



PhD Positions in Circular Economy and Sustainable Innovation in the Apparel Industry, Aalborg University Business School (AAUBS), Aalborg University (AAU), Denmark

Aalborg University Business School (AAUBS), in collaboration with Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology (AUST), Dhaka, is inviting applications for **two fully funded PhD positions** under the large-scale research project titled “**Circular Economy in Bangladesh’s Apparel Industry (CREATE)**”, funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA).

These joint PhD scholarships aim to build knowledge capacity among Bangladeshi scholars and institutions in circular economy transitions, innovation policy, and sustainable business strategies within global apparel value chains.

Program Overview

The two selected PhD candidates will be enrolled at AAUBS and will conduct research aligned with the themes of the CREATE project. The program includes:

- **18 months based in Bangladesh**, hosted by the School of Business at AUST,
- **18 months based in Denmark**, at Aalborg University Business School.

While in Bangladesh, students will also take PhD courses offered by Danish and EU universities. To fulfill the Danish PhD requirements as outlined by the Ministerial Order on PhD education, candidates must: (i) Complete **30 ECTS** of PhD-level coursework in Denmark, (ii) Write a

doctoral thesis (monograph or paper-based), and (iii) Engage in knowledge dissemination activities totaling approximately 600 hours.

Upon successful defense of the dissertation, the PhD degree will be awarded by **Aalborg University, Denmark**.

We encourage applications with a background from Bangladesh who are passionate about contributing to research capacity development in the country and are committed to returning to Bangladesh after completing their degree.

Key Details

- **Start Date:** 1 August or September 2025 (expected)
- **Duration:** 3 years
- **Application Deadline:** 07 June 2025 (midnight CET)
- **Location:** Aalborg, Denmark & Dhaka, Bangladesh

Funding & Support Package

PhD candidates will receive a combination of stipend and allowances from the CREATE project and the Danida Fellowship Centre (DFC):

- Stipend in Bangladesh: BDT 125,000 per month (gross), provided for 3 years during residency at AUST under the CREATE project.
- Allowance in Denmark: DKK 13,521 per month (gross) during the 18-month stay in Denmark. Tax-free under Danish regulations for DFC fellows.
- Additional Financial Support Includes: Round-trip travel between Dhaka and Aalborg: Visa fees and related costs, Full tuition coverage, Research-related expenses including data collection, PhD course participation, books/equipment, and international conference attendance, Funding for publication in peer-reviewed journals, Opportunity for a research stay abroad at a reputed university

Application Process:

Please refer to the end of this document for detailed instructions **on how to apply**.

About the CREATE Project

The CREATE project explores the shift toward circular economy in global apparel value chains, focusing on how Bangladesh's apparel industry, linked with European brands, can adapt and lead in sustainable production and innovation to meet global sustainability goals by 2030. The five-year project includes work packages on mapping circular transitions, firm-level capabilities, cost and policy analysis, and strategy development for suppliers, global brands, and national institutions.

Given Bangladesh's critical role in global apparel exports, the project investigates the challenges and opportunities of circularity—especially around pre- and post-consumer textile waste—and how different types of suppliers can respond to new sustainability demands from global brands. CREATE aims to provide in-depth research that informs effective industrial policy and supports the transition to green and circular

business models. PhD candidates will contribute to these themes by combining perspectives from Global Value Chains, institutional and business systems theory, and innovation management with circular economy insights. For more details, see: <http://createproject.aust.edu/>

Project Partners

CREATE, being the largest multi-stakeholder ‘research-based capacity development project’ on circular economy in the apparel industry, collaborates with Aalborg University, Denmark (as lead), Copenhagen Business School, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester Fashion Institute, SOAS- University of London, Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology (AUST), Dhaka, Global Fashion Agenda (GFA) Copenhagen, Access2Innovation, Danish Fashion and Textiles (DM&T), Ethical Trading Initiative-UK, Reverse Resources (RR), University of Dhaka, and Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Research Theme for the PhD position:

PhD Theme: Organizational Capability and Innovation Ecosystems for Circular Economy in Bangladesh’s Apparel Export Industry

This PhD position focuses on the role of organizational capabilities in driving innovation outcomes within the context of the circular economy transition in Bangladesh’s apparel export sector. The research will explore the interaction between global fashion brands’ sustainability strategies and the innovation capacities of their suppliers in Bangladesh, particularly in circular production, waste reduction, and green technology adoption in global fashion supply chains.

