

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The business sector, with respect for human rights and the environment, is able to contribute to sustainable development through corporate social responsibility (CSR). Embracing sustainable entrepreneurship brings many challenges, but even more opportunities, not in the least for SMEs in developing countries and emerging markets. The Dutch government supports CSR in various sectors by securing agreements such as covenants with the Dutch business sector and civil organisations.

For PUM, CSR is an integral part of the services we offer to SMEs. PUM takes sustainable entrepreneurship as a starting point in various sectors like tourism, clothing & textiles and agriculture & food. This way PUM supports a practical interpretation of the CSR covenants and strengthens the synergy between developing SME's and sustainable development.

LEES MEER

FERTILE RESIDUAL PRODUCT BRINGS EMPLOYMENT IN BANGLADESH

In many cases, the residual product remains unused in the treatment of countless products. This also applies to the processing of coconuts into various products, such as coconut mats. Entrepreneur Mozahid Ahmed of Natural Fibers in Bangladesh wanted to start using and selling the residual product and called in the help of potting soil and substrate expert Wim van Schie. The PUM expert sees great opportunities for the company that can not only lead to a substantial increase in turnover, but also a substantial increase in employment!

THE ONLY EXPORTER IN BANGLADESH

There is much more demand for *cocopeat* (coconut fiber) than supply, even though in Bangladesh there are mountains of cocopeat: it is viewed as a waste product. Cocopeat can be dried and used as an alternative to peat moss in potting soil. The Netherlands imports one million m³ of cocopeat annually and is therefore looking for other sources for cocopeat than Sri Lanka and India. Natural Fibers is the only company in the region that produces fibers on a fairly large scale (for coconut mats and mattresses, for example) and is currently the only company in Bangladesh that can supply cocopeat. Entrepreneur Mozahid Ahmed: "We knew that the by-product of the coconut fiber, the cocopeat, is useful and has a market price. But we were uncertain about the management, the quality aspects, and the marketing of the cocopeat."



If the current residual product were to be sold, the turnover of Natural Fibers could increase by 50 percent. The export market is important as a market for substrates. Wim: "In order to carry out the quality improvement, large investments have to be made in various areas, a major investment." Talks with investors are happening, but there are some difficulties, so hopefully the financial resources will become available.

'IF THE CURRENT RESIDUAL PRODUCT WERE TO BE SOLD, THE TURNOVER OF NATURAL FIBERS COULD INCREASE BY 50 PERCENT'

NEW KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PRODUCTION

Mzahid: "We have been working with the coconut shell (the husk) for 14 years. Mr. Wim started his visit with a practical study of the company: from the collection of the raw materials to the sale of the products, including the cocopeat. I have learned a lot of complicated things about expanding the sale of cocopeat, information about the market, and marketing of the product. We have made plans for the short and long term, and we continue to monitor progress."

'MORE EMPLOYEES AND A HIGHER TURNOVER HAVE A HUGE IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT IN BAGERHAT'

Both Wim and Mozahid Ahmed are very enthusiastic, ambitious and decisive entrepreneurs. Mozahid wants to realise all these plans within one to two years, but a lot still needs to be done before that happens. But that is a challenge! Wim: "The expectations are that, if everything is realised, the number of employees can increase from 75 to more than 200 and the turnover can increase by 40 percent. That would have a huge impact on the company as well as employment in Bagerhat."



Wim van Schie: "I have already done many PUM missions about coconuts in Sri Lanka, India and Colombia, but this is the first time that a company in Bangladesh came by, so I find this very interesting. I have given advice on the improvement of quality, making cocopeat suitable for use in horticulture and therefore suitable for export to other markets, especially Europe and Asia."

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POSTAL ADDRESS

P.O. Box 93078
2509 AB The Hague
The Netherlands

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CONTACT

Bezuidenhoutseweg 12
2594 AV The Hague
The Netherlands
T +31(0)70 349 05 55
F +31(0)70 349 05 90
info@pum.nl

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