

NORWAY AND BANGLADESH  
A Fifty-Year Relationship 1972 - 2022



Norwegian Embassy  
Dhaka



NORWAY &  
BANGLADESH  
1972 - 2022

**PHOTOS, FRONT AND BACK PAGE:**

*School children, photo: GMB Akash | Illustration flags: AdobeStock | Partyboat, photo: Kristin T. Wæringsaasen | Textile factory, photo: Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka  
Back page: GMB Akash*

# NORWAY AND BANGLADESH A Fifty-Year Relationship 1972-2022

Arve Ofstad



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# FOREWORD

Fifty years is a considerable amount of time. Long enough that many things have happened, but still short enough that many still remember the beginning. In 2022, it will be fifty years since Norway recognised the new state of Bangladesh and established diplomatic – and many other – relations. We can look back on a rich collaboration that has engaged and touched many while spanning a wide range of issues and activities.

The history of Norway and Bangladesh is also the history of two countries during important development decenniums. For Bangladesh, of course, it has been about building a country, a nation, on the ruins of a long conflict and a devastating war. Norway, meanwhile, was in an early learning phase in the field of development assistance. We have learned a lot from working with Bangladesh.

Norway has been engaged, active and present in Bangladesh for the whole period. We had a presence almost from the beginning, and the embassy in Dhaka has been there for half of these fifty years.

We have set out to tell the story of Norway and Bangladesh, fairly broadly, albeit not in full depth. It is a story, not a research work, an evaluation, or an official report. We have tried to include colours and nuances and, to this end, introduce individual events and people when it enriches or colours the story. The numerous pictures will hopefully deepen the narrative.

To write the story, we chose Arve Ofstad, who has the important, but rather rare, combination of deep insight and experience and a light writing style. He has been research director at Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), guest researcher in India, UN coordinator in Sri Lanka and ambassador to Zambia. In between times he also served as policy director at the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and eventually wrote the story of Norway's cooperation with Zambia. He has handled the combination of high ambitions and tight deadlines in an exemplary and impressive way.

It is our hope that the story will be a useful and readable summary of fifty years of engagements, and at the same time spark new interest in Bangladesh for Norwegians – and in Norway for Bangladeshi readers.

Dhaka, December 2021  
Espen Rikter-Svendsen, Ambassador

## Major Activities:

Build up on Disaster and Climate Change Adaptation,  
Fisheries Adaptation Technology,  
Fruits and Vegetables cultivation Technology,  
Seed Preservation and Vermi-compost Technology,  
Farm Management,  
Duck & Goat rearing,  
Disease Control of Cattles,  
Production of Fodder - cultivation.

Ministry of Agriculture Extension, Dept. of Fisheries,  
Comprehensive Disaster Management Plan

Photo: Norwegian Embassy Dhaka

*During the first thirty years, development assistance dominated in the direct relations. In the decades since 2000, however, relations have changed dramatically. Today the relationship has broadened, while trade and business interests are the dominating elements.*



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# A CHANGING AND DIVERSE COLLABORATION

*In 2021, Bangladesh celebrated its 50th anniversary as an independent state. Norway was among the first countries to recognise the new state and is now observing fifty years of good relations. This is the story of the diverse cooperation that has been revised and developed over time – in line with changing needs and economic developments in Bangladesh and changing political priorities in Norway. Despite the long distance and major differences between the two countries, areas of common interest as well as personal and institutional interactions have emerged.*

## 1.1 This is how it all began

Norway recognised Bangladesh as an independent state on 4 February 1972, one of the first twenty-five countries to do so. Diplomatic relations were established two months later, when Bangladesh's ambassador in Stockholm was accredited to Norway. Norway was already financing emergency aid for refugees from Bangladesh in India. This support was soon expanded to assist returnees and other victims of the war inside Bangladesh.

From 1973, Norway offered commodity aid for the reconstruction of the economy and decided that Bangladesh should be a “main partner country” for development aid. In 1975, a resident representative for Norad (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) was appointed, and a Norad office was established in Dhaka. In 1996, this was upgraded to a full-fledged embassy. Bangladesh has maintained an embassy in Stockholm, also accredited to Norway.

Thus began the official Norwegian-Bangladeshi relationship. Any previous contacts between the two countries were limited and little is known about them. The Danish-Norwegian Østasiatiske Kompagni (East Asiatic Company) traded with India through what was then Bengal as early as the 17th century. In 1777, the Danish-Norwegian state took control of the Serampore trading colony in present-day West Bengal. It was sold to Great Britain in 1839.

There were probably trade and contacts in East Bengal as well, and Norwegian ships are known to have visited the port of Chittagong (now: Chattogram) during the colonial era. Missionaries from the Nordic Santal Mission in India established themselves around Dinajpur and Rajshahi in present-day Bangladesh in the early 20th century. Much later, in 1967, the Santal Mission also took over a mission field in Sylhet. This was probably the only long-standing link between Norway and East Bengal / Bangladesh before 1971.

The conflict between West and East Pakistan and the war of liberation in 1971 attracted considerable attention in Norwegian media and political circles. Public sympathy was clearly on the side of the East Bengalis. The youth wings of most political parties formed a Support Committee for Bangladesh, which was active until Bangladesh became independent. Humanitarian organisations provided emergency aid and there was a popular willingness to contribute to alleviate distress and support reconstruction.

# BANGLADESH

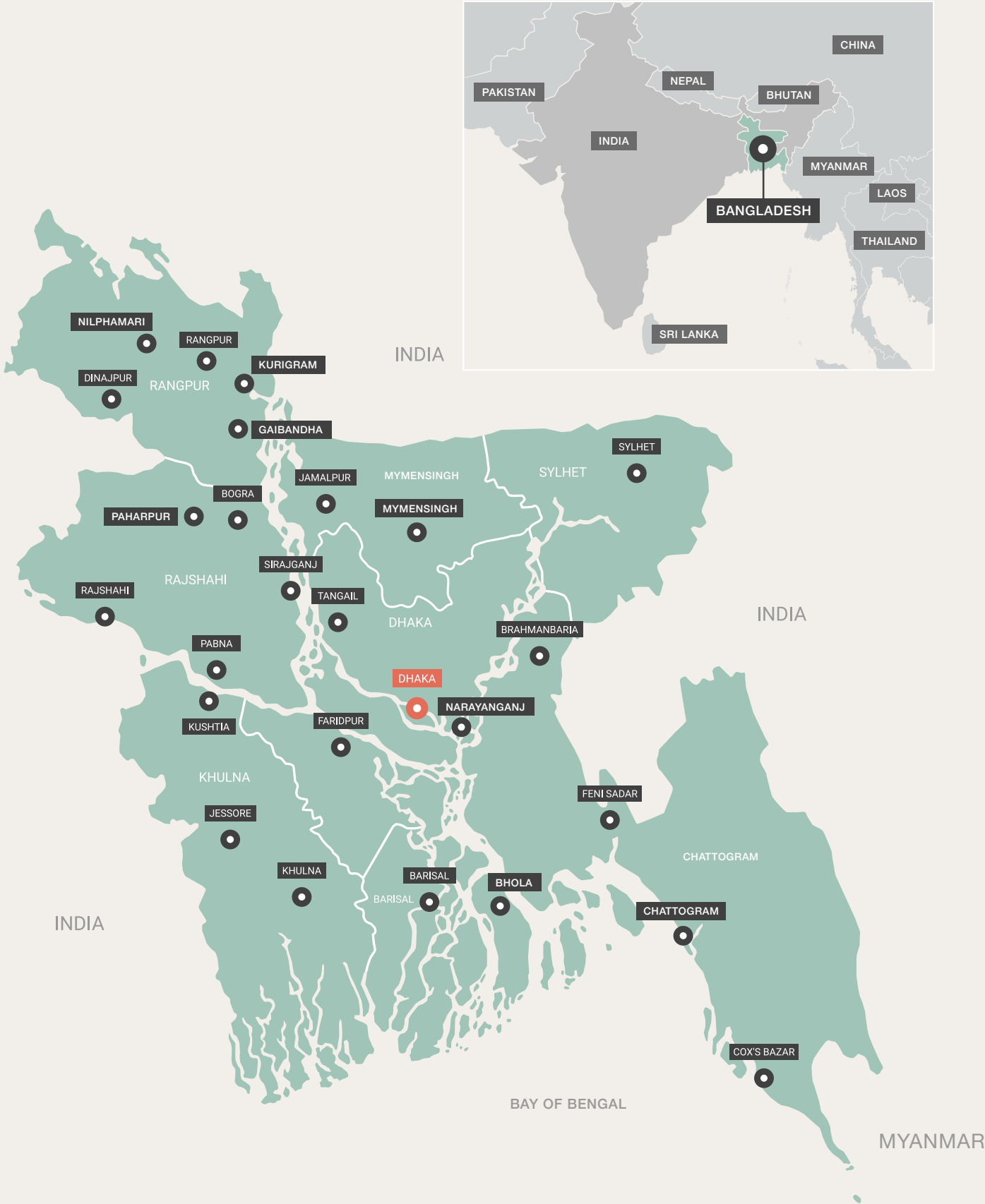




Photo: E. Rikter-Svendsen



Photo: E. Rikter-Svendsen

### Major changes over fifty years – from aid to trade and investment

During the first thirty years, until approx. the year 2000, development assistance dominated direct relations. As shown in the diagram, the value of development assistance rose to over USD 40 million in 1986. Thereafter, it was kept relatively stable at USD 30-40 million annually until 1999, before being reduced to less than USD 15 million a decade later. In 2008 Norway decided to reschedule aid to Bangladesh and several large programmes were scaled down. In response to the large influx of Rohingya from Myanmar in 2017, Norway once again contributed humanitarian assistance.

In the decades since 2000, however, relations have changed dramatically. While development assistance

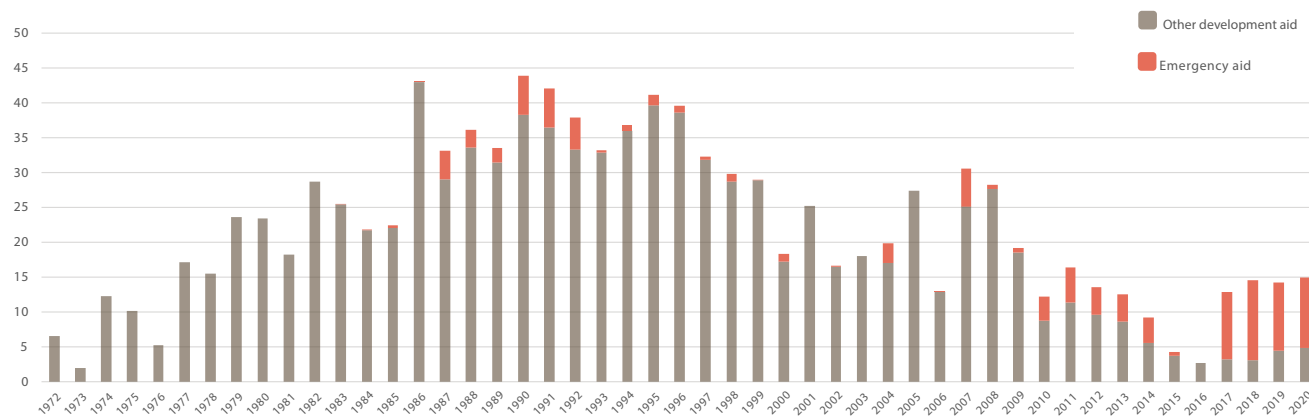
has been reduced, trade figures have increased sharply. As described below, trade and business interests now dominate bilateral relations.

### 1.2 Aid for reconstruction – and Norwegian initiatives (1972-1991)

#### At first there was commodity aid and emergency assistance –

Over the last fifty years, the composition of Norway's development assistance has changed several times to include supplies of imported commodities; major programmes for health, family planning and education; river and coastal transport; rural development; credit programmes; support to women's

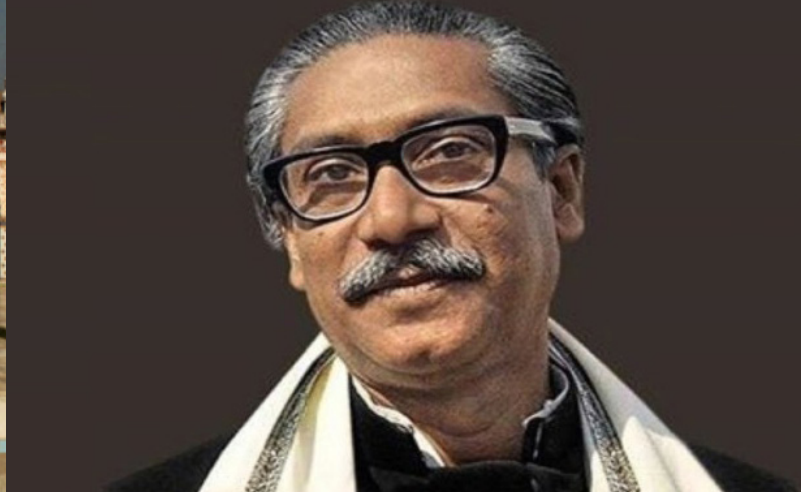
Norway's development aid to Bangladesh 1972-2020 (million USD)



Total bilateral assistance to Bangladesh 1972-2020. In the years before 1979, it is not possible to separate emergency (humanitarian) aid. (Source: Norad)



Tara Majid – Star Mosque in Dhaka (Photo: Arve Ofstad)



Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, first Head of Government of Bangladesh.

organisations: and more. In parallel, collaborative projects in research and higher education have been developed. Cultural institutions and civil society have also received support.

These changes have been caused by a combination of factors on both the Norwegian and Bangladeshi sides. Initially, the desire to reduce suffering and poverty in Bangladesh was crucial on the Norwegian side. In order to quickly implement support beyond emergency aid, it was decided that Norway should supply goods that Bangladesh needed for reconstruction, partly from Norway and partly from other developing countries. This commodity aid constituted the bulk of Norwegian contributions until around 1985.

***– then projects for health, family planning, rural development, women, and river and coastal transport***

Early on, Norway wanted to supplement the commodity aid with projects that would more directly address the major challenges in Bangladesh: poverty, high population growth, weak health and education systems, and widespread discrimination against women and girls.

Towards the end of the 1970s it was agreed that Norway would support a large health and family planning programme together with the World Bank and other donors. Second, Norway would contribute to strengthening women's rights and economic opportunities. Third, three Nordic countries joined forces to establish an integrated programme to build rural infrastructure and stimulate the local economy in selected districts. And fourth, since both Norway and

Bangladesh are coastal countries with corresponding interests in ferries and other maritime traffic, Norway offered to assist the country with coastal and river transport.

All the new projects were largely a result of Norwegian priorities and initiatives. Bangladesh needed support for almost every economic and social sector and was willing to accept offers from donors. But they still insisted on control and management over their own development, and it was obvious that some of the donors' initiatives were more welcome than others. Some parts of the national administration were weak and lacked experience. Elsewhere, local political and economic interests had a strong influence on what projects were implemented. The process to get women's projects started was very slow, and traditional river boats were not a priority. Some rural programmes were easier to implement than others. There was not always full understanding between the parties. External donors, such as Norway, did not necessarily have good enough knowledge of the political and cultural conditions to implement aid activities effectively in the Bangladeshi reality.

Just four years after independence, Bangladesh's first president, and later prime minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was killed in a military coup. Thereafter, the country was ruled by military leaders for 15 years until a transition government was appointed and organised general elections in 1991. Much of this period was marked by political unrest, demonstrations and tensions. However, this did not have much impact on the Norwegian development assistance effort, which increased more than five-fold in this period from USD 6 million to around 35 million annually.



Photo: E. Rikter-Svendsen

Photo: E. Rikter-Svendsen

In the same period, Norway had several elections and changes of government. In 1983, Norway appointed its first Minister of International Development, Reidun Brusletten. This had little or no effect on the level of aid to Bangladesh.

and nation-building. These included measures to preserve and protect traditional cultural heritage, strengthen new institutions, and use culture to promote social change. Bangladesh has a proud history and is keen to maintain and protect its cultural heritage.

### ***Gender equality and women's rights – and cultural cooperation***

Towards the end of the 1980s, Norway wanted to make changes. The World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 stimulated increased commitment to women's rights – including in Bangladesh. Norway began supporting a scholarship programme for girls in high school and provided support to local and national organisations for women. Norway was among the first supporters of Grameen Bank, which introduced microcredit to poor women. Support for the women's movement was stepped up further, with added emphasis on larger organisations promoting advocacy and awareness-raising activities.

The Grameen Bank and programmes for women inspired a Norwegian sociologist. She subsequently convinced the Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries to develop a similar credit scheme for Norwegian women who needed work in rural areas. This led to the creation of the Women's Bank for two fishing communities in Lofoten in northern Norway and similar network credit schemes in several Norwegian municipalities. This is the only known example of a programme in Bangladesh inspiring a completely new institution in Norway.

In the 1980s, Norway began to finance cultural initiatives that could contribute to development



Photo: Helge M. Kristoffersen



Photo: Kristin T. Wæringsaasen

### 1.3 Consolidation and change (1991-2010)

The political situation in Bangladesh calmed down when a civilian government took over in 1991 under Prime Minister Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Nevertheless, major unrest surrounded the elections in 1996 when the opposition party Awami League under Sheikh Hasina won control of the government. New elections in 2001 brought Begum Zia back to power. This government's rule ended in 2006 with a new state of military emergency. During the same period, the country experienced a devastating cyclone and several major floods. Despite these problems, economic growth was greater than in previous years.