As global brands respond to climate change regulations in their home institutions, they increasingly push circularity initiatives onto their suppliers. However, in Bangladesh, the suppliers’ innovation ecosystems often lack cohesive alignment, strong actor participation, and capability complementarities, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent sustainability outcomes. The rise of new fiber and traceability technologies and recycling innovations presents opportunities for new forms of collaboration and co-evolution between incumbents and new entrants affecting organizational capabilities and innovation outcomes, yet this remains underexplored in existing literature.

The PhD project will investigate how organizational capabilities evolve and interact with ecosystem-level dynamics, focusing on the interdependencies, complementarities, and coordination between actors, technologies, and institutions. The research will examine how suppliers either acquire or develop innovations internally or through their ecosystem relationships, and how this contributes to circular economy transitions in global value chains.

Potential Key Areas of Investigation:

- Green value creation and value capture dynamics among apparel and textile actors.
- Organizational capability development and innovation ecosystem governance.
- The role of SMEs in the circular economy and their capability-building strategies.
- Institutional influence and business model innovation for new fiber and recycling technologies.

- Cross-country comparison with other emerging economy apparel sectors to identify best practices relevant for Bangladesh.

Suggested Research Questions:

1. How do different actors in Bangladesh's apparel ecosystem acquire or co-create or create innovation value (e.g., green fibers, recycling technologies, digital traceability), and how do they manage tensions between green value creation and cost pressures?
2. How are the organizational capabilities of large apparel suppliers configured and complemented by global brands in acquiring or developing green technologies in the apparel ecosystem?
3. What roles do policy frameworks and institutional arrangements play in governing the innovation ecosystem, and how do firms navigate multiple institutional logics in their circular economy transitions?
4. What factors influence the choice of technological trajectories in green technology adoption, and how do these choices affect sustainability and economic performance within the innovation ecosystem?

This PhD will adopt a primary focus on innovation management and international business areas, contributing to literature on organizational capability and strategy, innovation ecosystems, circular economy, and global supply chains as well as international business. The research may utilize qualitative or mixed-method approaches, depending on the chosen focus.

Eligibility:

Applicants should hold a research-based master's degree in international business economics or management. Prior research experience or field experience is a strong advantage together with familiarity with the concerned literature.

Minimum Requirements

- a) To be considered, the candidate has preferably completed the master's level education (similar to a master's education as per the Bologna process or an equivalent qualification) from a reputed institution. Students high academic background writing their master theses may also apply with a positive recommendation from the respective supervisor and providing the thesis contract
- b) Applicants will normally have received at least an equivalent grade of 10 (A-) or higher on the Danish grading scale for their master's thesis.
- c) The applicant must be fluent in written and oral English. Applicants shall provide documentation that they have passed one of the following official tests with the respective minimum score:
 - IELTS (band score): 7
 - TOEFL (paper-based): 600
 - TOEFL (internet-based): 100

The language test must be no more than 2 years old at the time of the application.

Application Submission:

If you are interested in applying for any PhD positions in this project, **please submit the following documents electronically to the following email addresses: create.sob@aust.edu** with a CC to imran_du6@yahoo.com by **May 30, 2025 by making ONE PDF file of all the documents** asked for.

Please mention one of the three proposed areas of research to which you are applying.

1. *Research proposal on the theme described above should be a maximum of five pages (5 pages only).* This research proposal should contain a title followed by a presentation of an original research question based on the research problem/gap in the literature, a description of the initial theoretical framework and methodology, a presentation of the suggested empirical material, as well as a work plan.
2. *Copies of bachelor's and master's degree certificates or other certificates (together with experience certificates in the field) of a corresponding level along with grade transcripts.*
3. *Brief curriculum vitae (CV)*
4. *List of papers and publications, if any.*
5. One copy of a selected publication or a written work is expected (e.g., master's thesis or a publication of good quality)
6. *Documentation for English language skills (if you do not have a valid IELTS score)*
7. *A motivational letter highlighting your career objective and the relevance of the proposed PhD study*

Recruitment Procedure

The recruitment committee expects to shortlist at least three / four applicants for the final assessment. All applicants will be notified of their status in the recruitment process shortly after the application deadline. Applicants selected for assessment will be notified about the process of the assessment. Short-listed candidates will be required to participate in an interview via Zoom.

Once the recruitment process is completed, applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application. It should be noted that once the project team has selected a candidate, the candidate will have to go through the formal admission process of AAU and pass an internal academic quality evaluation at AAU before they can start PhD studies.

Any question related to the PhD scholarships and the proposed theme may be directed, only in case of urgent inquiry, to A/Professor Yimei Hu, yimei@business.aau.dk, Aalborg University Business School, AAU, or A/Professor Mohammad Rana, mbr@bsuiness.au.dk.

CREATE PARTNERS:

