



**The population of the Netherlands is becoming more and more diverse. Dutch society has now taken on a multicultural character, particularly in the large cities. Three million people of immigrant descent currently live in the Netherlands and 1.7 million of this total comes from non-Western countries. This means that ten percent of the Dutch population is originally from Chinese, Turkish, Moroccan, Surinam, Antillean or other descent. And this percentage is expected to climb to 20% by 2020. As a co-operative bank, Rabobank is committed to fulfilling the same leading and involved role for all of its customers, both from immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds. Rabobank is consequently dedicated to ensuring that both its workforce and communications reflect the diversity of its markets and fields of operation.**

Why is cultural diversity a theme at Rabobank? There are three key reasons why cultural diversity is important for Rabobank:

- It is important from the perspective of the market because 1.7 million immigrants constitute an appealing target group.
- It is important in view of the workforce because Rabobank seeks to be a reflection of the community and needs sufficiently motivated and qualified employees.
- It is important because the bank's social role constitutes a core motivation: as a co-operative bank we focus on emancipating groups in society.

Rabobank has traditionally been a rural bank. However, the Netherlands is currently urbanising at a rapid pace. More people in the Netherlands now live in urban<sup>1</sup> than in rural environments. There are currently 24 cities in the Netherlands with populations of more than 100,000 and together they account for more than 30% of the country's population and 35% of its economic activity. The greatest dynamism is found in and around the cities. Rabobank consequently wishes to focus additional activities and attention on the cities in order to realise its ambition of attaining market leadership in both the Netherlands' rural and urban regions. One third of the population in the cities is comprised of non-Western immigrants. These new Dutch citizens are significantly different with regard to a number of aspects and this consequently requires separate attention and specific competences.

However, these new Dutch citizens also constitute part of the regular target groups such as start-ups, students, mortgage customers, etc.

Rabobank must study the needs of this group in order to maintain a recognisable positioning among these immigrant customers as well. And Rabobank puts its words into action in this area. Rabobank Utrecht-Nieuwegein is a prime example of a local member bank that puts diversity into practice by mobilising businesses located in the 'Kanaleneiland' district to offer internships to vocational school students who are primarily from immigrant backgrounds. This has resulted in 100 internships within

---

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Netherlands defines 'rural environment' as areas that have less than 1,000 addresses per km<sup>2</sup> and 'urban environment' as areas with more than 1,500 addresses per km<sup>2</sup>.

just a few months. Rabobank Amsterdam is another excellent example. It introduced microcredits for start-ups in the Southeast district of the city. Diversity is also reflected in Rabobank's workforce. For example, 23% of the employees at Rabobank The Hague are of immigrant descent.

The policy is founded on making diversity an integral part of Rabobank's market approach, HR, communications, co-operative structure and social activities.

### ***Market***

Immigrant customers in the Netherlands as a rule do not require different financial products. It is much more important to reach the immigrant target group through specific and differentiated communications channels. This can be achieved by working with immigrant intermediaries in the cities and by organising meetings at mosques or other venues. Rabobank leverages its extensive network of branch offices in order to fulfil its commitment to be nearby and involved. Rabobank is consequently continuing to expand the number of branch offices in the cities so that it is now physically more nearby in many neighbourhoods that have a relatively high immigrant population.

Rabobank began holding information meetings for Turkish homebuyers in the spring of 2006. A mortgage guide in Turkish has also been developed as a support tool. This guide outlines all the steps involved in buying a house and taking out a mortgage. The meetings are held at mosques, community centres or other low-threshold locations.

The local Rabobanks in Utrecht-Nieuwegein and Boskoop Reeuwijk are currently testing the so-called Charity Account, which is a savings product whereby the interest earned on the account is not paid to the customer but rather donated to a charity. A study is currently also being conducted into the possibilities for introducing the Islamic mortgage.

Rabobank has furthermore introduced the microcredit tool for small businesses (with up to ten employees) in a number of large cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and Arnhem). Microcredits are a particularly attractive tool for customers wishing to start new businesses, which include large numbers of new Dutch citizens. These credits are intended to support economic development at the district and neighbourhood levels. They consequently support the small SME sector to take initiatives that contribute to housing, employment, healthcare and education in the neighbourhood.

### ***HRM***

Diversity and pluriformity are likewise strategic spearheads from the perspective of Human Resources. Rabobank wishes to tap into the pool of potential talent that is found among immigrants. This talent will enable the bank to safeguard its expertise and quality and consequently also its competitive position. Rabobank is committed to ensuring that its workforce is a reflection of the society in which it operates. It maintains contacts with specialised recruitment agencies for this purpose.

Diversity constitutes an express component of the selection procedure for the trainee programmes. Immigrant university and student associations now form part of the

standard set of recruitment channels for trainees. And the cultural aspect is given extra attention with regard to assessment procedures.

An intercultural communications skills training course is currently being developed for account managers who work at local member banks. Attention has already been given in the past to promoting internal expertise for HR consultants who wish to undertake concrete activities to achieve a more multi-coloured workforce.

In addition, contacts are maintained with non-commercial initiatives that focus on promoting employment for refugees and immigrants, such as the volunteer association *Emplooi* and *Stichting Samenleving en Bedrijf* (Society and Business Foundation).

### ***Communications***

Rabobank seeks for its internal and external communications to mirror the multicultural society. Diversity is part of the media and tools mix and the multi-coloured nature of Rabobank is reflected in the choice of images used in the communications. Communications play a key role in the process of embedding diversity among the management and employees (via internal media, workshops, diversity days, etc.) and in the image that is projected via external communications.

### ***Co-operative***

Customers are invited to become a member of the bank if they purchase one or more services. Membership provides customers with special advantages and benefits. Not only in the form of discounts on banking and non-banking products, but above all also in the form of the 'nearby benefit' in the direct environment. This 'nearby benefit' is translated into the co-operative dividend that the local Rabobank contributes to numerous social projects and initiatives. Another key advantage that members enjoy is the ability to join the bank in the process of considering and deciding its future course. In order to gain a good insight into the current developments within the various ethnic customer groups regarding financing needs and how they view the Rabobank as a financial services provider in this regard, it is imperative that these customers also become active members of the bank. Recruiting members from ethnic minorities is consequently a key spearhead. The aim is for immigrants to be well-represented in the members council and feedback groups in order to ensure they also have an effective voice in determining a local member bank's policy.

### ***Society***

Informal contacts represent an important part of doing business in non-Western cultures. This means that a core aspect entails developing networks in immigrant communities. We have already learned a tremendous amount from these contacts. In order to become a part of new networks in primarily the cities, we have entered into working partnerships with TANS, Cosmicus and TANNET (multicultural network organisations for ambitious, well-educated young people) and ZZVN (Black Businesswomen of the Netherlands). Rabobank also supports Rabobank TIC Turkey, a network organisation that promotes trade and investment activities between the Netherlands and Turkey.

Rabobank furthermore sponsors multicultural festivals such as Ha-Schi-Ba in The Hague, the Dunya Festival in Rotterdam, Po-Der in Eindhoven and the World Festival in Utrecht.