadership.

Rahul notes, “This was identified as a key focus area for change and for enabling gender mainstreaming throughout PEG. This included driving delivery of related objectives and outcomes in our two other areas of focus.”

Hayley adds, “When I joined PEG in 2017, I was the only female on the leadership team. This is common with start-ups, particularly in the renewable energy sector. However, the gender assessment showed there was a need for change.”



Area 2: Internal policies and training

The PEG senior management and leadership team undertook and delivered six activities within this focus area:

#1. Gender Equity Policy. “We developed a Gender Equity Policy articulating our commitment. As a result, our data shows that the tech team grew to 43 per cent female representation, which is very high for the sector. This was a result of the conscious effort to recruit women through the improved recruitment strategy.” Rahul also points out “This resulted in the ratio of men to women growing to 1 to 1.5 at mid and senior-level positions. We now have four women out of 12 in the senior leadership team and the ratio of women in the PEG offices increased to 39 per cent. This was a key criterion for qualifying for the 2X challenge and exceeds the 2X requirement.”

#2. Recruitment. Hayley outlines, “We found that fewer women were applying for our advertised jobs, particularly the senior leadership roles. So, we made considerable changes to the recruitment process, updated the language we used in our job descriptions and worked with recruiters to ensure we had female candidates at every level.”

Hayley adds, “For example, we recruited a great female Kenyan Data Engineering Manager who then spearheaded the recruitment drive to find more female tech talent. She attended a series of tech events and reached out to young females at those events. I also connected with female leadership and other under-utilised networks and found amazing female talent we had not tapped into before.”

#3. Promotions. The gender assessment using gender-disaggregated data highlighted to PEG that they promoted men more quickly and more often than women. To address this, they developed a Gender Equity Promotions Policy with set criteria to support the process.

#4. Mentorship. “Mentorship and promotion go hand in hand,” Rahul comments. “So, we introduced a middle-management mentorship programme to support staff in promotions. This led to 25 per cent increase in female promotions to mid-level managers within six months. We now have almost 50 per cent women participating across our business and have more women in senior leadership positions. The Chief of Staff (she was also formerly Ghana country Director), Country Director of PEG Mali, Group Director for People and Culture, and Head of Corporate Finance are all women. It is important to see women in leadership positions ‘walking the talk’, and all of this is reflected in PEG's company growth and performance.”

Hayley adds, “It is all about gender diversity, racial diversity, locally led leadership and demonstrating to other women that there is a career opportunity. It is so important to have representational leadership like this when you are building a business and a culture.”

#5. Flexible working. The assessment led to PEG introducing flexible working conditions. This improved local-level staff retention and resulted in a 75 per cent female subscription to PEG's flexible working programme.

#6. Family centred policy. PEG implemented a family centred policy, providing health insurance to all employees, as well as a paternity leave policy. Rahul interjects, “It is important to understand that childcare is about both parents and not just responsibility of women.”

Area #3. Field operations

Rahul says, “Our third objective was to increase the employment of women in field staff positions, gain more female customers and improve repayment rates. We were able to do this by looking at our data through a gender lens and by developing a programme-based, gender equity approach in the field.”

Hayley explains this approach. “Acumen, one of our early stage capital investors, provided grant funding to pilot an innovative programme to empower female sales agents and to pilot a different way of doing business.”

Rahul adds, “We knew that it was important to test this new model and Acumen supported with grant funding.”

As a result, PEG launched the one-year, pilot ‘Village Savings and Loan Associations Programme’ (VSLA) focused on developing a new ‘female sales agent role’ in the field. These female agents would primarily make sales to VSLAs, with the objective of reducing barriers for women.

“Commission-based sales agents have a really tough job and the sales agent role is more difficult for women who are exposed both socially and culturally. Women have found it more challenging to undertake the installation of equipment which requires climbing a ladder onto a rooftop. We found this to be more of an issue in the north of Ghana where society is more conservative than in the south. PEG was not in the north of Ghana, so we felt that it was the right place for us to pilot a new female sales agent model.”

HAYLEY BRON

Outcomes: Rahul notes, “We gained a lot of learning on training and empowering female sales agents, and enabling additional income generation opportunities for women – at the same time as providing affordable energy in their communities, which is one of the biggest challenge in our industry. The VSLA programme has been the foundation for our future programmes, and we recognise that PEG has to continue to adapt, innovate and commit to replicating the model in our other markets.”

Recommended Solutions

#1. Undertake a baseline assessment. Rahul comments, “It is vital to understand where you are with gender equity and it is really important to have a strong foundation from which to undertake gender mainstreaming.”

