



ALTERNATIVE INVESTMENTS

Tania Swanepoel

Head of ESG at Old Mutual Alternative Investments (OMAI)

# PROFILE

*A geologist by training, I did not know when I started my career doing geotechnical mapping at the Council for Geoscience in Pretoria in 1998 that I would one day work in investment management. However, it is this background, largely shaped by environmental consulting, that has prepared the groundwork for what I do today.*

Armed with a BSc Engineering & Environmental Geology (Hons) degree from the University of Pretoria and a BSc Geology & Geohydrology (Hons) degree from the University of the Western Cape, and being a Registered Natural Scientist (Pr. Sci. Nat), I spent years working with companies in various sectors, assessing their environmental and social risks – from groundwater impacts to stakeholder engagement – and working with them to identify and implement solutions. Previously, I was a Principal Consultant at Environmental Resources Management (ERM), and a board member of ERM Southern Africa for six years. I also gained valuable technical experience that spans the broad sustainability spectrum, including social aspects, labour, health and safety, biodiversity, and climate change, with experience across multiple sectors including oil and gas, mining, renewable energy, power utilities, industrial, ports & logistics and transport.

So when the opportunity to step into the Private Equity space as an Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) advisor came along, the years of 'on the ground' experience were a good foundation. In 2018, I joined Africa Infrastructure Investment Managers (AIIM), a division of Old Mutual Alternative Investments (OMAI), as a Senior ESG Advisor, responsible for embedding ESG and Impact

into all aspects of AIIM's transaction execution and asset management activities across the African continent. During my time at AIIM, I was involved in developing the strategy and management systems, supporting investment decisions, driving ESG and Impact outcomes, serving on boards and sub-committees, and building strong relationships with clients.

In 2023, I took on the role of head of ESG at OMAI, which allows me to determine and drive our strategy, improve our systems, and increase our ability to execute on ESG and Impact aspects. I work closely with our investment teams and portfolio companies to manage ESG risks and maximise positive impacts, focusing on the cross-cutting themes of climate change, decent work, diversity, and governance.

Looking back at this journey, I have no regrets; things have worked out exactly as they were supposed to, and what seemed like detours were necessary for my professional development. However, I do wish that I had a greater appreciation for my value and contribution earlier on in my career. This is a valuable lesson for any woman in today's working environment – do not hesitate in pursuing opportunities.

What attracted me to this space and keeps me engaged is how my department's work is able to influence portfolio companies, and we see the positive changes in businesses and the real-world impact they are able to achieve alongside financial returns.

It is rewarding work, which is why it is not always easy. The most challenging part of my job is making sure that the environmental and social risks of a potential deal are adequately assessed and appropriately mitigated, and that there is alignment around ESG and Impact

management expectations between us and the target.

One of the areas that I'm passionate about within ESG is infrastructure, because I have worked in this space the longest. It appeals to me because the assets are so tangible, and because infrastructure forms the bedrock of economic growth and development.

I also love that ESG continually evolves. While there was a time when it was considered a tick box exercise for some, today it is a sustainability mantra and treated by many investment managers as an integral part of making good investment decisions. The past few years have thrown up global crisis after crisis, with the associated volatility challenging investors. In the context of this volatility, the idea of sustainability, by definition, is to implement a long-term view, and taking actions to ensure that we preserve the planet and improve society for future generations. Therefore, today, a sustainability-driven and positive impact investor must take a generational view, while navigating current challenges. It has become increasingly important to strategically invest in sectors that provide a sustainable 'ecosystem' for generations to come.

Similarly, I hope that the legacy I leave behind through the work I do makes an impact that lasts generations. Until then, I continue to exercise my passion for the "E" in ESG in my free time as well: I enjoy all that our natural environment has to offer, and spend time in nature or going on holiday to the Kruger National Park. This sees me birding with my husband (even though I am not a birder per se). I also enjoy crossfit, crocheting, eating out (my favourite restaurant is the Foodbarn in Noordhoek, Cape Town), and tending to our three rescue dogs. 🐾