

# Insights from Camco Clean Energy

# #2

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In this second interview in the insights series, I talk to Laura Lahti, Impact Manager at **Camco Clean Energy** (Camco), about the company's gender mainstreaming journey. Camco is the investment manager of the **Renewable Energy Performance Platform** (REPP), which is supported by £148 million funding from the UK's International Climate Finance through the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Laura explains that sustainability is the "cornerstone" of both Camco and REPP. "We do not have a separate sustainability strategy because, as a financial advisory and fund management business, by investing in small- and medium-size renewable energy projects in African countries we are building towards a sustainable, low-carbon future," she says. "To that end, sustainability underpins everything the company does and works to achieve, and gender mainstreaming is at the heart of our work."

Camco started its gender mainstreaming journey in 2018 when it established its Gender Equality Strategy. More recently, it has hosted a [webinar on gender mainstreaming in renewable energy](#) and launched a [Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit](#) to support gender equality in the sector.

## Camco's approach

Laura reflects on the 2X Challenge. "It is a great initiative, but we set our own target of 50 per cent women ownership or management in our recent [gender-themed request for proposals](#). Why should it be less? It is important to motivate investors to make changes at the same time as engaging them in the gender conversation. Although it has been difficult finding investments that meet the 50 per cent target, we feel it is important to have ambitious goals."

Camco mapped the REPP portfolio using the 2X Challenge criteria which, Laura notes, was relatively easy since Camco already collects this information as part of its impact framework and most of its social data is gender disaggregated. Of the \$38 million committed to date across 26 investments, \$8.4 million across five investments meets the 2X criteria - this equates to 20 per cent of the invested portfolio.

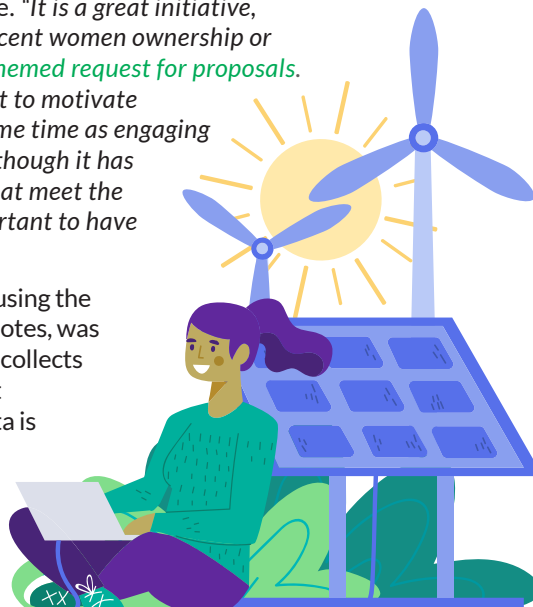
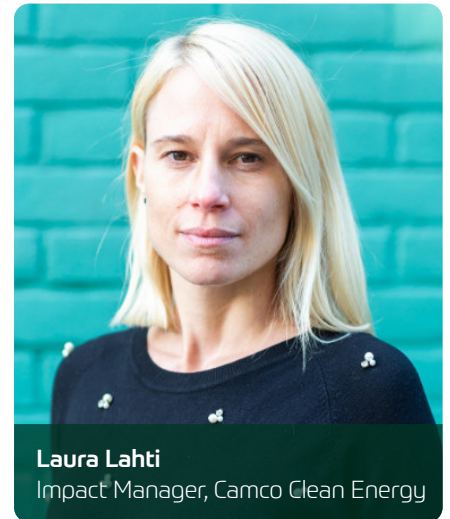


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**Laura Lahti**  
Impact Manager, Camco Clean Energy



**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.

Laura walks me through Camco's approach to gender mainstreaming and highlights seven key components.

### #1. Develop a Gender Equality Policy

In early 2018 Camco started its gender mainstreaming journey with the development of a Gender Equality Strategy, which was followed with the implementation of REPP's Gender Mainstreaming Policy in 2019.

*"We believe that the full and equal participation of women in decision-making and leadership, in both the public and private sector, is crucial to addressing climate change, as well as achieving affordable clean energy for all as defined in SDG-7."*

### #2. Incentivise equality

Laura notes that a key aim of REPP's approach is to incentivise investees with a discounted interest rate for those that successfully implemented REPP's Gender Mainstreaming Policy.

### #3. Develop a 'Gender Action Plan' at a portfolio and company level

To qualify for the discounts, the investee company must:

- carry out a **gender equality analysis** on itself, its country/ countries of operation and the targeted sector
- establish an investee-specific **gender action plan** by identifying gender performance indicators and gender-disaggregated targets, against an established baseline.

"This is reviewed annually, and we provide a retrospective discount on the interest rate linked to results," adds Laura.

### #4. Mainstream gender equality into investee's operations at corporate and project level

"Equally important to female ownership at investee level is gender mainstreaming at the project implementation level in the beneficiary communities," highlights Laura. "This means, for example, ensuring gender-balanced stakeholder engagement processes and hiring local people."

### #5. Work closely with your portfolio companies

Laura goes on to talk about how she kickstarted the sensitisation and buy-in process by using **webinars** to inform investees about the policy, the importance of incorporating gender equality considerations, the incentives and the Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit. "It is good to have the financial incentive, but it is also important to work closely with and encourage investee companies," she says. "The core of the work we do in my team is directly supporting investees and handholding throughout the process."

