

# SUSTAINABLE TRADE AND INVESTMENT IN BANGLADESH: FOR BUSINESS, BY BUSINESS



BY DÉsirÉE VAN GORP

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*Traditionally, relations between the Western world and developing countries have been strongly based on initiatives led by governments, supranational organizations and NGOs. They were more or less one-way relationships, with one party helping the other. At the same time, the role that businesses can play in stimulating development has been largely overlooked. However, this paradigm is shifting. Governments, NGOs and companies increasingly work together to build sustainable trade and investment relations.*

An example of this new kind of economic collaboration between different parties from developed and developing countries is the assignment that Nyenrode Business Universiteit received last year from the Netherlands Embassy in Bangladesh in Dhaka. In this unique partnership, Nyenrode serves as the linchpin between the embassy and companies in the Netherlands and Bangladesh in a three-year program (2012-2015), with the aim of stimulating bilateral trade and investment between the countries.

The project's goal is to reap economic benefits for both sides through responsible and sustainable trade and investments. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a key aspect in this project. This is reflected in the fact that we not only strive for profits for the Dutch and Bangladeshi companies involved, but also focus on issues such as food safety, sexual reproductive rights, health and water.

In the Netherlands, Bangladesh is mainly associated with poverty and floods, whereas the country actually offers great opportunities for Dutch companies. Although the current labour force in Bangladesh may be less skilled than that in India, for example, it does have low

wages and a relatively large labour potential. Moreover, Bangladesh is experiencing a phase of substantial growth. It is also strategically situated between India and China, giving it a favourable geographic position. Trade links with those countries and investments from them are expected to increase in the near future.

We want to bring these trade and investment opportunities in Bangladesh to the attention of Dutch companies. At the same time, we are identifying Bangladeshi companies that are interested in working with Dutch businesses. Together with the embassy, we focus on sectors such as food production and processing, water, logistics and outsourcing.

We are looking to creatively match companies that complement each other. It is with this in mind that we have created the business platform [www.nbbp.org](http://www.nbbp.org) and organise fairs in which matchmaking between Dutch and Bangladeshi companies is arranged, while also conducting research in the aforementioned key sectors. We make sure that companies translate the results of the research we do in this program directly into practical use. Two trade and investment officers have been

appointed: one operating from the Netherlands Embassy in Bangladesh in Dhaka and the other operating from Nyenrode Business Universiteit in the Netherlands.

Nyenrode was founded in 1946 by captains of industry from leading companies, and we have maintained close relations with the business community ever since. Today, Nyenrode Business Universiteit is still the only private university in the Netherlands. We strongly believe in the power of business. The trade and investment program with the Netherlands Embassy in Bangladesh reflects our longstanding motto 'for business, by business.'