Shifting Norwegian governments continued aid to Bangladesh at stable levels throughout the 1990s. Internal considerations in Norway nevertheless led to a desire to adjust the content of its assistance. This became evident in a new agreement that was signed between the two countries in 1995.

#### *Support for health, family planning, and river transport was replaced by a large programme for education – and democracy and human rights*

A new agreement in 1995 implied that Norway ended its participation in the large health and family planning programme that it had supported since 1975. Instead, it would increase contributions to education and participate in the joint sector

programme for basic education, which was high up on the Bangladeshi agenda.

At the same time, Norway wished to continue its support for rural development and credit schemes. A new project for electrification of two districts aimed at promoting economic activity. Meanwhile, support for coastal and river transport was terminated after twenty years of cooperation.

A new dimension was added in that Norway wanted to support institutions that would stabilise democracy and strengthen human rights. This support could be provided to government institutions as well as to independent organisations. In practice, the Bangladeshi authorities were slow to allow and accept support for public human rights institutions. The Norwegian contributions were thus largely channelled to independent organisations.

#### *Norwegian business became interested in Bangladesh while culture and research cooperation was strengthened*

As the new millennium approached, new changes took place in the relationship between the two countries. The Norad office was upgraded to an embassy in Dhaka in 1996. Aid activities were still dominant, but there was growing interest from the business community. The first major investment took place when the Norwegian company Telenor agreed with Grameen Telecom to launch Grameenphone in 1997. The Norwegian investment fund for developing countries, Norfund, also started to make investments.



Mosammat Taslima (for Grameen Bank) and Muhammad Yunus received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. (Photo: The Norwegian Nobel Institute/ Ken Opprann)

Photo: E. Rikter-Svendsen

*In 2006, the Norwegian Nobel Committee decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize to Grameen Bank and its founder, Muhammad Yunus. The Peace Prize award ceremony is a major social event in Norway, with the Royal Family and the Prime Minister present. Thus, Bangladesh also received a lot of positive publicity and attention. The award was not equally popular in all political circles in Bangladesh.*

In addition, mixed credits were given to several Norwegian exporters of investment goods.

Cultural collaboration got a boost from a growing interest in the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen whose plays were seen to be of social relevance. This culminated in major Ibsen festivals in Dhaka in 2006 and 2009. The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) was engaged to renovate the contemporary art collection in the national art gallery of Shilpakala Academy, and a collaboration on photojournalism was initiated.

Research collaboration increased with the emergence of highly qualified institutions in Dhaka, including in health research. The social research collaboration between the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in Bergen and the Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies (BIDS), which had started in the 1970s, continued and a new master's programme in public policy and administration was developed in collaboration between universities in Dhaka, Kandy (Sri Lanka), Kathmandu (Nepal) and Bergen (Norway).

#### **1.4 Trade and investments – and broader cooperation (2010- )**

##### ***Reorganisation and reduction of development assistance***

In early 2008, Norway decided to restructure its co-operation with Bangladesh. The volume of aid was to be reduced and many large programmes were closed down. Greater emphasis would be placed on bilateral interests, especially on private business, while broader areas including culture, research, and civil society would be further stimulated.

This was partly justified by the fact that Bangladesh's economic growth made the country less dependent on international aid. The Minister of International Development at the time, Erik Solheim, believed that there was greater need for Norwegian assistance elsewhere and for other purposes. Bangladesh was not the only country affected as Norway's development aid to Angola and Cuba was also revised and reduced.



*The Parliament building in Dhaka (Photo: Kristin T. Wæringsaasen)*



*Ahsan Mazil, erstwhile official residential palace for the Nawab of Dhaka, now a museum. (Photo: E. Rikter-Svendson)*

The downsizing came as a surprise in Bangladesh. For some of Norway's partners the reductions came abruptly, and planned activities had to be shelved, while other partners had several donors and were therefore not so vulnerable. Many partners had become accustomed to Norway being a predictable partner. The women's organisations had considered Norway as a supportive ally.

### ***Multiplication of trade and new investments from private companies and government funds***

Bangladesh had an economic growth of over five per cent annually, despite political challenges. In the years after 2010, this rose further to six per cent and as much as eight per cent in 2019. Much of this growth was due to income from labour migration to the Middle East. Growth was particularly strong in the export-oriented garment industry. This also had consequences for trade with Norway. The value of exports from Bangladesh to Norway had already reached USD 100 million by 2010. Thereafter, it continued to increase to USD 270 million by 2020. By this time, the slogan "trade – not aid" had become a reality.

Grameenphone is the largest single Norwegian investment in Bangladesh, but other companies have followed suit. The Varner company is a major producer of ready-made garments, Bergen Engines Bangladesh monitors deliveries of generators, and Nordic Woods imports wooden poles for the electricity grid. Scatec is preparing a solar energy project. Jotun invests in paint production, DNV has interests associated

with shipping and shipbuilding, while Porsgrund Porselænsfabrikk and several other companies have production agreements. The biggest financial investments have come from two government funds, the Norwegian Investment Fund for Developing Countries (Norfund) and the Norwegian Pension Fund Global (SPU) that together have invested approx. USD 270 million in Bangladesh as of the end of 2020.

### ***Technical assistance through multilateral organisations***

Norway has continued to finance certain projects, with a preference for technical assistance managed by multilateral organisations. Norway wanted to improve conditions in the ship recycling industry based on the beaches around Chattogram and contacted the International Maritime Organization (IMO). This resulted in an agreement between Norway, Bangladesh, and the IMO on the Safe and Environmentally Sound Ship Recycling (SENSREC) programme.

Agreements were also reached with UNDP regarding support for crisis management and prevention of floods and other natural disasters, with the ILO regarding strengthening workers' rights in export-oriented industries, and with UNIDO regarding better use of plastic and combatting plastic waste in the sea. Furthermore, Norway has supported UN Women's project to map women's vulnerability as a result of climate change, IFC's project to improve the banking system's accessibility for women and the Asian Development Bank's competence building in the gas sector.





*Sculpture «Friendship» by Jasmin and Anowara, from the exhibition Wings of Hope, Dhaka, 2016.*



*Photo: E. Rikter-Svendsen*

### ***Humanitarian aid***

Unfortunately, the end of the 2010s was marked by new humanitarian challenges: in 2017, close to 750,000 Rohingya were displaced from Myanmar and crossed the border into Bangladesh, making the total number of people in temporary shelters in the camps near Cox's Bazar almost one million. Norway, along with the UN system and international aid organisations, heeded Bangladesh's calls for humanitarian aid. Norwegian humanitarian organisations also stepped in to join the aid efforts.

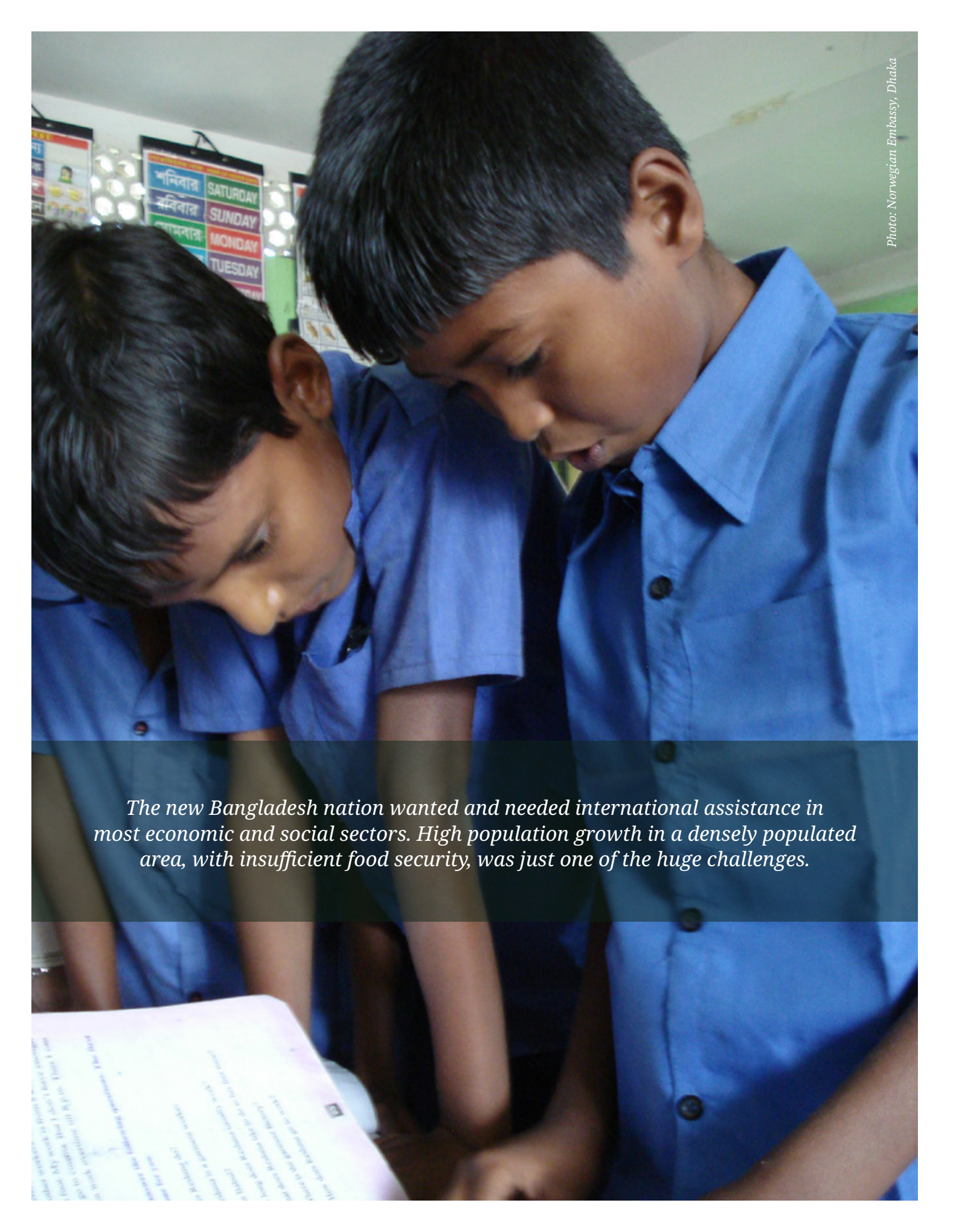
### ***Long-term ties***

For fifty years, many Norwegians and Bangladeshis have cooperated and made contacts in each other's countries. Many projects and programmes have been implemented, and while most have been completed, memories remain. Some organisations, institutions and companies continue their cooperation and interaction, with or without financial support from government agencies. Political ties have varied over the years, but the countries have common interests both bilaterally and multilaterally.

At the individual level, new ties have been forged. Several hundred Bangladeshis have studied in Norway, and some have chosen to stay. Others have travelled to Norway for various reasons, such as for work or for love. In 2021, there were approx. 1,300 immigrants from Bangladesh in Norway, and approx. 450 who had been born in Norway to immigrant parents. Many of them are Norwegian citizens. Some are

engaged in cooperation with organisations and institutions in Bangladesh, while many maintain personal contacts in other ways.

The next chapters provide more information about the fifty years of collaboration.

A photograph of two young boys in blue school uniforms looking at a book together in a classroom. The boy on the right is leaning over the book, and the boy on the left is looking at it from the side. In the background, there are educational posters on the wall, including one for the days of the week in Bengali and English. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent dark blue band across the middle of the image.

*The new Bangladesh nation wanted and needed international assistance in most economic and social sectors. High population growth in a densely populated area, with insufficient food security, was just one of the huge challenges.*

# 2

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## THE DEVELOPMENT AID PROGRAMMES

### 2.1 Imports of intermediate goods to strengthen the economy

*In the first years following the war of liberation, Bangladesh was in urgent need of support for reconstruction and to resume production in agriculture and industry. Exports had largely stalled, and the country desperately needed foreign currency. Several major donors were willing to fund imports of raw materials and intermediate goods, and Norway agreed.*

During the first decade, almost all Norwegian aid was in the form of commodity aid, meaning goods purchased internationally and delivered free of charge to Bangladesh. The authorities were then free to pass these on to institutions that needed them, or the goods could be sold to industry on the open market. Commodity aid accounted for around 70 per cent of total Norwegian aid until 1985, and some purchases continued until the 1990s.

**Fertilisers.** The largest deliveries in the Norwegian commodity aid were fertilisers, about half of which were delivered directly from Norway, plus some delivered from Yara's (then Norsk Hydro) factory in Qatar. Several other donor countries provided fertilisers as well. Overall, this was very important for strengthening food production, which increased by five per cent annually during this period. Bangladesh produced some fertilisers itself, although far from enough to cover demand. Therefore, fertiliser imports – including those financed by Norway – were crucial to the increase in food production in the first decade.

Questions were raised, however, as to whether the poorest farmers and farm workers, those with little or no land, benefited from this form of assistance, since they received hardly any subsidised fertilisers. Studies found it difficult to assess the overall distributional effect since increased agricultural production also meant that more people found work and more food became available.

**Metals and wood pulp.** Norway also supplied commodity aid in the form of aluminium, iron alloys, zinc, copper, and wood pulp. These were important inputs for industry. While Norway supplied only 5 per cent of the fertilisers, it supplied over 50 per cent of iron manganese and other iron alloys and other metals such as zinc and aluminium during this period. The delivery of wood pulp was also important since it provided the input for production of all kinds of paperware including textbooks, newsprint, wrapping paper, and cardboard.

Commodity aid purchased in other developing countries was termed “import support”. Norway funded input goods such as cement, raw rubber, asphalt, oil products, and aluminium in this way. These were also products that Bangladesh needed as the country's own production was far too small to meet the demand.

An evaluation of the total commodity aid from Norway up to 1985 concluded that most of these goods were necessary input for the economy, and that they had most likely contributed to higher production in industry as well as in agriculture. However, imports financed by Norway were only a small part of total commodity aid to Bangladesh in those years, so it is



*Norway delivered fertilisers as commodity aid. The fertilisers were important to stimulate food production. (Photo: Magnus Rustøy)*



*Aluminium was one of the commodities supplied as input to industry. It was also used for simple household utensils. (Photo: Magnus Rustøy)*

difficult to measure the additional value added from Norway's contribution.

**Some items were completely wrong.** However, there were some exceptions to the generally positive assessment of commodity aid. Norway supplied medicines which were not approved by the Bangladeshi authorities and hand sprayers for agriculture, which proved to be too expensive and competed with national production. Equipment delivered to the Marine Academy in Chattogram was unsuitable for the purpose for which it was intended. In these cases, agents for the Norwegian producers, in conjunction with local consultants, had by irregular means persuaded the authorities to misrepresent the need for these products, thus convincing Norad to accept the request.

**Downsizing.** In the period after 1985, the volume of commodity aid was reduced while increasing parts of Norway's appropriations were directed towards projects and programmes that more clearly identified the recipients. Some imports from other developing countries continued while Norwegian suppliers became too expensive.



*This smelter for zinc located in Odda, Western Norway, previously Det Norske Zinkkompani AS – now Boliden Odda, was one of the companies that delivered commodity aid to Bangladesh. (Photo: Joar Øygard)*



*The Norwegian economist Just Faaland (right) was appointed as the first World Bank Representative at the request of Bangladeshi authorities. He shakes hands with Minister of Finance Tajuddin Ahmed (left) in 1974. (Photo: Chr. Michelsen Institute)*

### *A Norwegian became the first World Bank Representative*

Shortly after independence, Bangladesh became a member of the World Bank. The bank appointed the Norwegian economist Just Faaland as its first representative in Bangladesh. As a young economist, Faaland had worked in the Pakistan Planning Commission in the late 1950s as part of a group of advisers from Harvard University. There he met with many Bengalis from East Pakistan. After independence, these individuals became prominent in the Bangladeshi Planning Commission. They recommended that the World Bank engage Faaland. He soon gained a reputation as an advocate for Bangladesh, at times going against his superiors at the World Bank. After two years Faaland returned to Bergen as the director of development research, which he himself had initiated, at Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI). From CMI in Bergen, Faaland initiated research collaboration with the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) which lasted for over 20 years.



*“The enlightened and pioneering role played by Just Faaland merits special recognition. As the first representative of the World Bank in Bangladesh, appointed following a specific request from the Bangladesh Planning Commission, he established close personal relationships with senior policy makers, professionals, and academics. He shared this social capital with the Norwegian government, which was provided with a direct channel to establish good working relations with the government and other key people in Bangladesh.”*

*Professor Rehman Sobhan,  
Chairman, Centre for Policy Dialogue, October 2021*



*Traditional river boats were the most important means of transport for people and goods. Norway and the Netherlands wished to support improved navigation, but the boatmen acquired low-cost engines that solved the problem. (Photo: Helge M. Kristoffersen)*



*Pontoons, floating jetties, were essential for access to the river boats. They were flexible and adjusted to fluctuating water levels and when the rivers changed direction. Picture from 1994. (Photo: Arve Ofstad)*

## 2.2 Coastal transport, river boats, an oil tanker, and ship recycling – common maritime interests?

*Bangladesh and Norway have at least some factors in common: long coastlines, rivers and the ocean, ships and ferryboats carrying people and goods. They also share an interest in protecting the coastline and seabed, and offshore resources. Therefore, both countries felt that this was an area for closer cooperation.*

**The first port facilities – and studies.** As early as 1975, several projects were identified where Norway could assist Bangladesh in improving transport of goods and people on the country's countless rivers and in the coastal zone. The first agreement with the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) was signed in 1978. It resulted in the construction of three new ports, which were completed in 1981: two in Narayanganj and one in Khulna. In the same year, it was decided to build two more ports and investigate whether the river Lakhya (Shitalakshya) could be used by motorised river boats.