### #6. Proactively seek investments that support women's interests

"We proactively seek out projects that support women's interests, and which would benefit from REPP's support. The **gender-themed request for proposals** I mentioned earlier is an example of this, through which we targeted small and medium-size renewable energy companies that were at least 50 per cent owned or managed by women. We are currently looking into finalising investments in a handful of the 70 applications we received from 20 African countries. It is not a huge proportion of the applications, but this reflects the challenges of investing in the sector, combined with our own mandate to make bankable investments that lead to transformational change. It was great to realise there are a lot of companies that are women-driven that did not necessarily know about REPP."

### #7. Undertake comprehensive investee capacity building

"This is all part of our contribution and the value we can add as an investment partner," says Laura. "We established the **REPP Academy** to support this work. Capacity building is important to our business and is built into the cost at fund level. Capacity building is done across a spectrum of investee requirements, from gender equity to financial structuring, and from shareholder agreements to waste management in the off-grid sector. We often provide technical assistance too, for conducting Environmental Social Impact Assessments (ESIA) that meet **our requirements**, which are aligned with the IFC performance standards, even if an ESIA has already been approved by government."

## Results to date

"Signing up to REPP's Gender Mainstreaming Policy is recommended for our investees, and I am happy to say that almost all of them have expressed their interest in the process and have already started implementing it," says Laura.

"We are currently in the process of undertaking gender equality analyses using our toolkit, setting baselines and developing gender action plans together with the investees. The financial incentive provides an economic benefit and is a strong motivator, and we expect to see strong results in the future."

## The challenges

Laura reflects: "We have found it difficult to find bankable projects that are majority woman owned and promote women's economic empowerment, and that also fit our investment mandate – which are private sector small and medium-size renewable energy companies and projects in West, Central, East and Southern Africa.

"We do not reject an application for funding purely on the basis that it does not meet the 2X criteria, but instead provide an ecosystem to encourage investees to do more. And, of course, every investee is different. **PEG Africa**, for example, has a history of being very pro-active in focussing on women's economic empowerment, particularly through its sales agent model. Other investees, by contrast, only started focusing on it after we published our policy."

The other key challenge Laura outlines is that the energy sector is male dominated. *"This is a challenge for the whole industry, although the renewable energy sector is doing better than traditional energy,"* she says. *"But even in our sector, just a third of the overall workforce are women, and the balance is even more skewed at the senior management level."*

## The solutions

Laura believes that part of the solution lies in creating a comprehensive approach to enable women's economic empowerment, but points out that this requires funding. The key is the development of a gender equity policy and toolkit to assist in implementing it.

She adds, *"In conjunction with this, it is also helpful to facilitate sensitisation through capacity-building activities, such as webinars and training events, as well as providing direct support. It is important to help investees understand the rationale for women's participation and show them that it can improve results and project implementation. There are several studies, especially in the off-grid sector, that demonstrate how female participation leads to improved customer satisfaction and productivity at all levels of the business."*

*"Our sensitisation work to enable management buy-in among investees has been really important,"* Laura notes. *"Sensitisation is about shifting mindsets which, when done within the right ecosystem, leads to systems becoming embedded as 'business as usual'. We had a similar experience with gaining buy-in on the importance of an IFC standard ESIA. For us it is all about enabling better business. Change comes with time and it is about starting the journey."*

*"Women's participation in stakeholder consultation is critical to ensuring customer satisfaction with any off-grid renewable energy project."*

*"Across rural communities in particular, women and girls are the primary energy producers in the household, meaning that they are responsible for sourcing fuel, paying for it and managing its use. Understanding their needs is therefore paramount to the successful delivery of a project. Lighting, for example, is needed for cooking and doing school homework. However, the installation of solar lights has traditionally been done by men with little consideration for women's household requirements, and so lights would be installed in the living space instead."*

Laura says, *"It is important to make sure that gender mainstreaming is practical and implementable so that the project development company can focus on its core business."*

She adds, *"At Camco we work with a wide spectrum of investees and many project development companies are small, with maybe just a five-person shareholder-management team. Implementing a process that is not a burden for these investees is therefore essential."*

## REPP's gender-sensitive COVID-19 response

Laura explains, *"We recognise that existing inequalities, including gender, are being aggravated by the crisis. Our response has been to intensify monitoring efforts. We collect gender-disaggregated data based on which we will be able to make some solid conclusions on the impact of COVID-19 from a gender perspective."*

*"Separately, we have seen the impact COVID-19 has had on business generally as a direct result of travel restrictions affecting sales, shipping delays and slower processing by governments on ESIA approvals."*

She goes on to outline REPP's **wider response**, which has been to provide automatic interest and repayment holidays and set up a streamlined working capital loan facility to respond quickly to the impact of COVID-19.

Laura adds, *"It is key that investees continue operations and that we support businesses, so they do not need to retrench staff. The comprehensive occupational health and safety (OHS) plans established by our investees have been helpful in enabling a fast response for a COVID-19 safe workplace."*

## Conclusions

*"The concept of a 10X Challenge is very bold and ambitious, in the way that all big and important challenges should be,"* says Laura. *"Female inclusion has a long way to go and so it is important to set the bar high, which the 10X Challenge is doing."*

*"We believe that financing gender mainstreaming, gender equality and women's empowerment is crucial for the achievement of the SDGs. Any comprehensive approach that is funded and is not burdensome to investees is key to moving this forward in a meaningful way."*



**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.