#2. Develop a gender equality policy and gender action plan. “Gender equality has to be business as usual. You have to have the policies, the right organisation processes and the capacity in place to deliver this important work. Gender action plans are developed from this,” Hayley notes.



#3. Build internal capacity and have dedicated resources.

Rahul outlines, “Having 100 per cent dedicated capacity is critical for the successful delivery of gender mainstreaming. If you do not, this important work will be de-prioritised. You need to have a lead in a senior decision-making role to spear head this work. They have to be empowered to get on with delivering against the mandate. It is not about just ticking a box. It is about innovating and building a culture of inclusivity.”

#4. Have women on your senior management and leadership team and disaggregate data by gender. “PEG has seen this result in improved business, better revenues and higher job retention. We developed a case study on this, ‘Promoting Gender Equality in the off-grid sector through gender inclusive business practices’, which also correlates with McKinsey’s diversity research on women leadership leading to reduced personnel turnover,” notes Rahul.

#5. Use partnerships and grant funding. “When you are trying to introduce a new approach to business, such as gender mainstreaming, it is important to have the right partnerships and grant funding to unlock difficult market failures and catalyse much needed change,” says Hayley.

“PEG’s belief in women’s economic empowerment and strong executive support to deliver on this was strengthened through global partnerships which enabled the undertaking of innovative analysis, thinking and programming.”

“Partnerships were developed with Power Africa, EWB and Acumen. This work continues and is central to our mandate. We were the first company to qualify for the 2X challenge for CDC, as well as the first in our industry to qualify. CDC is now supporting us with follow-on grant funding to replicate our successful gender inclusion model in Cote d’Ivoire and Senegal.”

PEG's gender-sensitive COVID-19 response

Rahul comments, "We already have processes and policies in place that empower women. So, during this challenging time we have been building on what we have already established. A core component of our COVID-19 response has been our work from home policy, setting up an employee advance fund, as well as an e-learning repository where we have on-line courses on COVID-19 precautions. This can also be a time of distress for many people, so we engaged two coaches to support our staff with remote counselling."

"PEG moved everyone to work from home and allocated 10 additional leave days to support staff in managing the extra responsibility in the household."

With regards to general business, Rahul notes, "The impact of COVID-19 has not been as significant as we had initially anticipated so far. Sales are trending in similar way to before COVID-19 and this is mainly due to lockdown being limited to capital cities. Our field sales staff have been able to work throughout the crisis, in line with government regulations and PEG's COVID-19 procedures. Field staff are seen by government as providing an essential service to rural communities and we obtained licences for them to continue delivering key services."

Rahul concludes, "COVID-19 has been an agility test for PEG. We re-structured the business in a short space of time to move 500 full time employees quickly from offices to working remotely. This has been a great exercise for us and we have developed a successful model that demonstrates that working from home can be achieved and it also works for our business."

Thoughts on a potential 10X challenge

Hayley comments "It is crucial that this is not a box ticking exercise. This has to be a complete cultural shift and one organisation cannot do it alone. It requires an entire ecosystem and good partnerships." She adds, "It is also important to share related learnings. Often we see that organisations are reluctant to share lessons, successes and failures. It is essential that we share these, as gender mainstreaming is a really big challenge."

Hayley and Rahul both talk about the importance of investing in gender mainstreaming and Hayley points out, "We work in markets where women are vastly under-represented. So, you have to make an investment in gender equality and in the ecosystem. We know that it is good for business and it is great that investors are now prioritising to invest in companies that meet the 2X criteria. However, investment in the form of grant funding is needed so the industry can do more and move beyond counting."

Hayley concludes by saying, "It is critical that supporters in the funding communities recognise that this work needs to be grant funded in the early stages and to the point that it becomes business as usual. My concern is for the small organisations who do not have the public profile or the direct foreign investment. We need to think about how they can go about starting their gender mainstreaming journey."



PEG

Frank Impact was founded in 2017 by Siobhan Franklin when she acknowledged she was not achieving her own impact mandate. Since then, we have worked on high impact innovative initiatives, investments and projects with catalytic individuals, leaders and communities.

We believe in the power of gender lens investing, it's not an easy undertaking and we felt it important to develop this insights series to help others on their gender lens investing journey, and the market to articulate what comes next, and for developing whole of market solutions to do more better. We would like to thank the insights series participants for making this possible.

We look forward to forging new relationships with others who have a similar impact mandate, passion for what they do, and who believe in working for a better world.