**More studies and lighthouses.** Many studies were undertaken of the rivers and options for dredging, water levels, and transport volumes. Upgrading the state shipyards was also considered, with a special focus on BIWTA's own shipyard in Barisal. Not much came out of these studies. However, spare parts and new beacons and light buoys were purchased to improve navigation, including along the river route to Sylhet. In 1986, 135 lighthouses operating on solar cells were delivered, a completely new technology

for Bangladesh. BIWTA had problems installing and operating them, and in 1989 – four years later – 44 lighthouses were still in the warehouse.

**Pontoons.** From 1982 Norad continued to finance the construction and repairs of small landings – mainly pontoons (floating jetties). Fluctuations in water level and changes in river courses make pontoons the preferred solution in most places. Earlier, large concrete piers had been left standing in the middle of the rice fields when the river changed direction. BIWTA believed that it needed at least 1,400 new pontoons to cover all passenger boat terminals throughout the country. Norad paid for ten of these in addition to repairing 12 existing pontoons.

**Maintenance workshop in Barisal.** After many studies, it was finally decided in 1989 that the third phase of the agreement between Norad and BIWTA would include an upgrade of the Barisal Marine Workshop (BMW). It turned out, however, that the proposals from numerous consultants ran contrary to the authorities' own plans for reform and possible privatisation of BMW. A new study revealed a number of other weaknesses in the BMW, which had a small turnover, large overhead costs, and a leadership reluctant to reform. The entire project was cancelled in 1992 – barely three years after it was approved.

**Traditional river boats.** In the years 1982-84, a slightly different study was undertaken. It was about the traditional river boats, the most important mode of transport for both people and goods. At that time, there were an estimated 500,000 traditional river-boats, navigated by sail or poles. These accounted



*The river boats are still important means of transportation.  
(Photo: Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka)*



*Trade and numerous other activities take place on the rivers.  
Norway contributed to keeping the rivers navigable, and safe at night.  
(Photo: E. Rikter-Svendsen)*

for around 90 per cent of all passenger traffic on the rivers and a significant part of the rice transport from tens of thousands of villages to local markets and larger storage centres. Norway and the Netherlands therefore joined forces to finance a thorough survey of this sector and come up with proposals for actions. The study attracted a lot of attention and was later published as a book.

It took time before the proposals were followed up. BIWTA and other authorities did not think this was a priority. Finally, a pilot project was started in 1990 to improve navigation of these sailing boats. By then, however, several of the boats had fitted cheap Chinese engines that had been introduced to pump water to the irrigation canals for the rice fields, and which could be used in the river boats out of season. The pilot project was thus soon terminated in 1993.

**A preliminary conclusion.** River transport was still described as a major sector for Norwegian aid to Bangladesh as late as 1989, and a third cooperation agreement was signed. Since the project with the BMW shipyard was cancelled, only parts of this agreement were implemented. The entire programme in this sector was completed in 1995.

### *New collaboration opportunities?*

**Ship recycling.** More than ten years after the end of cooperation on coastal and river transport, Norway suggested a new project to improve conditions for the ship-breaking and recycling taking place on the beaches around Chattogram. At the time, this business was totally unregulated, had major negative consequences for the environment and posed significant health hazards for the workers. Ship recycling was not registered as an ordinary industrial industry until 2011. Bangladesh dismantles and recycles more ships than any other country in the world. The activities are mostly conducted on the shore after the ship sails at full force onto the beach. As a large shipping nation, Norway has a keen interest in ensuring that old and obsolete ships are recycled in an environmentally safe manner.

Norway therefore entered into an agreement with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 2009 for a feasibility study, which resulted in a collaboration from 2014 between Bangladesh, Norway, and the IMO on the programme “Safe and Environmentally Sound Ship Recycling” (SENSREC). The goal is to provide technical assistance so that Bangladesh can accede to the 2009 Hong Kong Convention on safe ship recycling. This presupposes inter alia that hazardous waste is handled properly and that workers receive adequate training and protective equipment. After an initial phase, SENSREC has focused on capacity building in relevant Bangladeshi institutions. Several shipyards have come a long way in upgrading to the requirements, and Bangladesh aims to ratify the Hong Kong Convention by 2023.



*The combined oil and ore ship M/S Banglar Noor was donated by Norway, and sailed for five years 1977-82 before being sold. Bangladesh thus saved foreign exchange when importing goods, but the ship was not well suited for the needs. (Photo: Sjøhistorie.no)*



*Plastic pollution has become a global challenge. Picture shows Gulshan Society President Sakhawat Abu Khair Mohammed (left) with former Ambassador Sidsel Bleken engaged in the Ocean CleanupDay. (Photo: Kristin T. Wæringsaasen)*

### *Bangladesh Shipping Corporation's first tanker became expensive – for Norad*

*In parallel with the plans for river and coastal transport, Norad agreed in 1976 to finance the purchase of an oil tanker for the state-owned Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC). The idea was to provide greater national control over oil imports and save foreign currency. Thus, the combined oil and ore ship M/S Vestan of 90,000 tonnes dw was purchased in early 1977. The ship was renamed Banglar Noor, and four Norwegian officers were recruited to assist with its operation.*

*But already on the first trip, problems arose due to a lack of qualified crew, both on board and for unloading the ship. At the request of BSC, Norad extended its assistance to include a contract with a Norwegian shipping company to operate the ship from January 1978. After just over three years, this contract was taken over by another shipping company. Training was provided in Bangladesh as well as in Norway. In 1979, the ship was in good operational condition and transported approx. 790,000 tonnes of heavy oil, corresponding to approx. 75 per cent of the country's import needs.*

*When the second management contract expired, BSC still did not want to take over responsibility for further operations. In August 1982, the ship was sold at a loss of approx. USD three million.*

*An assessment made by Norad in 1983 concluded that apart from significant savings in foreign currency while the ship was in operation, the project had not yielded satisfactory results. The type of ship proved to be a bad choice and the combination ore/oil made cleaning the tanks as well as loading and unloading complicated and costly. The purchase had been arranged directly between BSC and a Norwegian broker without Norad's involvement. Training had not been optimal, and little had been done to train senior officers. Apparently, BSC was not very involved in the ship as long as Norad paid the operating costs. This history shows that neither BSC nor Norad had taken responsibility for ensuring good quality in this project.*





*Ship-breaking and recycling is an important income-earning business, taking place on the shores near Chattogram. Norway supports a project by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to make this activity safe, environmentally sound and sustainable in line with international standards. (Photo: E. Rikter-Svendesen)*

Until this happens, many shipping companies will not allow their ships to be dismantled and recycled in Bangladesh. There is also a global campaign against “beaching”. The Norwegian Shipowners’ Association decided in 2015 to dissuade its members from sending their ships for scrapping on the beaches of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. At the same time, the association cooperates with the IMO to make ship recycling safe, environmentally sound, and sustainable.

**Marine resources.** Bangladesh and Norway have a common interest in good management of the oceans, and both countries want to limit pollution as well as ensure sustainable management of fish and other marine resources. Norway has assisted Bangladesh with the mapping of the continental shelf outer limit and given professional advice to have this map internationally accepted by the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

In 2018, the fishery research vessel Dr. Fridtjof Nansen was on a survey in the Bay of Bengal to assist with mapping the fish stocks. This ship is owned by Norad and operated by the Institute of Marine Resources in Bergen as part of a programme under the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Bangladeshi specialists joined the research on board, and all results on the fish stocks were shared with Bangladeshi fishing authorities.

## 2.3 Major programmes for health, family planning, and education were important boosts

### *Health and family planning resulted in lower population growth*

The new Bangladesh nation needed assistance in almost every economic and social field. Population growth of almost three per cent annually in a densely populated country where many people were starving was just one of the challenges. In 1974, the World Bank was asked to support a major programme aimed at reducing the high population growth. The bank was joined by the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and several donor countries, including Norway, for joint funding. In the 1960s, the global fear of the “population bomb” had become almost as big as the fear of the atom bomb. This way of thinking influenced Norwegian policy as well, and in 1970 the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget) decided that at least 10 per cent of Norwegian global aid should be for family planning.

Norway therefore joined the agreement between Bangladesh and the World Bank. The entire programme was designed to increase the training of personnel in health and family planning, support motivation and awareness campaigns and build a research and evaluation capacity. Norwegian support was initially earmarked for building seven schools for “family welfare visitors” who would serve as practical midwives, provide family planning advice, and carry out preventive health work in rural areas.



*A health worker promotes family planning and demonstrates various birth control methods. (Photo: Ole Bernt Frøshaug)*

*Bangladesh is among the countries with the highest population density globally. The level of population growth has been substantially reduced, however, thanks to national and international efforts. (Photo: Niloy Biswas, Unsplash)*

### ***Disagreements about implementation***

The start-up of these schools was slow, and Norway eventually agreed to reallocate funds to other priorities in the sector, such as health clinics for women and children. In 1981, Norway joined the next phase of the entire programme and increased its contributions. Norway took an active part in the dialogue on the implementation of the programme. Many donors felt that the Bangladeshi side placed too much emphasis on sterilisation rather than other methods of contraception. At the same time, the donors warned against placing too much emphasis on financial incentives for patients as well as for staff.

This criticism led to Sweden withdrawing its support, while Norway and the other partners continued from 1985 into phase three. Norway was then one of the largest donor countries contributing almost 20 per cent of the total programme budget. For twenty years, this health and family planning programme was a large and important part of Norway's contribution to Bangladesh.

### ***Tangible positive results***

From the late 1980s, results from this joint effort became more visible. By then, health services for mothers and children had improved, the position of women was strengthened, more people used contraception, and population growth had slowed down. The Norwegian contributions ended in 1997. By then, Bangladesh had made great progress in the health sector. Infant mortality had fallen from 150 to 83 per 1,000 births, child and maternal mortality had fallen

sharply, and population growth had been reduced to around 1.6 per cent. The Bangladeshi government and health workers were responsible for major efforts, while donor contributions accelerated the good results.

### ***Strong support for education***

Education was another major challenge for the new country. At independence, Bangladesh had a small well-educated elite and a middle class with some education. But the majority of the population had not attended primary school, and around 75 per cent of the adult population were illiterate. There was a need to strengthen all parts of the education system from primary school to university, vocational and adult education. The authorities therefore emphasised increasing the number of educational facilities, while appealing for additional contributions from international donors.

During the first decade, Norway did not provide direct assistance to education other than through some non-governmental organisations. But from 1985, Norad began delivering paper for schoolbooks through UNICEF. The collaboration was expanded in the 1990s with new programmes such as the education of special tutors for physically disabled children and a scholarship programme for girls in high school. In the cooperation agreement signed in 1995, however, it was agreed that education – with an emphasis on basic education – would become one of the three main sectors for Norwegian development assistance in subsequent years. This fit well with the Bangladeshi authorities' new strategy of "Education for All".



*Vaccination is an important element in health programmes for mother and child. (Photo: GMB Akash)*

*The scholarship programme for girls succeeded in increasing the proportion of girls in high school. (Photo: GMB Akash)*

### ***The world's largest sector programme for primary education***

Over the next fifteen years, education became the largest sector in Norwegian development assistance. Norway contributed in particular to three major programmes. One was an extensive effort to improve the quality of education, primarily for basic education. By the year 2000, Bangladesh had achieved almost 100 per cent attendance in five-year primary schools. But there were great problems with quality, and drop-out rates were high. The government nevertheless wanted to extend primary school to eight years. In this part of the programme, the Asian Development Bank was the main partner.

Secondly, Norway continued to fund scholarships for girls in high school. This programme was co-funded with several other donors. All reports confirmed that the scholarships effectively increased the proportion of girls in high school. The third programme was to assist over 8 million illiterate adults in 31 districts to become functionally literate. This programme, which was also supported by Sweden and the United Kingdom, struggled to yield results as many people dropped out without having received adequate training and practice in mastering the art of writing.

In addition, Norway chose to support the independent organisation BRAC, which had an extensive network throughout the country and ran integrated programmes for rural development and poverty reduction. BRAC had an innovative education programme and a centre for better quality in education linked to its university. BRAC's primary schools

captured poor children who fell outside the public system. More than 3.3 million children attended these schools by 2008. Norwegian support for BRAC education programmes began in 2004 and was scheduled to last for several years but was discontinued after 2008.

Norway contributed a total of approx. USD 170 million for education during the 20-year period 1990-2010, including the paper deliveries for textbooks for UNICEF. For Bangladesh, as a large country, the amount may not have been decisive, but it came alongside large contributions from many donor countries and the major development banks. Norway participated actively in dialogues and negotiations about the programme and engaged Norwegian education specialists as advisers.

The results in education were due to the combined efforts of the Bangladeshi authorities and international donors. By 2010, primary education had been improved, and more than 30,000 new teachers had been engaged. Nearly 100,000 teachers and more than 140,000 administrators had received further education. Thirty thousand new classrooms were built, 12,500 arsenic-free wells were dug, and 14,000 new toilets were installed. Perhaps most importantly, comprehensive reforms were carried out as part of the world's largest programmes for basic education.

In line with the decision to restructure Norway's involvement in Bangladesh, support for BRAC's education programmes was ended in 2008, while support for government programmes for primary education was terminated in 2010.



*A poor family in Kurigram, one of the districts included in the RESP programme for rural development. Picture from 1988. (Photo: Bodil Maal)*



*Irrigation and water control are essential for the rice fields. However, the RESP programme in the 1990s did not make use of motorised pumps such as this one. (Photo: GMB Akash)*

## **2.4 Rural development, infrastructure, and microcredit provided employment and income – with varying results**

*Another one of the great challenges for Bangladesh was – and continues to be – to promote development and income for all, including in remote rural areas. At independence, absolute poverty was initially over 75 per cent, only 10 per cent of the population lived in the cities, and there was widespread food shortage and hunger.*

Norway and the Nordic countries wanted to help to improve this situation. In 1977, Norway, Sweden and Denmark agree to contribute to a rural development programme with several components. Initially, the aim was to improve flood control and irrigation systems, and build other physical infrastructure.

### ***Rural development through IRWP / RESP***

The activities started in 1979, and from 1981 they were organised as an Integrated Rural Works Programme (IRWP). However, an evaluation after five years was devastating. It concluded that the programme had failed in just about every area. Food production had not increased. Road construction had reduced – not expanded – the cultivation areas, and no new long-term jobs had been created. In addition, much of the infrastructure that was built was of very poor quality. There were also major financial losses from mismanagement. Much of the benefits from the programme had apparently accrued to local landowners and the power elite, and not the poor and landless. Denmark withdrew its support after

this. The Bangladeshi authorities disagreed with the strong criticism, however, and obtained support from Sweden and Norway for a revised Rural Employment Sector Programme (RESP).

RESP was an integrated rural development programme focusing on employment and infrastructure. It was implemented in two districts, Greater Faridpur in flood-prone central Bangladesh and Kurigram in the north. An evaluation in 1989 was far more positive than the one from 1986 and recommended continuation. In particular, the improved irrigation systems provided a good basis for long-term employment. At the same time, the programme was costly with high expenses for international and national professionals.

A revised RESP programme continued in the two districts for another ten years. The focus was on further infrastructure development and an improved programme for credit and counselling for income generation. More emphasis was placed on strengthening the Bangladeshi institutions that would carry the programme forward. Norway nevertheless discontinued its participation in 1996 after disagreements with Sweden regarding management and implementation of the programme. Sweden continued its support until the year 2000. Norway agreed to support a sub-project in Kurigram, but this had major challenges and Norway ended its participation quickly.

The final evaluation, which was carried out in 1998, provided a mixed assessment of the results after almost twenty years in total for IRWP and RESP. After a difficult start, RESP had earned a good reputation for



*The rural development programmes IRWP and RESP supported digging of dams and irrigation systems, combined with fishing when feasible. (Photo: Christine Johansson, SIDA)*



*Female project workers in the RESP programme ready to travel to the villages in their district. (Photo: Christine Johansson, SIDA)*

managing a comprehensive rural development programme with effective implementation of projects. But it was more doubtful whether the programme had managed to improve the living conditions of landless farm workers. They had at best been given short-term work in public infrastructure projects in periods when there was little work in the rice fields. The study showed that the microcredit programmes were seldom reaching those who were dependent on wages alone.

### ***Grameen Bank – the frontrunner for microcredit***

Grameen Bank is one of the world's most well-known development programmes for poverty reduction. It has been replicated in many parts of the world – even in Norway. Economics professor Muhammad Yunus started an experiment with microcredit at the University of Chattogram in 1976 and established an independent bank in 1983. As of 2021, Grameen Bank is represented in more than 80,000 villages and encompasses more than 9 million borrowers, of which 97 per cent are women. The borrowers are also co-owners of the bank. The bank lends small amounts without collateral requirements to women who have organised themselves into groups for mutual support. The bank also provides advice on how the loans can be used for productive activities and to provide income. This has proven to be a sustainable concept and the loan repayment percentage is high.

