

Putting gender equality at the forefront, a profile of Fasanara Capital

With #QVCS, Maddyness profiles different funds to give founders and entrepreneurs the information they need to choose the right investor. Today we interview Anita Bhatia, former UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for UN Women, who has recently joined the Advisory Board at Fasanara Capital.

For the past 30 years, I've been working to connect female empowerment with financial independence and campaign for a world where women have the same access to opportunities and financial freedom.

I agreed to serve on Fasanara's Advisory Board in May this year, but had been previously working as the Assistant Secretary General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women since 2019, a role which I used to highlight and champion the importance of financial empowerment along gendered lines. Before that, I was in Washington DC with the World Bank Group, including the IFC, where I championed growing more productive and inclusive global economies at scale through women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion.

I joined Fasanara's board as I was impressed with the way that they are taking

a fresh approach to financial innovation and funding. They're very focused on inclusivity, democratization and accessibility in their fintech lending and their investments.

Fasanara was founded in London in 2011 by Francesco Fillia and is now one of the largest fintech lending funds in Europe, lending to small and medium-sized enterprises. As a firm, it focuses on the sectors of fintech, web3 and decentralised finance and now has over \$4B assets under management. Last year, the fund made 15 investments and is ready to continue that level of growth.

With my background, I'm keen to bring my experience to bear to help create a more sustainable world while also helping Fasanara to reach its own ESG goals and be a more sustainable investor.

Which industries is Fasanara working in?

Fasanara is committed to shaping the transition to a digital economy. Fasanara primarily invests in financial innovation through companies across fintech, web3 and decentralised finance.

I believe that the digitalisation of finance can create a more equitable and inclusive society for all. Primarily, for women, it can help to make financial independence a reality. This could have a lasting impact on societies across the globe by making communities more equitable.

Fasanara manages a number of different investment vehicles to target today's transformational markets. This includes Fasanara Fintech, Fasanara Digital, Fasanara Quant and Fasanara Ventures. Through these vehicles, the firm is influencing the future of fintech lending, DeFi, Web3, digital lending and crypto assets.

Fasanara looks for visionary founders that are bringing disruptive tech-enabled and data-driven solutions to the market.

Founders within our portfolio think long term and are committed to creating the future of the digital economy. In return, Fasanara offers founders significant internal resources, decades of expertise and proprietary technology.

Fasanara aims to future-proof capital, as well as ensure it be accessed, distributed and deployed for the benefit of all, not the few. So, founders that are bringing disruptive, impactful solutions, that are tech-enabled and data-driven, are going to catch our attention.

When it comes to tackling the gender gap, the future of finance will be a potent

force in making lasting change. Financial independence is one of the pillars of female empowerment, and I want to see founders that recognise and address these challenges.

Can you talk about Fasanara's commitment to advancing gender equality?

Financial markets and the tech industry have been male-dominated for too long. Women are currently underserved and neglected, left behind by the global financial system. On a global level, we desperately need an inclusive digital future for the economy, one where women's economic rights are defended and protected.

The Fasanara outlook believes that a society that only works for and listens to half of its population, won't live up to its potential. According to McKinsey & Company's Global Institute, narrowing the gender gap could add between \$12 and \$28T to the global GDP. Advancing gender equality has benefits for each and every one of us.

When women are empowered economically, it helps whole families be poverty free. There are also benefits at a national economic level, because when women are working that can help countries grow their GDP.

Every investment made at Fasanara is put through ESG filters to increase liquidity to underserved sectors of society. Investments also follow the UN Principles for Responsible Investing (PRI) and, in recognition of this work, Fasanara has been categorised as an Article 8 Fund under the EU's Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation. I am personally committed to helping Fasanara's portfolio companies improve their best practices, so that they in turn are also putting gender equality at the forefront of their priorities.

Companies that prioritize gender diversity perform better in the long run. There are studies that show that inclusive teams make better business decisions and more diverse companies tend to outperform with higher profits and longer term value. The bottom line is that inclusivity and diversity makes for better outcomes.

What does the future look like?

Technology is constantly evolving, markets are changing and it's a really exciting time. The separation between the physical and digital world is ever

more blurry and for financial services in particular, the pressure to innovate is huge.

As our spending, borrowing and investing habits become digitally-driven, the financial sector is responding. This will only accelerate as the digital native generation comes into adulthood and positions of greater financial clout.

Sectors including decentralised finance and web3 are fuelling the financial revolution and will change consumer habits and business practices.

Decentralised finance is an especially interesting space, capable of making financial decisions and services more open and equitable. It's still a relatively young market area, but already it's clear to see the benefits that it can bring. Embedded finance and tokenisation on the blockchain could unlock new financial services and allow businesses greater financial autonomy.

What makes Fasanara different?

Bonds between the digital and physical world grow stronger each day and we are now living in a space where digital innovation is a necessity, not a 'nice-to-have'. In this context, existing institutions are no-longer fit for purpose for the new economy.

For generations, banks have been acting as the financial gatekeepers of the global economy, but they don't answer all the needs of the current generation. While banks will always remain important, we need more flexible working capital financing solutions and that meet the requirements of a digital economy. The collapse of SVB in the US and the UK showed us how banks are no longer agile enough to respond to the needs of businesses in a more connected world.

Fasanara exists to close the gap by offering faster, lower risk, high-return and more liquid ways of accessing, distributing and deploying capital. In doing so, liquidity is improved and barriers for businesses that have historically been underserved are removed, helping to create a financial future that works for everyone.

Fasanara are long-term investors – there is no need to raise a new fund every few years – which means that the firm can meet clients' needs across the investment and digital finance landscape, focusing on the long-term benefits rather than the short-term costs.

What one piece of advice would you give founders?

Be disruptive. We're living in an increasingly digital world and now is the time to shape the future of it. The economic climate might be uncertain but tech innovation is soaring – with new challenges, comes new opportunities.

Look for partners and backers that will help you push forward your vision, give you the support you need, and help you access the finance you need to make it happen.

Anita Bhatia is a former UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for UN Women, and on the Advisory Board at *Fasanara Capital*.

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