

**Speech by the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Lilianne Ploumen, International Conference on Financing for Development, 13 July 2015**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Catalysis: that's what I want to talk about here today. The concept was discovered by a Scottish chemist at the end of the eighteenth century. She published her book under the name of 'Mrs Fulhame', because at that time a woman was a wife above all else. But it was Mr Fulhame who disappeared into obscurity. Whereas Elizabeth Fulhame achieved lasting fame when she discovered that chemical reactions can be dramatically accelerated or even instigated when just the right elements are combined.

If we can make the Sustainable Development Goals take flight it will be this effect – catalysis – that we have to thank. Because in my view, that's precisely why we're here. Like Mrs Fulhame, we're looking for just the right combination of elements – in our case to accelerate the effects that the world needs: inclusive growth to end hunger and poverty and fight inequality, leaving no one behind.

I regard my unique mandate of Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade as a catalytic combination. Traditional Official Development Assistance remains crucial for the poorest of the poor. But that can never be enough. So wherever possible, we must ensure that ODA billions spark trillions in private sector resources and domestic resource mobilisation.

Take taxes. For the past two years, the Netherlands has been giving developing countries technical assistance to broaden the tax base and build tax collection capacity. We are revising our tax treaties with 23 of them. We are launching a partnership of donors and developing countries to generate extra resources. And we are doubling our own contribution in this area. This makes good sense: the rate of return on a dollar invested in building tax collection capacity is way over a factor of 10. That's the kind of dynamic that was mistaken for alchemy until Mrs Fulhame came along.

The ultimate catalyst for development is our ever closer cooperation with the private sector. Over the last four decades we've seen a profound change in mentality. Business activities still

revolve around risk and return. But concepts like corporate social responsibility have firmly taken root in a growing number of boardrooms.

Take Unilever, the Dutch multinational. The company has evolved into a champion of sustainability. Does that make them a charity? Certainly not. Yes, the hand-washing and teeth-cleaning programmes Unilever runs in many countries promote hygiene and public health. But they also promote sales of Unilever soap and toothpaste. In a similar way, Dove's lighter-weight packaging and new compressed deodorants have not only reduced the amount of plastic used in packaging, they're also convenient for consumers.

Sustainability as a way to sell more goods? Yes, partly. Unilever believes that sustainability is a business case. And a very sound one too, as their current stock value seems to show. It's not just about savings on energy and plastics. Consumers in a growing part of the world are willing to pay a little extra for goods that are more environmentally friendly.

We still have a lot of convincing to do. Developed countries and big companies play an important role. They can afford to make extra investments and comply with higher standards. We must take care that by promoting new sustainable business practices we don't inadvertently exclude countries and companies that may not yet be able to keep up. Like in any catalytic process, equilibrium is essential. But we should never lose sight of our common goal. It's the result that counts.

Take the aftermath of the Rana Plaza collapse. The Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety is a powerful example of what can happen when government policy is combined with the commercial force of companies that want to change their supply chain for the common good.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude with one more lesson from the story of Elizabeth Fulhame: as a woman she had to fight to be taken seriously. But she won that fight and gave the world new insights of vital importance. She realised her potential, but how many other women have not? How much talent remains unused to this day? Unleashing that potential may be precisely what we need in order to accelerate development. The Sustainable Development Goals can help us achieve this. Women as the catalyst of global development: Elizabeth Fulhame would have been proud!

Thank you.