This success was not obvious in the beginning. Norway was nevertheless one of the first donor countries to make contributions as early as 1986. The objective was to strengthen the bank's institutional develop-

ment and provide risk capital for the bank's lending activities. In the years that followed, Norway made several special contributions in support of victims from floods and cyclones and for the additional window for loans for house construction. The last payment took place in 1997 as a general contribution to institution building. Since then, Grameen Bank has been self-financing.

In 2006, Grameen Bank and Muhammad Yunus were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize by the Norwegian Nobel Committee “for their efforts to create economic and social development from below”.



*Grameen Bank introduced microcredit for poor people, without demanding collaterals. Parul Begum makes her down payment on the loan she has taken to purchase cows. (Photo: Ken Opprann)*

*Wooden poles from Norway were prepared and treated, and proved well suited as electricity poles in rural areas in Bangladesh. (Photo: Norplan for Norad)*

### ***Support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)***

Besides agriculture, small and medium-sized enterprises employ most people in Bangladesh. These include everything from trading activities via crafts and small mechanical workshops, to agricultural-related activities, transport, and local clothing production. These small-scale entrepreneurs did not receive much public attention and support. Many lacked credit as they were too large for the microcredit programmes and too small and risky for the commercial banks. In addition, many had low technical and commercial competence. Norway was among the donors willing to provide high-risk support to SMEs and contributed in particular to three initiatives:

**The Small Enterprises Development Project (SEDP)** combined loans and credit with training and financial advice. It was started as a pilot project in 1990 and was reorganised and attached to the state-owned Agrani Bank from 1995. SEDP was meant to supplement the RESP rural development programme and be active in the same rural areas. In 2004, the support was discontinued when Norad felt that a business-oriented programme should be able to manage on its own after 13 years.

**Small Enterprise Credit Project (SECP)** was a programme following a similar model to SEDP. The partner this time was the state bank Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB) which was active in Rajshahi and Rangpur. The purpose was to increase lending to SMEs and provide them with advice and training. Norway supported the SECP from 2002 to 2008.

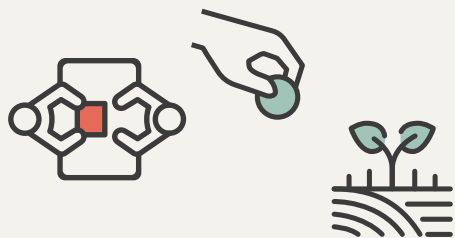
The **South Asia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF)** was managed by the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC). Norway supported its Bangladesh operations from 2003 to 2008, together with the EU and other donor countries. Its main purpose was to provide further training to banks and other institutions that provide financial and technical advice to SMEs and contribute to better public policy in the sector.

Evaluations and final reports from these programmes show that many new businesses and over 100,000 new jobs were created thanks to more available credit and better advice. One study found that entrepreneurs who received training increased their income by 77 per cent on average. About 25 per cent of the contractors were women.

However, another report concluded that the state-owned RAKUB bank was not sufficiently business oriented and put too little emphasis on quality in the loan portfolio and on requirements for loan recovery. It was bureaucratic and inefficient and prone to political influence. A general problem with subsidised loans is that they – directly or indirectly – easily benefit people with power and influence locally.

Agrani Bank and RAKUB have both continued with special programmes for small and medium-sized companies in their districts after the Norwegian support ended.

### SMALL ENTERPRISES DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (SEDP)



### SMALL ENTERPRISE CREDIT PROJECT (SECP)



### SOUTH ASIA ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT FACILITY (SEDF)



Norway supported several credit programmes for small and medium enterprises at local, district and division levels. They used different approaches and covered various geographical regions, while their abbreviated names may easily lead to confusion.

### ***Rural electrification in Bhola and Gaibandha***

Lack of electricity was another significant factor that limited social welfare and hampered economic activity in large parts of the country. At the request of the Rural Electrification Board (REB), some of the Norwegian commodity aid was used to supply equipment and wooden poles for expanding the power grid. The poles were delivered from Norway, initially for testing in Bangladeshi conditions. They proved to be highly suitable and became an important part of REB's expansion of the grid in rural areas. In 2004, the company Nordic Woods was established to prepare and treat the poles in Bangladesh.

In 1997, Norway and REB agreed to support the electrification of two districts: Bhola on the southern coast and Gaibandha in the north. In both districts, local electricity cooperatives had been established in line with REB policies. Norway paid for half of the investments, while operating and maintenance expenses were to be covered by income generated from electricity customers. A final report confirmed that more than 30,000 households and businesses were connected in Bhola as planned, while in Gaibandha close to 35,000 were connected, twice as many as expected. This accounted for over 90 per cent of households in Gaibandha and around 40 per cent in Bhola and represented a major improvement in the two areas.

The final report nevertheless expressed considerable uncertainty as to whether these projects were sustainable without strong subsidies. The profitability of the two cooperatives was very weak, and the power

supplies from the main grid were unstable. Many of the transmission lines were old, and there were big power losses. The quality of the power supply was very low when it arrived in Bhola, and people became less willing to pay. Thus, the electricity cooperatives did not have sufficient income to cover their expenses. This was probably improved after the project was completed, as almost all districts and villages by now (in 2021) have access to electricity, either from the grid or from local facilities.

### **2.5 Women's movement for education, income, and participation – despite opposition**

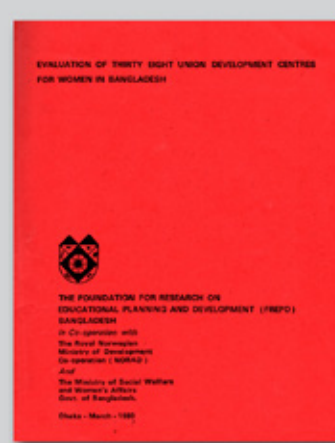
*Women's organisations for gender equality, equal opportunities, women's rights and recognition have emerged in Bangladesh and Norway, as elsewhere in the world. In Bangladesh, the situation for women was particularly difficult due to the combination of poverty, cultural and religious traditions, and patriarchal attitudes. Norway wanted to assist the government and the emerging women's organisations with measures that could stimulate change and promote opportunities for women.*

#### ***The 38 community centres for women.***

In 1978, it was agreed that Norway would finance the construction of 14 community centres for women at the union council level (Union Development Centres). They should have space for adult education and informal vocational education, have social workers available for general information, and motivate for better



*Organising women to increase their active participation in social and economic development at all levels. (Photo: UN Women)*



*Evaluations may be very critical. These reviews of the 38 community centres for women concluded that the training provided at the centres was inadequate, and very few women got a job or increased their incomes after attending the courses.*

health, good nutrition, and childcare. Gradually, Norway expanded its participation to finance 38 community centres, some of which were close to urban centres, others in more remote areas. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Women's Affairs was responsible for the construction and operation of the community centres through a national women's organisation, Bangladesh Jatya Mahila Sangstha (BJMS).

An evaluation of the project in 1980 revealed a number of weaknesses and concluded that the political goodwill and well-meaning efforts of more affluent sisters in Dhaka were not sufficient to reach the poor women in rural areas with relevant support. A new evaluation in 1985 was somewhat more positive. It confirmed that the centres provided relevant adult education and vocational guidance, but that there were still few job opportunities. Many dropped out of the courses. Another evaluation – in 1990 – was very critical and concluded that the 38 centres had achieved their goals only to a limited extent. Relatively few of the women who had followed the courses had obtained work and income. The main problem was that a top-heavy leadership in Dhaka did not know the conditions and needs of the villages. The training that was offered was thus more characterised by wanting to improve social welfare than by providing vocational training that could generate income.

### ***Multiple organisations have been supported***

Norway concluded that further support for community centres would be futile and wanted proposals for new projects. The process took time. The Directorate of Women's Affairs had low status and lacked professional capacity. It was obvious that the political will to prioritise programmes for women was low among decision-makers, despite positive political rhetoric about gender equality.

In 1991, the Norad office prepared an action plan to support women in Bangladesh. It emphasised that a gender perspective should be integrated into all projects, regardless of their main purpose. The action plan also led Norway to increase support to several women's organisations, with greater emphasis on information, education and awareness raising. At the same time, the number of funded organisations was reduced, and more support was provided to those that might have a significant national influence on attitudes and policies.

These three organisations work in different ways and at different levels of society:

**Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP)** is the oldest and largest women's organisation in Bangladesh, founded in 1972. It is a social movement with over 100,000 members and thousands of volunteers organised across the country. The fight against violence against women (VAW) is a major issue. BMP also participates in campaigns for women in elected bodies locally and nationally.





*Most rural development programmes aimed at increasing job opportunities for women. The work may be arduous, but could increase family incomes and improve the status of women as income-earners. (Photo: UN Women)*



*Violence against women is a major problem and one of the main issues for the women's movement. These young women are learning martial arts to defend themselves. (Photo: Shahidul Alam/ Drik)*

With a network of professional lawyers, doctors, teachers, and other academics, BMP can serve as a resource in local communities, in litigation and for advising the authorities. Through dialogue and courses offered to journalists and others, BMP has contributed to changes in the media's portrayal of women in general and a stronger gender perspective in regular news reporting.

Norway supported BMP financially from 1994 with modest funds in the first years. After 2000, allocations increased, and Norway became the largest international donor. The support ended in 2016.

The **Association for Community Development (ACD)** is a leading organisation in Rajshahi and an important player in promoting women's rights and equality there. It has been active since 1989, with a focus on supporting the most vulnerable in society, such as harijans and ethnic minorities, but also street children, abused women, and victims of human trafficking. Norway supported ACD from 1993 to 2006. ACD makes extensive use of local resources. It activates cultural workers, has established committees to combat human trafficking, promotes local conflict solution using the traditional Shalisha system, and fights the practice of dowry.

The **Naripokkho Doorbar Network**. Naripokkho was established in 1983 as a voluntary organisation of professionals with experience from development programmes. Its aim is to promote a stronger gender perspective in economic and social policy. In preparation for the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995, it organised series of workshops, meetings,

and conferences that brought together close to 250 organisations. These formed the basis of the Doorbar network. After the Beijing Conference, this Naripokkho Doorbar Network received support from both Norway and Denmark to further develop and consolidate the network, which in 2008 had grown to 550 organisations.

Numerous other organisations all over the country have been – and are still – part of the social movement for women and women's rights in Bangladesh. Norway has supported at least 20-30 of these.

Organisations that work more broadly for human rights are also important for promoting gender equality. Norway has supported several such rights organisations, including **Ain o Shalish Kendra (ASK)**, one of the leading human rights organisations with an emphasis on legal assistance. **SAMATA** works to ensure that poor landless people have the right to land. **Manusher Jonno** is a joint mechanism that manages and distributes international support from UK / DFID and others to a wide field of human rights organisations.

In 2016, Norway ended its remaining agreements with the Bangladeshi women's and human rights organisations. Norway had started its gender engagement in close collaboration with the government, but ended up mainly supporting independent organisations. During the last period, most of the Norwegian support went to larger organisations that want to change attitudes, policies, and legislation, and to a lesser extent to social welfare organisations.



*The general conditions for most women in Bangladesh are dramatically better than fifty years ago, thanks to education, incomes, and greater awareness of rights and opportunities. (Photo: E. Rikter-Svensden)*

*Dr. Fauzia Moslem, president of the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, the country's largest women's organisation*

*“Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) is a voluntary and non-political mass organisation for women. We are pleased to have collaborated with Norway on a project to promote and secure women's human rights in the period 1999 to 2016. The project has helped to create greater awareness of women's rights and about violence against women and girls, and to build capacity in the women's movement.*

*Today, the women's movement has been accepted as a force for social change, and women's participation in the national development process is recognised as an absolute necessity.*

*Through this project, BMP has learned about the working systems and the principles and ethics of the Scandinavian countries. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad has warm feelings for the people and the Government of Norway, and wants to continue this relationship forever.”*

*Dr. Fauzia Moslem – President of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, 18 November 2021*

The general situation for women in 2022 is dramatically different from – and better than – the conditions in 1972, despite some setbacks in recent years. Nevertheless, there is a long way to go before there is real equality and equal rights in practice. The Bangladeshi women's movement, in combination with the new economic opportunities for women in working life, have been the main forces behind these positive changes. Norway's commitment and financial support have hopefully also made a positive contribution.



*Construction of dikes is one of the measures undertaken to prevent floods from causing major destructions, in a country strongly exposed to natural disasters including floods and cyclones. (Photo: UNDP)*

## **2.6 Natural disasters, forced migrations, and disaster preparedness**

### ***Floods and cyclones – earthquakes and landslides***

Most of Bangladesh is a fertile river delta that depends on annual floods to fertilise the soil and provide moisture. But the threat from major floods is imminent. Major floods inundated almost half the country in 1987 and 1988, and subsequent floods, as well as several cyclones, have caused great destruction killing thousands and causing enormous financial losses. During the most recent floods in 2015 and 2017, however, the damage was significantly less, thanks to improvements in warning and security measures.

Moreover, parts of Bangladesh are in an earthquake zone, while other parts are susceptible to landslides during heavy monsoon rains. Rising sea levels are leading to the penetration of salt into the groundwater and soil.

Climate change is expected to result in heavier and more irregular monsoon rains, more cyclones and rising sea levels. All of these increase the risk of natural disasters in Bangladesh. Therefore, the Bangladeshi authorities have for many years made efforts, nationally as well as locally, to increase disaster preparedness, improve risk management and constantly expand flood protection and other measures to protect against the destructive forces in nature.

Norway has contributed extra funds to emergency aid in the years of major natural disasters, and in some years has reallocated funds from other programmes where progress was slow. Norwegian emergency aid organisations such as the Norwegian Red Cross and Norwegian Church Aid have contributed emergency aid and reconstruction on several occasions. Their partners, including the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDP) and Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK), work with flood protection, warning systems and disaster preparedness, among other things.

### ***Disaster preparedness and early warning***

Norway also participated in the dialogue on the Flood Action Plan which was prepared under the leadership of the World Bank after the great floods in 1987 and 1988. The plan was criticised for its overfocus on strengthening riverbanks and for not paying sufficient attention to ensuring a fair distribution of costs and effects. Norway financed a study of the possible negative consequences of the plan. It was prepared by Shapan Adnan and published in 1991. This study received considerable attention. The plan was only partially implemented.

More recently, the Geological Survey of Bangladesh (GSB) and the Norwegian Geotechnical Institute (NGI) have collaborated since 2008, and together they have developed a simple warning system against landslides resulting from increased precipitation. It was first installed in the Chattogram Hills and later in other hilly areas. At the request of UNDP, the system has also been installed in the Rohingya camps at Cox's Bazar.



Around one million Rohingya from Myanmar are living in temporary camps around Cox's Bazar. They also risk exposure to damaging floods, such as the one resulting from extraordinarily heavy monsoon rains in 2021. (Photo: Zia/ NRC)

In a parallel programme, the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) has collaborated with the Meteorological Institute in Oslo since 2010 to introduce better weather models and modern forecasting tools. The Meteorological Institute has developed a separate visualisation tool – Digital ANALyse (Diana) – which combines all types of meteorological data, thus making it easier to predict the development of cyclones, among other things. This was of great benefit when the cyclone Amphan hit in May 2020, and Bangladeshi authorities managed to evacuate 2.4 million people ahead of the cyclone.

From 2010 to 2015, Norway joined in co-financing the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme CDMP, managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief. This programme seeks to combine early warning with effective disaster preparedness. It has increased awareness of risk reduction and preventive action, including in relation to long-term climate change. The programme has worked across 14 ministries and directorates and collaborated with 40 vulnerable districts.

The goal was a paradigm shift in thinking by incorporating risk management into all planning. Models have now been developed for how climate adaptation in local communities can best be achieved in a number of areas. The government, UNDP and other international partners continue to fund this demanding work and develop relevant measures to counteract the effects of natural disasters.

Bangladesh will still be one of the most vulnerable countries in the world as climate change leads to major changes in the weather patterns and as the sea rises.

### *The Rohingya crisis*

In August 2017, a large influx of Rohingya arrived from neighbouring Myanmar after being forced to flee their homes in the Rakhine district. By the end of the year, nearly one million people had sought refuge in camps in and around Cox's Bazar. This was – and continues to be – a major humanitarian crisis that far exceeds Bangladesh's capacity to take care of people seeking protection. International humanitarian organisations and the UN system, led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), have therefore provided technical and financial assistance.

The Norwegian Red Cross and Norwegian Church Aid had been actively involved in previous humanitarian disasters in Bangladesh. They returned quickly when this crisis arose. In addition, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Redd Barna (Save the Children Norway) mobilised additional grants of aid funds from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from collections in Norway. In total, Norway contributed more than USD 40 million to this crisis during 2017-20, and more allocations have been made in 2021.

No one knows when conditions in Myanmar will improve and the Rohingya can return to their homes. Until this is possible, the international community must continue to assist and relieve Bangladesh of this additional burden.

# NORWAY

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*Bangladesh was the second largest supplier of clothing to the Norwegian market in 2020. Nearly 10 percent of all imported garments were produced in Bangladesh.*



# 3

## BUSINESS, TRADE AND INVESTMENTS

### 3.1 Trade is multiplied, and Bangladesh has a large export surplus

*During the first decades, commercial relations between Norway and Bangladesh were very limited. This has changed dramatically since the turn of the millennium, especially in the last decade. One could say that the old slogan “Trade – not Aid” has been realised. While development assistance may still be useful and relevant in some areas, the main content of the relationship has moved in other directions, “beyond aid”.*

***Bangladesh has imported intermediate goods, equipment for the energy sector, and other industrial goods***

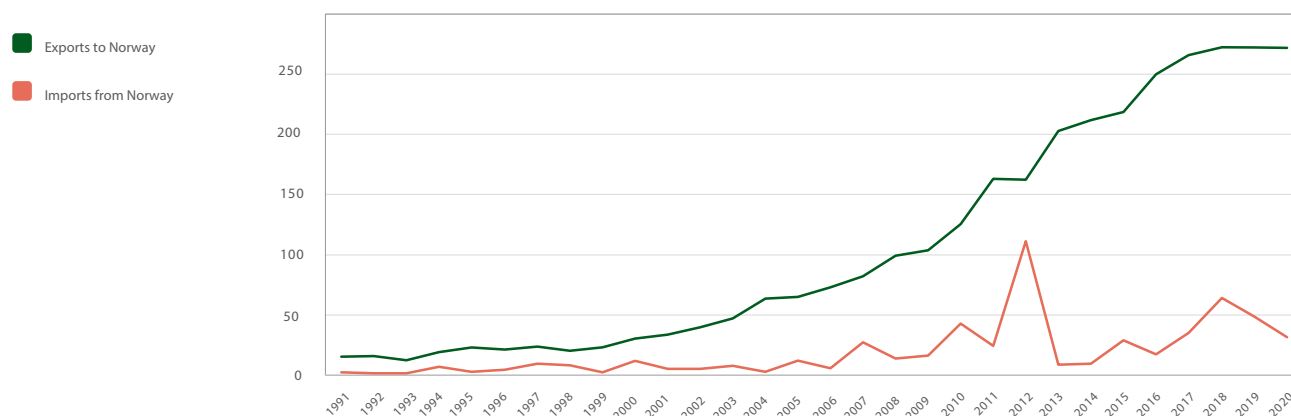
Norway’s exports to Bangladesh started with commodity aid which consisted of inputs to agriculture

and industry, as described in chapter 2. Norway supplied mostly fertilisers, wood pulp, iron, zinc, and other metals. These exports more or less stopped at the end of the 1980s, when commodity aid was discontinued in favour of other forms of aid.

In the years that followed, the volume of exports remained low at around or below USD 5 million annually. Some years fish and fish products were exported, some years grain products – possibly as emergency aid – and other years animal feed. Norway has also supplied paper, wooden poles for the power grid and other equipment for development aid projects even when these were not tied to procurement in Norway.

In the year 2000, there was a small jump in exports when Bergen Engines delivered the first generators to Bangladesh. This was followed by large deliveries of diesel generators between 2007 and 2012 and a new

Total trade between Bangladesh and Norway 1991-2020 (million USD)





*Bangladesh has become a major exporter of textiles and ready-made garments to the whole world. (Photo: E. Rikter-Svendsen)*



*Many women are working in the clothing industry and earn salaries. This has been an important contributing factor to poverty reduction, and improved status of women. (Photo: Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka)*

major contract signed in 2017. Bergen Engines has been the biggest exporter from Norway to Bangladesh over the past decade.

Exports of other goods such as telecommunications equipment, electrical machines, plastics, etc. vary somewhat from year to year and do not seem to be linked to long-term supply agreements. Bangladesh imports no Norwegian oil and gas and very little fish, Norway's largest export items. It is thus not a big export market for Norway, but it is important enough for those involved.

### ***Bangladesh is a major supplier of clothing – including to Norway***

Meanwhile, Bangladeshi exports to Norway have grown tremendously and have been clearly higher than imports since 1986. Prior to this, exports were almost negligible. But from USD 4 million in 1986, export figures passed USD 150 million in 2011, rising to more than USD 270 million in 2020, as shown in the figure. Clothes and accessories totally dominate this figure, representing around 90 per cent of the export value.

The strong growth in clothing exports from Bangladesh was a result of the emergence of a textile and clothing industry from the mid-1980s. There were several reasons for this, including active government policies, the participation of Bangladeshi entrepreneurs and South Korean investors, the availability of a workforce willing to work for relatively low wages, and Bangladesh's status as one of the "least developed countries" (LDCs). Products from Bangladesh

are duty free when imported into Europe and the United States, with some exceptions. Bangladesh is now in a process whereby it may graduate from the LDC category in 2026, and this may have an impact on customs and tariff levels.

All the major international clothing manufacturers have established themselves in Bangladesh, either directly or through production and supply agreements. Scandinavian companies like Hennes & Mauritz came early, while large Norwegian companies such as Varner and Helly-Hansen followed suit.

In 2020, Bangladesh was the second largest supplier of clothing to the Norwegian market after China. Nearly 10 per cent of all clothes imported for Norwegian consumers are produced in Bangladesh. Few people, if any, would have predicted this 20 years ago, and even fewer 50 years ago.

From Bangladesh's perspective, Norway is not an important market. Although Norwegian consumers have strong purchasing power, Norway is a small country with only 5.4 million inhabitants, and only 1-2 per cent of Bangladesh's clothing exports go to Norway.





*The agreement between international textile industry and international trade unions have resulted in improved fire and building safety in many factories producing for exports. (Photo: Henrik Width)*

*The production hall in AKH ECO Apparels Ltd (April 2017). Many factory owners realise that the meeting safety requirements and improved work conditions result in more international orders. (Photo: Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka)*

## *Debates in Norway about safety and working conditions in the clothing industry*

*There has been a long-running public debate in Norway about the importation of clothing from Bangladesh, especially after the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory buildings in 2013, where more than 1,000 workers lost their lives. Critics cite not only dangerous work conditions but also low wages, long working days, and a lack of trade union organisation. Many argue that the international textile and clothing industry has a lot of responsibility and should pose even stricter requirements on manufacturers and follow these up better.*

*Following the Rana Plaza accident, most international companies entered into an agreement with several international unions to demand better fire and building safety in factories. This agreement – Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh – included an independent inspection body that was established to follow up the requirements for better safety. The agreement has since been renegotiated and renewed, most recently in 2021.*

*Several reports show that fire and building safety have improved since 2013. Many factory owners also realise that meeting the requirements results in more orders and increased production. Subcontractors are also supposed to adhere to the same requirements, but follow-up is more complicated.*

*The criticism in Norway has so far not had any consequences for imports of clothes from Bangladesh. But critics are keeping an eye on developments and the actions taken by the clothing industry including the follow-up of the Accord agreements, as well as general working conditions and salaries. Provided conditions remain acceptable, Norwegian consumers will continue to buy affordable and nice clothes, and Bangladesh will earn foreign currency from its exports – including to Norway.*



*The Norwegian company Telenor is majority owner of Grameenphone, the largest mobile operator in Bangladesh. Its logo is visible practically everywhere. (Photo: Sidsel Bleken)*



*Mobile phones are popular – all over the world. (Photo: E. Rikter-Svendsen)*

### 3.2 Norwegian companies in Bangladesh

*There were no Norwegian companies with commercial interests in Bangladesh at the time of independence in 1971 and it took a long time before private or state-owned companies wanted to get involved. But since the 1990s, interest has increased. Some large Norwegian companies, as well as several medium-sized ones, now have an active collaboration with Bangladeshi partners either through direct investments and jointly owned companies or long-term sales agreements.*

#### ***Grameenphone – the largest mobile operator in the country***

Grameenphone is the biggest and most visible Norwegian investment in Bangladesh. The Norwegian company Telenor is the majority shareholder of Grameenphone, which is the largest mobile operator in Bangladesh with over 80 million subscribers and more than 2,000 full-time employees. The company is one of the biggest taxpayers in the country. The Bangladeshi Grameen Telecom (GTC), which is co-owner of Grameenphone, is an ideal (not-for-profit) company and together they have succeeded in spreading mobile communications to most villages in all parts of the country. This collaboration has been exciting and innovative, but not always as easy.

The story of Grameenphone started when a Bangladeshi entrepreneur, Iqbal Quadir, contacted several European mobile operators to find a partner who would help expand mobile telephony to the countryside,

not just the central and urban areas. Telenor, which was then a wholly state-owned company, showed an interest. With Quadir's help, Grameenphone was founded jointly by Telenor (62 %) and GTC (38 %). The company was launched publicly on Independence Day on 26 March 1997. Telenor believed that this was a risky engagement and secured a loan and a bank guarantee from Norad. They also borrowed from the World Bank's IFC, the Asian Development Bank, the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC), and Norfund.

The development of Grameenphone began slowly but was helped by an agreement to lease capacity in Bangladesh Railway's fibre-optic cables. These cables had previously been financed by Norwegian development assistance in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank. But most important was the collaboration with Grameen Bank, which already had a network of loan customers in most villages.

As early as 1997, Grameenphone and the Grameen Bank introduced a programme for "village phones" managed by the GTC and available only to Grameen Bank's customers. Individual women got loans to buy a mobile phone. With this phone, they sold telephone services to the people of the village, almost like a living "telephone kiosk". This contributed to direct employment for women and strengthened the economy for many farmers and villagers who could utilise the mobile network and gain better knowledge of the market. There are fewer such "village phone ladies" today as most Bangladeshis now have access to their own mobile phones. According to GTC there may still be around 1.8 million of them, spread over at least 83,000 villages.



*Grameen Bank customers could buy a phone from Grameenphone and become “Village Phone Ladies”, selling talk-time to other villages. (Photo: Grameen Telephone Company GTC)*



*Several Norwegian clothing companies produce substantial parts of their collection in Bangladesh. (Illustration photo: AdobeStock)*

### *The conflict over ownership between Telenor and Grameen Telecom*

*When Grameen Bank and Muhammad Yunus were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, a great deal of attention in Norway was drawn to the disagreement that had arisen over the ownership and future control of Grameenphone. Yunus referred to a letter of intent entered into by Telenor and the GTC stating that the majority of shares would eventually be transferred to Bangladeshi owners, to which Telenor no longer agreed. He had a vision that Grameenphone should become a social company, with profits being reinvested in the company or used for other social purposes rather than being paid to the owners. Telenor, which by then had been partially privatised, could not accept this either. Yunus had several conversations with Telenor’s management, raised the issue in his Nobel acceptance speech, and met with several Norwegian politicians.*

*The conflict was eventually resolved as there was no legally binding agreement on the transfer of ownership. In 2009, Grameenphone was listed on the stock exchange. By the end of 2020, Telenor’s share had been somewhat reduced to 55.8 per cent, while Grameen Telecom owned 34.2 per cent. The remaining 10 per cent was dispersed among several Bangladeshi and foreign owners, including the Norwegian Pension Fund Global which owns 1 per cent.*

Grameenphone is still the largest mobile operator in Bangladesh, with a wide and modern network that reaches almost the entire country. They continue to work on several new initiatives, including teaching children responsible internet use; extending the network to reach all the islands in the coastal zone, as well as fishermen and boats; reducing their own carbon footprint; and generally appearing to be a responsible company that complies with high standards.

### *Varner is a major clothing manufacturer*

The Norwegian clothing company Varner is one of the largest in Scandinavia with several well-known brands such as Cubus, Carlings, Bik Bok and Dressmann. They have been producing in Bangladesh since the end of the 2000s and established their own purchasing office there in 2012. Today, Bangladesh is the main production country for Varner. Their production accounts for a large share of Norwegian clothing imports from Bangladesh.



*Generators from Bergen Engines (Norway) are producing more than five percent of the electricity supply in Bangladesh. These are installed in Chattogram. (Photo: Bergen Engines)*



*The Norwegian company Porsgrund Porselænsfabrikk (PP) is producing several of its collections in Bangladesh (Photo: Kristin T. Wæringsaasen)*

Varner found that conditions in Bangladesh were well suited for production and export of ready-made garments, facilitated by the government and modern factories with a stable supply of labour. An increasing proportion of their production was therefore moved to Bangladesh, while production in other countries such as China was reduced. Today, 29 suppliers with 74 factories in Bangladesh produce almost half of all the clothes Varner sells in Norway and other European countries.

Like most international clothing companies, Varner chose not to own the factory plants but to order production from existing factories. They found, however, big differences between the factories. At first, local agents negotiated production agreements which also stipulated minimum safety, environmental and labour conditions. This proved not to be sufficient, and several factories made use of unserious subcontractors. Once Varner established a direct presence, they made a careful review of all their agreements and carried out new feasibility studies for potential suppliers. These are now followed up regularly.

Varner has joined the agreements entered into between the international clothing companies and international trade unions on fire and building safety and other measures to improve the safety of workers. They were actively involved in the revision of the agreements in 2018 and have signed the new 2021 agreement.

In line with the company's ambitions for enhanced sustainability and its own ethical guidelines, Varner sets comprehensive requirements for safe workplaces, responsible treatment of dyes and other environmental requirements. In addition, they make sure that there is no child labour, that working hours are regulated, and that there is a right to organise in a trade union. This is

followed up by constant inspections, which unfortunately still reveal deviations from agreements and standards. The company is affiliated with Ethical Trade Norway. In Bangladesh, they have collaborated with Save the Children and UNICEF to strengthen children's rights.

### ***Bergen Engines contributes to power supply***

Bergen Engines has supplied power machines that produce more than five per cent of Bangladesh's electricity supply. The generators are produced by Bergen Engines located at Hordvikneset just outside of Bergen in western Norway. This factory supplies diesel and gas generators, ship engines and other engines and until 2021 was wholly owned by British Rolls-Royce.

In 2001, Bergen Engines delivered the first Rolls-Royce generators to Bangladesh. Several deliveries have been made subsequently. In 2017, they announced a new major contract for deliveries to two power plants of 112 and 150 MW, respectively. The early deliveries were generators for steel mills and other large companies that needed additional and emergency power. The new power plants will produce electricity for the grid to help cover the power deficit and the growing demand in the country. Bergen Engines Bangladesh was established to follow up on these deliveries and assist with maintenance and spare parts.

### ***Norwegian porcelain companies produce in Bangladesh***

Porsgrund Porselænsfabrikk (PP) is a well-known brand of quality porcelain in Norway. Today it produces many of its series in Bangladesh. The company was established in 1885 and is Norway's only producer of high fired porcelain. PP still has some production in



Two porcelain companies PP (picture) and Wiik & Walsøe both found high quality producers for their products. (Photo: Kristin T. Wæringsaasen)



The solar energy company Scatec has plans for a solar park in Nilphamari. (Illustration photo: AdobeStock)

its hometown of Porsgrunn, although most production has been moved to Germany or other countries, including Bangladesh. The manufacturers in Bangladesh have proven that they can deliver products of high quality. A local agent monitors production, performs quality control, and assists with shipments to Norway.

Another Norwegian design manufacturer of porcelain products, **Wiik & Walsøe**, has followed suit and now produces parts of its collection in Bangladesh. They found good craftsmen with a sense of quality and detail.

### ***Nordic Woods supplies wooden poles for power and telephone lines***

When Norad began supporting rural electrification in the early 1990s, someone suggested that wooden poles should be used instead of the traditional ones made of concrete or steel. Wooden poles are easier to mount in the delta landscape and have a superior strength to weight ratio. They are also clearly more climate friendly. The local tree trunks were porous and easily eaten by termites. Therefore, slow-growing pine pillars from Norway were better suited after being treated.

The experiment with imported wooden poles was successful, and this became an important part of the Rural Electrification Board (REB)'s development of the rural power grid. In 2004, the company Nordic Woods was established as a joint venture between Solør Treimpregnering and East Coast Trading (Pvt) Ltd to import and prepare wooden poles for delivery to REB.

The company continues to import wooden poles from Norway and now also from Finland and the

USA. Nordic Woods has three plants for impregnating and treating wood in Khulna. In addition to poles, it also produces railway sleepers; furniture such as chairs, tables, beds and cabinets; exhibition shelves and much more. Nordic Wood currently (2021) has around 350 employees in Dhaka and Khulna.

### ***Scatec plans to produce solar energy***

Today, close to 60 per cent of Bangladesh's energy supply is generated from natural gas and the rest from oil, coal, and some hydropower. The government wanted to increase the share of renewable energy to 10 per cent in 2021, but it had only reached 3 per cent by 2020. The Norwegian company Scatec has been involved since 2017 and aims to build a 62 MW solar park in Nilphamari in the north-western corner of Bangladesh. This is a relatively small but still important addition to the electricity supply.

Norad has contributed to this project by subsidising several preparatory studies since 2016 and has provided funds for linking the plant to the main grid. Scatec plans to build, own, and operate the plant itself, together with a local partner and the state power company Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB). BPDB has also entered into a long-term power purchase agreement for electricity from the project. Despite these preparations, this project is on hold (as of late 2021), and it is uncertain when it will be implemented.

### ***Business Matchmaking yielded mixed results***

When cooperation with Bangladesh was reorganised in 2008, it was decided that a Business Matchmaking Programme (BMMP) should be promoted. This



*PolyConcrete is a Norwegian-owned company that produces polymere concrete building materials. (Photo: PolyConcrete)*

programme supports Norwegian companies that are interested in partnerships in developing countries and has been implemented with some success in other Asian and African countries. In Bangladesh, it was implemented by Innovation Norway in collaboration with the embassy. There were positive expectations since Bangladeshi private business was growing and was interested in international partners.

BMMP in Bangladesh started with a round of visits in 2011 followed by a second round in 2013-16. A total of 29 Norwegian companies participated, most of them relatively small. When the programme ended, only six of these companies had established some form of business agreement. These included cultivation and export of flowers, a printing company, production of work wear, mini-grids, fire extinguishing equipment, and contract production of porcelain.

The lessons learned from the two phases of the BMMP confirmed that there is a potential for partnership between Norwegian and Bangladeshi companies, but there are also big challenges. The Norwegian companies were small or medium-sized and had few resources to invest. Many were ill-prepared for the great cultural and technological differences, and some lacked sufficient motivation. The Bangladeshi companies were also not always well prepared, and some showed little willingness to innovate. Many had a low technological level and were not quality-conscious. In addition, there were many bureaucratic challenges in relation to the authorities, long distances, and language barriers.

Experience indicates that this kind of programme is demanding on both sides. Time will tell whether the



*Jotun is one of the world's largest paint companies. In March 2021 Norway's ambassador Espen Rikter-Svendsen (with microphone) was present at the ceremony marking the construction of a new paint factory in Narayanganj. (Photo: Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka)*

government's policy for a better investment climate will make it easier for Norwegian and Bangladeshi companies to find each other and whether there are more Norwegian companies that are robust and risk-willing enough to seize the opportunity.

### *Several Norwegian companies are active – and one has been sold*

**Jotun** is a Norwegian-owned global paint company, the 9th largest in the world. The company has a sales office in Dhaka and in March 2021 it started construction of a new paint factory in the Meghna Economic Zone in Narayanganj. This factory will supply paint for all kinds of use, including ship paint.

**DNV** (formerly Det norske Veritas) is a global company specialising in quality assurance and risk management, and the world's largest in ship classification. DNV has an office in Chattogram that mainly works in connection with shipbuilding and maritime activities.

**Poly Concrete** is owned by Norwegian Polybo AS and produces polymer concrete, which is a construction material composed of cement, water and recycled styrofoam balls. The product is much lighter than concrete and is used for wall and ceiling construction, among other uses. Poly ConCrete was established in Bangladesh in 2011.

**NRD Bangladesh** was established in 2017 as the regional South Asia office for Norway Registers Development (NRD). It is a global consulting company for ICT services, especially in public registers such as population registers, electoral registers, and real estate registers.



*Clean energy is one of the priority sectors for Norfund. In 2019 it organised a conference for Bangladeshi interested partners, together with the Nordic Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Bangladesh. (Photo: Kristin T. Wæringsaasen)*

Among other projects, it has been commissioned by the National Bangladesh Computer Council to develop a Computer Incident Response Team (CIRT) – an emergency team that handles data security events.

**Cefalo** is a Norwegian IT development company with a staff of over 150 employees in Dhaka as of 2020. Most customers are Norwegian, and Cefalo assists them with finding data engineers in Bangladesh who can implement further development of their computer systems.

**Scancem International** was a Swedish-Norwegian company when it was established in Bangladesh in 1998 with support from Norad, Norfund and the Nordic Development Fund (NDF). Scancem built a new cement factory near Dhaka and bought into a local business. This was the first major international investment in the cement industry in Bangladesh, and the company is today one of the leaders in the industry. Scancem was acquired by the German company Heidelberg Cement in 1999. Norfund sold out in 2003 while the loan from Norad was repaid in 2008.

### 3.3 Large financial investments from Norwegian government funds

#### *Norfund – the Norwegian Investment Fund for Developing Countries*

Norfund has been active in Bangladesh since 2010 and had active investments and loans totalling around USD 60 million in 11 companies at the end of 2020. Norfund started in Bangladesh by investing

*The Norwegian Pension Fund Global, better known as “the oil fund”, has invested more than USD 220 million in Bangladeshi companies. It is by law and specific regulations required to invest responsibly.*

USD 15 million in share capital and loans to BRAC Bank, a commercial bank with a social profile. In 2015, the BRAC Bank had more than 100,000 small and medium-sized enterprises as customers. Norfund has since reduced its commitment to this bank somewhat while increasing its investments in several other funds and financial institutions, including funds for renewable energy. In 2020, Norfund’s largest involvement was in Mutual Trust Bank, which has an active commitment to small and medium-sized companies and especially supports women entrepreneurs.

#### *The Norwegian Pension Fund Global (SPU) – the “oil fund”*

The Pension Fund Global is made up of savings from Norway’s income from its oil and gas resources and is the world’s largest sovereign fund. SPU made its first investments in Bangladesh in 2015 and since then has invested more than USD 220 million in 20 companies. The largest investments have been made in the mobile phone company Grameenphone and in the drug manufacturer Square Pharmaceuticals. The SPU has also invested more than USD 22 million in BRAC Bank and in another pharmaceutical company, Beximco Pharma, which is owned by BEXIMCO, the largest multi-industrial group in Bangladesh. In line with its global policy, the SPU owns only a small share of each of these companies. In only one of them does the SPU own more than 4 per cent of the share capital.



*Around twenty Norwegian non-governmental organisations have been engaged in cooperation with Bangladeshi partners. Research institutes and cultural institutions have also established partnerships. The two cities Kristiansand and Rajshahi forged a lasting friendship agreement in 1979. A henna festival such as this one may reinforce personal bonds.*



# 4

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## COLLABORATION THAT ENGAGES INDIVIDUALS

### 4.1 Civil society and non-governmental organisations

*Civil society is diverse and has been very important for development in Bangladesh. Over time, Norway has supported several national and local organisations that work to reduce poverty, promote equality, strengthen the rights of vulnerable groups, and generally strengthen the role of civil society. Among the best known are Grameen Bank and BRAC, both of which have made a huge effort to enhance rural development and reduce poverty. In this chapter, only projects involving Norwegian organisations are mentioned; direct support to Bangladeshi organisations is discussed in other chapters.*

From the Norwegian side, church-based organisations have been particularly active in Bangladesh. The Santal Mission was the only one present at independence in 1971. Their activities in the areas of Dinajpur and Rajshahi made it easier for other Norwegian aid organisations such as the Strømme Foundation and Norwegian Church Aid to gain ground. In addition, the youth organisation YWCA / YMCA and the Salvation Army have a long history of cooperation with their sister organisations.

Several other Norwegian organisations have cooperated with their sister organisations for shorter or longer periods, including the Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted, the Association for the Hard of Hearing, and the Association of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities. Care Norway has supported women's health projects since the 1980s. The Norwegian Bangladesh Association funded construction of an

orphanage and has continued to fund maintenance and stipends. Plan Norway has recently started a programme to combat child marriage.

In total, around twenty Norwegian organisations have been engaged in cooperation with Bangladeshi partners. Below are some illustrations of comprehensive and long-term partnerships.

#### ***The Santal Mission – now Normisjon: The oldest of the Norwegian organisations***

The Santal Mission was a Norwegian independent mission organisation that started in British India in 1867 among the Santals, an ethnic minority. In the early 20th century, the mission expanded into Dinajpur and Rajshahi in present-day Bangladesh. Much later, in 1967, a Scottish Presbyterian mission field in Sylhet was transferred to the Santal Mission. Sylhet is a central area for tea growing, and many of the tea-pickers are Santals who have immigrated from India.

During the war in 1971, millions fled to India and the destruction was extensive. However, reconstruction efforts began in 1972. The Santal Mission became a central point of contact for several Norwegian emergency aid programmes. More relief efforts followed the major floods of 1974 and the simultaneous famine in northern and north-western Bangladesh.

Independent national churches were eventually established with the support of the Santal Mission. Grants from Norad and other organisations helped to build health posts, hospitals, schools, and training



Norwegian sociologist Bodil Maal used the experiences from Grameen Bank to develop a concept for network credits adopted to Norwegian conditions. Ms Maal (right) with the Grameen Bank founder Muhammad Yunus in 2009. (Photo: Maren Maal)



Mr Sølve Næss-Holm from the Santal Mission/Normisjon was not permitted to evangelise among non-Christians, but could meet with the local population for friendly conversations. Picture from 2011. (Photo: Normisjon)

### *The Grameen Bank concept became “network credit” in Norwegian coastal municipalities*

*There is only one known case where a Bangladeshi initiative has inspired a completely new programme in Norway, scattered over large parts of the country. The ideas from Grameen Bank laid the foundation for a programme of “network credits”.*

*The Norwegian sociologist Bodil Maal worked among poor women in rural Bangladesh for several years in the 1980s and saw how Grameen Bank succeeded with its microcredit programme for women. Early in the 1990s Maal convinced the Women’s Committee of the Fishing Industry to develop a concept of network credit based on the ideas of Grameen Bank, adapted to Norwegian conditions. The idea was to encourage entrepreneurship among women in coastal municipalities in Norway and make fishing-dependent communities more attractive for women to stay.*

*Kvinnebanken (the Women’s Bank) was established in 1992 in the municipalities of Moskenes and Flakstad in Lofoten in northern Norway. The participating women were organised into groups of five or seven and supported each other socially and professionally. They had access to loans and guidance to start their own businesses related to crafts and handicrafts, tourism, food production and much more.*

*Eventually, the idea spread to other municipalities, and 16 years later there were a total of 265 active groups with 1,320 members in eight different counties. The programme was managed by Innovation Norway and was one of its tools for women entrepreneurs. An evaluation of the programme in 2008 found many positive results, although it also recommended a number of improvements. The programme was nevertheless closed down a few years later.*

*Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank, visited Kvinnebanken in Lofoten and other network credit groups several times in the 1990s and again in 2006 when he received the Nobel Peace Prize. He was very impressed that this concept was viable in Norwegian coastal municipalities that are so different from the villages in Bangladesh.*

centres in connection with these churches. Norad provided grants inter alia to a nurse training school in Rajshahi and to a comprehensive health programme

in Sylhet. The organisation Sacred Welfare Foundation was formed in Sylhet to conduct health and education programmes and to disseminate microcredit and other



*The Norwegian missionary society Normisjon (previously the Santal Mission) is organising a rice-bank project to protect the rice harvest and secure fair distribution of rice among Santals in Dinajpur. (Photo: Tor A. Torhaug)*

welfare measures for the poor and vulnerable minorities. In Dinajpur, the Northern Development Foundation operates basic and vocational education and rural development. More recently, programmes for local media development, and training in human rights and conflict management have been added.

The history of the Santal Mission confirms that there were often tensions between the local churches and the relief and development programmes. The congregations did not always have the competence or capacity to manage comprehensive programmes and envy, as well as corruption, could develop. At the same time, some felt that the aid projects shifted the focus away from spiritual work. The development projects were therefore made into separate organisations. However, this too was challenging as these organisations paid higher wages than the congregations and attracted the most competent people.

In 2001 the Santal Mission merged with Norsk Luthersk Indremisjon (Lutheran Home Mission) to become Normisjon. The main purpose of the mission is to promote Christianity and support Christian congregations. The organisation faces limitations, however, as active evangelisation is not allowed in Bangladesh, although there is freedom to practice religion. The number of Christians is increasing very slowly, and in some areas Christians and other non-Muslims face persecution and discrimination locally. But in parallel with the religious side of its work, Normisjon has established schools, health services and other activities that serve everyone in the area regardless of religion. This social and development work is appreciated by the government.



*Two coastal communities Galachipa Upazila and Flakstad municipality initiated a friendship agreement in 2007. Many ideas were generated during mutual visits, and Flakstad facilitated financial support to Galachipa after the cyclone Sidr. This delegation was given warm sweaters during their visit to Norway in 2009. (Photo: Per Eidsvik)*

### ***Norwegian Church Aid: Emergency aid, reconstruction, and local organisation***

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) is one of the largest Norwegian aid organisations. Since 1971, it has supported two main partners in Bangladesh as well as several smaller organisations.

Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services (RDRS) was actually founded by a Norwegian missionary and aid worker, Olav Hodne, when he worked there for the Lutheran World Federation in 1971-72. After independence, the first task was to assist in reconstruction. Gradually, activities were expanded into agriculture, health, and projects to strengthen women's economic opportunities. RDRS became the leading development organisation in north-western Bangladesh.

RDRS also developed a programme to organise many small local groups into larger "federations". These were inclusive and democratic and gradually became an important counterweight to local traditional rulers. During the 2011 elections, many people from the federations were elected to the local Union Parishad (Council) thanks to the training and experience they had received.

The Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) was founded in 1973 and also focused initially on post-war reconstruction. Gradually, activities were expanded to include formal and informal education and rural development. CCDB works in many flood-prone areas and has emphasised programmes to improve security through disaster warning and preparedness. This may involve



*The Norwegian aid worker and missionary Olaf Hodne headed the relief work for WLF among Bangladeshi refugees during the independence struggle and later founded the Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services. Hodne with his family in 1984. (Photo: Normisjon)*



*The “Shonglap” programme initiated by the Strømme Foundation has helped troubled teenage girls to obtain education, avoid early marriage, and strengthen their incomes and self-esteem. (Photo: The Strømme Foundation)*

***Olav Hodne** was a well-known Norwegian missionary and aid worker. In 1970 he was appointed head of the relief work of the Lutheran World Federation (WLF) among refugees in India and Bangladesh. He founded Rangpur Dinajpur Rehabilitation, later Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services (RDRS). He had previously worked for the Santal Mission, and later for the Strømme Foundation. He had also worked among the poor and homeless in Kolkata (India) and was nominated several times by Mother Theresa as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize.*

designating safe evacuation areas, raising the foundations of buildings and wells, and procuring rescue boats. They also encourage making information about climate change and promote concrete and practical solutions to future challenges.

In 2011, the NCA ended all its development programmes in Bangladesh. However, when the Rohingya from Myanmar arrived in Bangladesh in great numbers in 2017, the NCA returned with emergency aid.

***The Strømme Foundation: From microcredit to “shonglap”***

The aid organisation Strømme Foundation (Strømme-stiftelsen) was founded in 1976 in Kristiansand in southern Norway and has supported projects in Bangladesh since the late 1980s. It collects fund widely in Norway from individuals, private companies, and foundations. In total, these collections amount to more than 50 per cent of the organisation’s budget. The remaining funds come mainly from Norad.

In 1990, the foundation opened an office in Dhaka, its first location outside Norway. For over 30 years, it has supported Bangladeshi organisations with a particular emphasis on microfinance. In addition, it has contributed to its partners’ programmes for education, empowerment of women, minority rights and economic development in local communities. Several long-term partnerships were ended in 2018, however, after the foundation reorganised and revised its aid strategy.

A long-term collaboration with Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services (RDRS) has nevertheless continued since the reorganisation. The Strømme Foundation entered into new agreements with five other regional and local organisations in northern Bangladesh. One of these, Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK), works especially with people who live on sandbanks in the mid-river (the so-called char), where flood warnings and emergency preparedness, such as access to boats and secure warehouses, are particularly important.

The Strømme Foundation also promotes special education for children who drop out of regular schools.



*Women in difficult and destitute conditions get help to earn a living by producing for Sally Ann, a Salvation Army institution, which resell these products internationally. (Photo: Inger Marit Nygård, the Salvation Army)*



*Products from Sally Ann Bangladesh on display at the Nordic Club Christmas fair and bazaar in Dhaka. (Photo: Kristin T. Wæringsaasen)*

## *Social Work and Production for the Market: Sally Ann, the Salvation Army and Others*

*The Norwegian Salvation Army, in collaboration with its sister organisation in Bangladesh, has encouraged and supported women to make a living by producing traditional handicraft products. Since 1996, this production has been organised as Sally Ann Bangladesh Ltd. At the beginning of the 2000s, more than three hundred women – including former prostitutes – were busy making rugs, bags, cards, baskets, furniture and much more. However, the market among the emerging middle class was not large enough and most of the products ended up in stock.*

*Contacts were therefore established in Norway, where enthusiastic partners wanted to open new markets for Sally Ann products. In 2003, a store was opened at Majorstua in Oslo, with assistance from the flower shop Mester Grønn and the Kavli Foundation. At the opening ceremony, the Minister of International Development, Hilde Frafjord Johnson, stated that this was an important way for Norwegians involved in development aid to rethink their approaches.*

*The store in Oslo was nevertheless closed in 2013. It was too small. Instead, a new strategy was developed focused on collaboration with chain stores, corporate sales, online sales, and sales within the Salvation Army. At the same time, the name “Sally Ann” was replaced by “Others”, which has a stronger foothold in the history of the Salvation Army.*

*The “Others” organisation is currently anchored at the Salvation Army’s headquarters in London, while sales channels have been opened in the United States, Canada, and Denmark. Bangladesh is still the largest production country, but there are now also goods from Pakistan, Kenya, and Indonesia.*



*Children and youth with disabilities greet visitors from Kristiansand welcome to Rajshahi. (Photo: Dag Vige)*

*Contributions from Kristiansand are funding water supply to poor neighbourhoods in Rajshahi. (Photo: Dag Vige)*

In this context, the “Shonglap” programme for teenage girls has proven to be suitable. This initiative seeks to strengthen girls’ position within the family, prevent early marriage, encourage them to continue their education, and help them start economic activities. Shonglap means “dialogue” in Bengali, and the programme has since been replicated by the Strømme Foundation in several countries in Asia and Africa.

### *Mayors who are friends*

**Kristiansand** municipality in southern Norway has had a friendship agreement with the city of **Rajshahi** in north-western Bangladesh since 1979, and this cooperation is still active. It started when a journalist and a photographer from the regional newspaper *Fædrelandsvennen* wrote about the enormous needs in Bangladesh after the liberation war in 1971. This prompted a fundraising campaign among the paper’s readers, and two years later a children’s hospital was opened in Rajshahi, funded by these collections. In 1979, the mayors of the two cities signed a friendship agreement, and each set up a committee to manage the cooperation.

Kristiansand’s inhabitants organise collections every three years where schools, kindergartens, businesses, sports clubs, congregations and other organisations collect money. These funds have been used inter alia for schooling, medical care and medicines for the poor, special measures for the disabled, and vocational training for abused girls. In addition, the municipality is donating its municipal emission credits for tree planting in Rajshahi. The municipality

has also allocated special grants to supply water to poor neighbourhoods and for a cancer hospital. It is Rajshahi’s own committee that proposes recipients and follows up the funds.

The collaboration also includes political contacts and mutual visits, such as exchanges for artists and professionals. In Kristiansand, this collaboration and fundraising provide a good entryway for teaching in schools and kindergartens. Churches hold friendship services and public meetings are organised to share knowledge and experience about Rajshahi, Bangladesh, and global development issues.

### *Exchange of young adults through FK Norway – now Norec*

FK Norway – previously *Fredskorpset* (the Norwegian Peace Corps) – is a voluntary exchange programme which finances the direct exchange of young workers between organisations in Norway and their partner organisations in developing countries. It also includes research institutions, municipalities, and the private sector. Exchanges may also take place between developing countries as a south-south cooperation, or in a triangle south-south-Norway. FK Norway was renamed in 2018 to become *Norec*, Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation, and is a body under the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Since the year 2000, several organisations with ties to Bangladesh have participated in the exchange programme. All exchanges are mutual, meaning that Norwegian participants work in Bangladesh for a period, while Bangladeshi participants work in Norway, or



*The city of Rajshahi donated a large 35 x 3.5-meter mosaic wall as a gift to Kristiansand's residents, in gratitude for cooperation and support of many years. It was uncovered in 2011 on the outside wall of Odderøya Hall, easily visible in a recreational area close to the city. It shows the first president of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and scenes from the liberation war.*

possibly in a third country. The participants in all programmes are young adults who spend up to a working year in very different cultures and environments. In this way, they will learn professionally as well as socially about cooperation across countries and cultures.

***Norwegian organisations that have or have had projects in Bangladesh:***

*CARE Norway*

*Norwegian Children and Youth Council*

*IMPACT Norway*

*Internasjonal Dugnad Norway (Service Civil International – SCI)*

*KFUK/ KFUM Global (YWCA/ YMCA)*

*Kristiansand Municipality / Rajshahi Committee*

*Norwegian Association for the Hard of Hearing*

*Norwegian Association of Midwives*

*Norwegian Association of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities*

*Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted*

*Norwegian Bangladesh Association*

*Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)*

*Norwegian Red Cross*

*Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)*

*Plan Norway*

*Redd Barna / Save the Children Norway*

*Student Christian Movement in Norway*

*The Salvation Army*

*The Santal Mission / Normisjon*

*The Strømme Foundation*



*The long-lasting cooperation between the Chr. Michelsen Institute and Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies resulted in several books that had an impact on the development and aid debates – and to some extent on policies.*

## 4.2 Research and university collaboration

A few Norwegian research communities have been conducting research on Bangladesh for a long time, often in collaboration with Bangladeshi researchers. However, an overview of early research interests and collaboration is difficult to find. A catalogue of Norwegian development research in 1984 included a total of 15 ongoing projects about Bangladesh. Almost all were within social science including anthropology, economics, and political science, while only one was of a technological nature. Three long-term cooperation programmes between Norwegian and Bangladeshi researchers are described below, including collaboration at the university level.

### *CMI, BIDS and CPD – social research with an applied perspective*

The collaboration between the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in Bergen and the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) began in the 1970s. It came about as a result of the personal friendship that developed between CMI director Just Faaland and prominent economists in the Bangladesh Planning Commission while Faaland was the World Bank Representative in Dhaka. After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, one of his ministers and several close associates, including the director of BIDS, were invited to CMI in Bergen for a period as visiting researchers.

The first agreement on institutional cooperation between CMI and BIDS was signed in 1978. The

cooperation received financial support from Norad to finance research and the exchange of researchers. In addition, BIDS was able to purchase its first computer and strengthen its library with books, magazines, and training. The agreement was subsequently extended several times until 1996, when it ended after almost twenty years.

Thanks to this agreement, researchers from BIDS and CMI have spent time as visiting scholars at each other's institutes, organised workshops and seminars, and shared experiences. This has resulted in several books, doctoral dissertations and scientific articles, as well as commissioned research and consultancy reports. This work has had an impact on thinking and dialogue about development policy, while the knowledge generated has been applied to advising on economic development policy in sectors such as agriculture, small industries and credit institutions, and on specific projects.

Meanwhile, the former BIDS director Rehman Sobhan launched a Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), where he made use of his contacts with CMI and other Norwegian institutes. In 2010, CMI and CPD entered into a three-year agreement. This agreement was policy-oriented and had two main pillars: inclusive growth, and democracy and human rights (good governance). The research reports were popularised as short policy briefs and discussed at seminars with broad participation from both political parties and other stakeholders in Dhaka. There was particular interest in the studies of local democracy and decentralisation, corruption in the political system, and the impact of corruption on economic growth.





*Student Sara Johannessen (with camera) on field work near Dhaka. She took part in the cooperation between the photojournalist institutions in Dhaka and Oslo. (Photo: Per Anders Rosenkvist)*



*Norwegian photographer Morten Krogvold is helping Norwegian and Bangladeshi students to select photographs for a student exhibition at the Chobi Mela in 2010. (Photo: Per Anders Rosenkvist)*

*“Norway was one of the first countries to support Bangladesh to promote the position of women. Norway has also financed art and culture that generally do not receive foreign funds. My personal connection with Norway has been mainly through research. I have always felt comfortable receiving Norwegian support as I always had full freedom. I greatly appreciated Norway’s cooperation and contributions to research, culture, and gender issues.”*



*Professor Rounaq Jahan,  
Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, November 2021*

### ***Photojournalism – an important tool for the free press***

Since 2003, there has been a close collaboration between the photojournalism schools in Oslo and Dhaka, a collaboration that also includes a wider network of contacts in South and East Asia. This was initiated by teachers at the school of journalism at Oslo University College (now Oslo Met) who established contact with the internationally renowned photojournalist Shahidul Alam and his Pathshala South Asia Media Institute.

The institute in Pathshala has become an important hub for photojournalism in the South Asian region. It has inter alia introduced a bachelor programme in association with the University of Dhaka. Shahidul

Alam had previously established a commercial photo gallery and archive, the Drik Picture Library, and launched one of Asia’s first international photo festivals, the Chobi Mela.

As part of this cooperation, students from the two institutions in Oslo and Dhaka have participated in a joint course with workshops and fieldwork. In the early years, the fieldwork was done in Bangladesh. But from 2011 the course was expanded so that students from both institutions could do fieldwork in a third country alongside students there. The programme has since been implemented in Nepal, India, Myanmar, Egypt, and China.

Around 100 students from Pathshala have received special tutoring from well-known photographers.



*Reza Rahman from Pathshala South Asia Media Institute was a proud guide at the Norad jubilee exhibition in 2002, for which he was the graphic designer. From left: Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, Reza Rahman (twice), Bondevik, then HRH Crown Prince Haakon and Minister of International Development Hilde Frafjord Johnson. (Photo: Mwanza Milinga)*

*Shahidul Alam had already made contacts in Norway through an exchange programme funded by FK Norway. Reza Rahman from Pathshala was the first volunteer to come to the small town Risør in southern Norway in an exchange with Sørvis Kommunikasjon. While in Risør, Reza won a competition to be the graphic designer for an exhibition that the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had commissioned for Norad's 50th anniversary in 2002. He thus became a proud guide to the exhibition for the Norwegian Crown Prince, Prime Minister Kjell Bondevik and Minister of International Development Hilde Frafjord Johnson. (See photos)*

They have become familiar with and have adapted to other cultures and have been exposed to new challenges in participating countries. At the same time, they have learned new techniques and acquired an international network. In many countries, journalism is a vulnerable profession, and photojournalists can document events that others want to keep hidden.

In August 2018, Shahidul was arrested after publishing photos of brutal police reactions to student demonstrations in Dhaka. The arrest led to major protests internationally, including by colleagues in Oslo, who argued that it represented a restriction on freedom of expression and an attack on journalistic integrity. After three months in prison, Shahidul was released on bail.

The photojournalism education in Oslo is now part of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Oslo Metropolitan University, and the collaboration with Pathshala has been ongoing for almost twenty years.

In parallel with this, but independent of Oslo University College, the well-known Norwegian photographer Morten Krogvold organised annual workshops for young photographers from Bangladesh and Nepal during the Chobi Mela for several years. Krogvold himself exhibited his work there in 2011.



*Health research institutions in Bangladesh and Norway cooperate on vaccines against infectious diseases. (Photo: AbodeStock)*



*Will Bangladeshi researchers in the future do research on social and economic challenges in Norway, such as questions about the future when the oil and gas production ends? The picture shows an oil platform in the North Sea. (Illustration photo)*

### ***Master's degree in public policy and administration***

The Department of Administration and Organization Theory at the University of Bergen has collaborated with North South University (NSU) in Dhaka since 2008 on a master's programme in public policy and governance, together with Tribhuvan University in Nepal and the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka. This has been financed through various support schemes from Norad and the Ministry of Education.

Within this master's programme, civil servants from Bangladesh and corresponding students from Nepal and Sri Lanka are offered a course in public administration and politics. The degree is awarded at NSU, which established a separate South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) in 2018. In addition, a PhD programme is offered at Tribhuvan University. To date (2021), the programme has welcomed 130 master's students and 11 PhD candidates. In addition, all participating institutes conduct postdoctoral research projects in connection with the collaboration.

The collaboration has clearly strengthened the institutes in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh through the development of institutional capacity for teaching and research. Meanwhile, SIPG has become an education and research centre that covers the whole of South Asia. It organises meetings, seminars and workshops on human rights, peace and conflict, climate challenges, etc. for the entire region. For the department in Bergen, the collaboration has provided inspiration and experience with the subject's application in Asian countries.

### ***Health research – and other research projects***

Since 2004, the Research Council of Norway has funded a total of 39 research projects relating to Bangladesh, most often in collaboration with Bangladeshi institutes. Of these, 15 major research programmes received funding for several years. Several key Bangladeshi and Norwegian institutions have participated.

The International Centre for Diarrhoea Disease Research (iccdr,b) has a collaboration with the Norwegian National Institute of Public Health and the University of Bergen regarding important research on vaccines, electronic health registers and infectious diseases. The University of Dhaka collaborates with the Norwegian Institute for Air Research (NILU) on air pollution from ship recycling in Chattogram. The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) conducts research related to Rohingya and the challenges facing stateless people in the border areas between Bangladesh and neighbouring countries. Several studies focus on climate and social change.

Researchers in Norway find it stimulating to cooperate with strong research environments in Bangladesh. Ongoing research mainly concerns challenges in Bangladesh but also addresses global topics. To date, few or no Bangladeshi researchers have studied and researched challenges in Norway. This will hopefully be done in the future.



*Somapura Mahavihara is an old Buddhist monastery from the 7th century and listed by UNESCO as world cultural heritage. Norway provided funds for its restoration.*



*Bangladesh puts strong emphasis on its cultural heritage which includes all art forms including dance and henna decorations. (Photo: Azmain Abir)*

### 4.3 Cultural heritage and cultural exchange

Norway began support to national cultural initiatives in the 1980s, and the first grant in Bangladesh went to a theatre in Dinajpur. Several small donations to local groups followed, and in 1988 the Bangladesh Centre of the International Theatre Institute received a grant to collect and record traditional ballads and drama.

This was in line with a broader understanding that development is not only about economic growth and poverty reduction but also includes cultural nation-building. Like Norway, Bangladesh puts great emphasis on national identity, cultural heritage, and its historical roots.

Cultural support was initially given directly to Bangladeshi institutions without any connection to Norwegian partners. However, this changed beginning in 1991 in accordance with new Norwegian guidelines which put more emphasis on cultural exchange for mutual learning and influence. Cultural support was also to be used to promote greater understanding of minorities and other vulnerable groups and their rights.

In line with these changes, in 1991-92 the Norad office in Dhaka prepared a special plan for cultural cooperation. A theatre in Khulna and a “children’s culture house” in Dhaka were among the projects that received support for a number of years. Norway’s National Touring Theatre together with the youth organisation Noregs Ungdomslag entered into a collaboration with the Khulna Theatre. For several years in

the 1990s LOSAUK (Lokenattya O Sanskritik Unnayan Kendra) was supported for its work using traditional village theatre to promote knowledge of the rights of vulnerable and excluded groups. It later also received support from the Norwegian Human Rights Fund for its work with the Hijra (transgender, eunuchs, and others in the “third gender”).

Support was also given to the restoration of the ancient Buddhist monastery from the 7th century, Somapura Mahavihara, in Paharpur. The monastery became a central educational institution in the 12th century and is listed by UNESCO as a world heritage site.

Another UNESCO project aimed to preserve and restore the old and abandoned city of Panam Nagar. Panam Nagar is one of the oldest cities still standing in Bangladesh and is a popular tourist destination. The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) had planned to provide technical assistance but withdrew its offer due to repeated delays on the part of Bangladesh. Meanwhile, NIKU entered into another agreement with Shilpakala Academy (below).

#### ***Restoration of works of art – Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy National Art Gallery***

The Shilpakala Academy, Bangladesh’s National Academy of Fine Arts, wanted to restore the collection of Bangladeshi contemporary art in the National Art Gallery and partnered with the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) from 2003 to 2010. The collection includes artworks from 1960



*The well-known painter Saffudin Ahmed (centre) discusses restoration of his painting with Jørgen Solstad (right) from NIKU. (Photo: NIKU)*



*Restoration of artworks is time-consuming. (Photo: Jørgen Solstad)*



*Some paintings were badly damaged by insects. This one, "Women" by Quamrul Hassan, was saved. (Photo: Jørgen Solstad)*

onwards with around 490 paintings and 190 other objects. Of these, about half were in poor or very poor condition and about to disintegrate as a result of moisture, fungi, insects, and other damage.

As part of the collaboration, four candidates received scholarships for master's studies abroad and were trained as specialists. Other employees received practical training in conservation and restoration through several extensive sessions. NIKU contributed advice and technical solutions regarding ventilation, air quality and pollution for a new building for the art gallery. The building included a new atelier for conservation. Norway financed the necessary equipment for this atelier which was officially opened in February 2010.

The collaboration has resulted in a number of valuable works of art being restored and secured for the future. At the same time, the National Art Gallery has a better qualified staff and a well-equipped workshop for continued conservation and safeguarding of its art treasures, and thus of the country's cultural history.

### ***Great interest in Henrik Ibsen's plays***

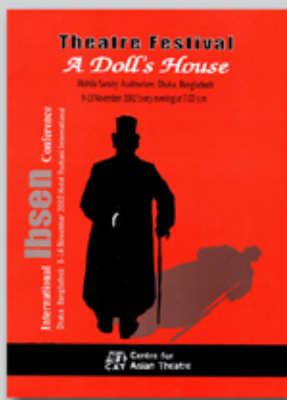
During the 1990s, theatre circles in Bangladesh took an increasing interest in the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) and his plays, which they felt were relevant to their own situation. Kamaluddin Nilu, the founder and director of the Centre for Asian Theatre (CAT), wanted to use Ibsen's dramas as a tool "to be able to show and describe social inequality and repressive forces in one's own society". CAT staged

its first Ibsen play, *Ghosts*, in 1996, adapted to the current situation in Bangladesh.

With support from Norway, CAT organised the first international Ibsen seminar in Dhaka in 1997 with participation from Europe and Asia. The main theme was gender roles in Ibsen's plays. This was a sensitive subject, which was illustrated during the next international Ibsen conference in 2002. The seminar was centred around the play *A Doll's House* and was completed as planned, but the coalition government cancelled all the planned performances.

During the 2000s, the collaboration with the Ibsen Centre at the University of Oslo and the Ibsen House in Ibsen's hometown of Skien developed further. The first Ibsen biography in Bangla was published in 2001, and several of his plays were translated and published. In 2006, an international festival was organised in Dhaka to mark the 100-year anniversary of Ibsen's death.

In 2009, the Centre for Asian Theatre in collaboration with the national art academy Shilpakala Academy and the Centre for Ibsen Studies organised another international Ibsen festival, this time over twelve days. In an address to the festival, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina emphasised that Ibsen's work is of great relevance to Bangladesh, especially to the struggle for women's rights. The festival also included guest performances of Ibsen productions in India, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan, and Egypt, and thus confirmed the continuing cultural and political interest in Ibsen's drama.



The theatre circles in Dhaka became very interested in the plays by Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. They organised international Ibsen conferences and festivals in 1997, 2002, 2006 and in 2009.

Inaugural ceremony for the International Ibsen Conference and Theatre Festival 2009. Front row (from right) Professor Kabir Chowdhury, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, and Ambassador Ingebjørg Steffring. (Photo: Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka)

*“Clearly, the issues which Ibsen raised in his plays – such as the freedom of the individual, man-woman relationships, religious fanaticism, freedom of speech, truth, hypocrisy and the contradictions between the interests of the individual and those of the larger society – are as important and relevant for our contemporary global world as they were when the plays were written more than a hundred years ago.”*

*Kamaluddin Nilu, former secretary general and artistic director of the Centre for Asian Theatre, in his welcome speech to the participants at the International Ibsen Seminar and Theatre Festival in 2009 in Dhaka.*



***End of special grants for culture – will cultural cooperation continue?***

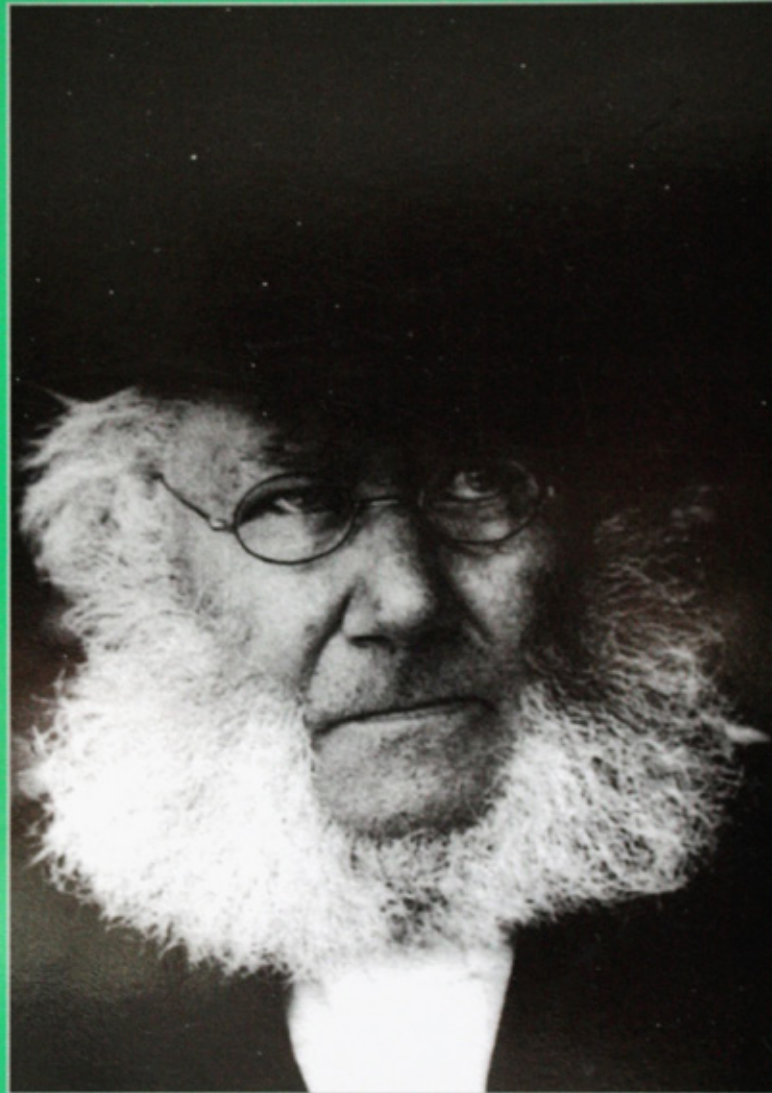
Norwegian cultural support was distributed among many Bangladeshi institutions. Grants were given to local theatre groups, local and traditional music projects, and to film and video productions for children. Norway also provided support to central institutions as described above. In 2005, Concerts Norway, a national organisation dedicated to making music accessible to all, put on a jazz concert in Dhaka. Annual visits followed with classical music and folk music, including joint Bangladeshi-Norwegian performances, until this programme ended in 2015.

However, other funding for cultural cooperation was largely discontinued from 2010. The personal and institutional contacts that were developed during the years when the collaboration was most intense will hopefully continue for some time to come.

# INTERNATIONAL **Ibsen** CONFERENCE

DHAKA, BANGLADESH 8-14 NOVEMBER 2002

THE RELEVANCE OF *A Doll's House* TRANSLATION AND ADAPTATION



Centre for  
Asian Theatre

In Collaboration with

Centre for Ibsen Studies  
UNIVERSITY OF OSLO



*Bangladesh and Norway have common interests in a sustainable shipping industry and maritime transport, as well as responsible management of the oceans. Several areas of cooperation in recent years have confirmed this.*





# 5

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## POLITICS AND COMMON INTERESTS

### 5.1 Do Norway and Bangladesh have common interests?

Bangladesh and Norway are two very different countries, more than 7,000 km apart on two different continents. Bangladesh has more than 160 million inhabitants in a small area of approx. 150,000 km<sup>2</sup>, while Norway has 5.4 million in an area that is more than twice as large. Norway is among the world's top ten in terms of income per capita and on indicators of level of education, health, and life expectancy. Bangladesh is now in the group of lower middle-income countries and scores slightly below the global average on these social indices. Around 14 per cent of the population was still extremely poor in 2016. In Norway, a narrow majority are Lutheran Christians, and a large proportion are non-religious. In Bangladesh, the vast majority are followers of a moderate form of Sunni Islam. There is, apparently, not much the two countries have in common. Nevertheless, a positive relationship has developed between the two countries in several areas of common interest.

During fifty years of development cooperation, there have been many contacts at the highest political level. Since 1984, seven Norwegian international development ministers have visited Bangladesh. In 2013, the Minister of Trade and Industry Trond Giske came with a business delegation, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Børge Brende visited Bangladesh in 2017. Several foreign affairs ministers from Bangladesh have been to Norway, most recently Foreign Minister Abdul Hassan Mahmood Ali in 2016.

For many years, the main pillar of bilateral cooperation was Norway's contribution to reducing poverty and improving health and education, thus promoting social and economic development. The countries have a common interest in promoting women's rights and equality, although this sometimes meets with opposition from conservative forces in both countries. Bangladesh and Norway share values such as democracy, respect for human rights, religious freedom, and opposition to terrorism, although forces exist that undermine these values.

Today, commercial relations dominate, and the countries have a common interest in ensuring stable conditions in international trade and the global economy. Both countries are concerned about the safety and welfare of workers, within economic realities.

Both countries have a long coastline and a close connection to the sea, although there are major differences between the oceans surrounding Norway and the Bay of Bengal. A common interest in a sustainable shipping industry, maritime transport, and good management of marine resources has laid the foundation for several collaborative measures in recent times. These experiences may lead to even stronger collaboration on common interests in the field of ocean and marine resources.

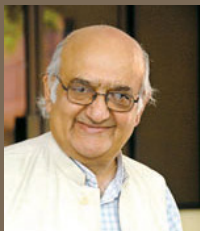
Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to major floods and other natural disasters, and this is exacerbated by rising sea levels and global warming. Norway has ambitions to contribute to the "green shift" to counteract dramatic climate change and global warming.



The Nordic countries often cooperate based on joint interests. The three Scandinavian ambassadors gathered on Nordic Day 2019. From left: Charlotta Schlyter (Sweden), Minister of Health Zahid Maleque (Bangladesh), Winnie Estrup Petersen (Denmark), and Sidsel Bleken (Norway). (Photo: Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka)

*“When it comes to academic cooperation, as well as in general inter-governmental relationships, the awareness in Bangladesh that Norway has no interest in exercising influence over Bangladesh’s political agenda and will never use aid for such a purpose, has been critical. Norway’s support for Bangladesh has largely been directed towards the less privileged.*

*Today, relations between Norway and Bangladesh are more diversified and cover a number of areas. It is to be hoped that the positive aspects of this relationship, such as the support for academic exchange and the commitment to assisting the underprivileged, will not disappear at the expense of the more market-oriented relations.”*



*Professor Rehman Sobhan,  
Chairman, Centre for Policy Dialogue, October 2021*

The two countries co-operate on climate and environmental measures in international fora.

Bangladesh, like Norway, is a strong supporter of international cooperation through the UN and other multilateral organisations. Norway is a major donor to many of the UN’s development programmes. Bangladesh is among the largest contributors of troops to UN peacekeeping operations, with significant female participation. Both countries are committed to promoting women’s participation in peace and security policy and protecting women who are abused in conflict situations. Norway is a NATO mem-

ber but also an active partner in peace processes and participates in conflict mitigation and peace negotiations in several countries.

Norway is a member of the UN Security Council in the period 2021-22. Bangladesh and Norway were previously both members of the Security Council in 1979-80. Bangladeshi membership in 2000-01 overlapped partially with Norway which was a member in 2001-02.

Bangladesh is a densely populated and important country in South Asia with a growing economy and



Bangladesh Prime Minister H.E. Sheikh Hasina (front row, third from left) hosted the Third IORA Blue Economy Ministerial Conference “Promoting Sustainable Blue Economy – Making the best use of the Indian Ocean” in Dhaka in 2019. (Photo: Kristin T. Wæringsaasen)



Norway's national day the 17th of May is celebrated in Dhaka with a Bangladeshi touch, such as this colourful rickshaw. (Photo: Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka)

increasing strength. It is non-aligned and relatively peaceful in a conflict-ridden region. The country also plays a moderating role vis-à-vis militant movements both regionally and locally. Norway needs good relations with such countries when acting in the global arena.

Norway cooperates closely with the other Nordic countries. Since 2015, Denmark, Sweden and Norway have had a joint Nordic embassy in Dhaka. Bangladesh often regards the Nordic countries as a group, and this can be a strength in bilateral dialogue and when promoting common interests.

There are a remarkable number of important areas where Bangladesh and Norway have common interests, bilaterally as well as in international fora. It is up to both countries to build further on these common interests.

## 5.2 What remains, what is remembered – and what happens to the relationship going forward?

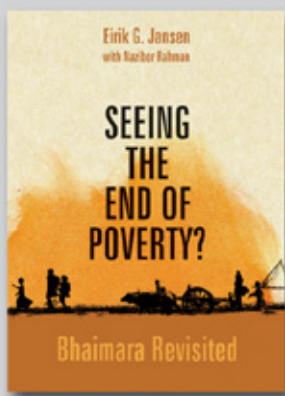
Fifty years after independence, Bangladesh can point to great progress in just about all development indicators. In 1971, the country was among the poorest and least developed in the world. Today, this picture has changed dramatically. Bangladesh is now a lower middle-income country with robust economic growth. The country produces a surplus of rice and the proportion of extremely poor people has been sharply reduced. Two female prime ministers have alternated governing the country, at times in fierce

political competition. Almost all girls go to primary school and many complete higher education. Women are an important workforce and are far more visible in all parts of society, although there have also been years of decline, and there is still a long way to go before full gender equality.

These results are mainly due to Bangladeshis' own efforts. Governments and political leaders, hard-working farmers and workers in other professions, entrepreneurs and investors and, not least, the many large social organisations have all played their part in this context. The international community has participated through major aid programmes, openness to trade and investment including special arrangements for the least developed countries, as well as sharing of information and technology. This has not been without contradictions, however. Economic structures, international competition and conflicts contribute to an uneven – and often unfair – distribution of wealth and benefits.

Norway and other development partners have often been frustrated by the extent of financial mismanagement and direct corruption in development aid programmes. Bangladesh's political leadership and government agree on the importance of combating abuse and fraud, but the country's economic and social structures have made this very difficult and time consuming.

Norway has been a small contributor to developments in Bangladesh. Assistance has often been provided together with other countries or in joint programmes with multilateral organisations. What remains, and what is remembered, depends on who



*While Bangladesh is moving away from extreme poverty, Bangladesh and Norway have positive joint experiences and common interests on which to build future relationships. Photo: AdobeStock*

is looking. Some people might point out that Norway had great ambitions to help alleviate the biggest development challenges in Bangladesh, which led to its participation in the large programme for health and family planning and later in the “education for all” programme. These programmes have produced clear positive results. Norwegian participation may not have been particularly visible, but it was definitely part of the overall effort.

Norway also donated to many programmes for economic and social development in rural areas, contributed to electrification and built ports and platoons. Some physical structures remain from these projects. Some people might recall Norway’s commitment to gender equality and the strengthening of women’s rights as a clear thread in most projects, in addition to its direct support for the women’s movement.

Norway has also contributed to other areas, which may not be visible to anyone other than those directly affected. Leading economists emphasise the commitment of the Chr. Michelsen’s Institute. Some cultural institutions have had good partners in Norway. The Rajshahi-Kristiansand municipal collaboration is still alive. Grameen Bank received early support from Norway and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize together with its founder Muhammad Yunus. In Sylhet, Dinajpur and Rajshahi, Norwegian organisations have supported social and economic development work for vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities for fifty years, and the Norwegian missionary Olav Hodne founded the leading development organisation Rajshahi Dinajpur Rural Services (RDRS).

Grameenphone is the most visible company with Norwegian ownership interests in Bangladesh, while other companies are active in shipping. Large Norwegian companies produce many of their clothes in Bangladesh. Norwegian companies plan to participate in the development of solar energy and other renewable energy.

What is remembered and what is visible in Norway after these fifty years of cooperation in Bangladesh? Many individuals have fond memories of working on important tasks with good Bangladeshi colleagues and friends. Some institutions and organisations still have their contacts and partners in Bangladesh. Perhaps the most visible is the large mosaic wall in Kristiansand which was a gift from Rajshahi.

Almost all Norwegians have one or more garments made in Bangladesh. Several large Norwegian clothing chains, including both low-price and expensive sportswear chains, import most of their products from Bangladesh. In the future, perhaps even more goods from more varied industries will be exported to Norway from Bangladesh. The outcome depends on many factors, including the development of world trade and adaptation to a greener future.

After fifty years of good relations and continuous adaptation to changing times and conditions, there is a lot to expand on in the next fifty.

## ANNEX 1

### Sources

#### **Interviews and communication with:**

Morshed Ahmed, adviser, Norwegian embassy, Dhaka  
Sidsel Bleken, former ambassador  
Anne Breivik, Deputy Head of International Department, The Strømme Foundation  
Per Eidsvik, former Nordland County administration  
Ishtiaq Jamil, professor, Department of Administration and Organizational Theory, University of Bergen  
Eirik G. Jansen, former researcher and senior adviser  
Nilu Kamaluddin, researcher, Centre for Ibsen Studies, University of Oslo  
Erik Lynne, Managing Director, Nordic Wood/ Solør Treimpregnering  
Glenn Mandelid, Vice President Communications, Telenor  
Hans Peter Melby, former minister-counsellor  
Bodil Maal, former senior adviser, Norad  
Vegard Neverlien, Global CSR Manager, Varner  
Sahidur Rahman, Honorary Consul General of Bangladesh, Oslo  
Espen Rikter-Svendsen, Ambassador  
Per-Anders Rosenkvist, photographer and former lecturer, Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Oslo Metropolitan University  
Bayzid Sayeed, adviser, Norwegian embassy, Dhaka  
Oona Solberg, lecturer, Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Oslo Metropolitan University  
Ingebjørg Støfring, former ambassador  
Anders Tunold, Project Coordinator, Norwegian Church Aid  
Dag Vige, Chairperson, Rajshahi Committee in Kristiansand  
Margrethe Volden, Head of Division, Norwegian Church Aid  
Gerd Wahlstrøm, former ambassador  
Arne Wiig, Research Professor, the Chr. Michelsen Institute  
Kristin T. Wæringsaasen, Counsellor and Deputy Head of Mission, Norwegian embassy, Dhaka  
Mirjam Artmark Aanensen, country coordinator, Normisjon

#### **Documents:**

This book is based on a variety of written and oral sources, including reports and evaluations from aid projects and programmes, webpages from Norwegian and international institutions, organisations and companies, and general literature on Bangladesh, on development aid and international cooperation. In addition, reports from several participating partners have been received. Norad annual reports (1972-2010), Norad reports on results (2007-17), and Norad webpage on results [www.resultater.norad.no](http://www.resultater.norad.no) have proven useful. Figures are mainly from Norad and Statistics Norway.

Three comprehensive reviews of the total aid programme merit special mention:

- Chr. Michelsen Institute: Country Study and Norwegian Aid Review. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 1986.
- J, Allister et al: Evaluation of Development Co-operation between Bangladesh and Norway, 1995-2000, Centre for Development Studies, University of Bath, UK. (Evaluation Report 5/2001) Oslo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001.
- Wiig, Arne et al: Mid-Term Review of the Country Programme (MoU: 2003-2008) between Norway and Bangladesh. (CMI Report R 2008:3) Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2008.

## ANNEX 2

### Norway's Ambassadors and Norad Resident Representatives

#### **Norad Resident Representatives (1975-1995)**

Lasse Seim (1975-76)  
Jan Tøgersen (1977-79)  
Rolv Hultin (1980-84)  
Ole Andreas Lunder (1984-86)  
Bjørn Johannessen (1986-89)  
Randi Bendiksen (1989-91)  
Roar Wik (1991-93)  
Tore Toreng (1993-95)

#### **Ambassadors (since 1996):**

Hans Fredrik Lehne (1996-99)  
Gerd Wahlstrøm (1999-2003)  
Aud-Lise Norheim (2003-06)  
Ingebjørg Støfring (2006-10)  
Ragne Birte Lund (2010-13)  
Merete Lundemo (2013-16)  
Sidsel Bleken (2016-20)  
Espen Rikter-Svendsen (2020- )





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