



Case Study: Dutch Fair Bank Guide

A partnership of: FNV, Amnesty International NL, Milieudefensie and Oxfam Novib

Country: Netherlands

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The logo for EerlijkeBankwijzer, featuring the text "EerlijkeBankwijzer" in white, sans-serif font inside a red, speech-bubble-like shape.

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I. Summary

The Dutch Fair Bank Guide (Eerlijke Bankwijzer, <http://www.eerlijkebankwijzer.nl>) is an initiative of Oxfam Novib, Amnesty International Netherlands, the Dutch labour union FNV and Friends of the Earth Netherlands (Milieudefensie). It is a dynamic database developed to benchmark the largest 10 Dutch consumer banks on various social, economic and environmental sectors and issues. It is an overview of the banks' policies on issues like climate change, human rights, labour rights, arms trade, transparency and sectors like oil/gas, fishery, banking, etc. The database is freely accessible to the general public.

The Dutch Fair Bank Guide was formally launched on 22 January 2009. After this successful start in the Netherlands, partners of Oxfam Novib and FNV launched a Brazilian version in April 2011. A first preparatory meeting for a possible Indonesian version has been organized in Indonesia in September 2011.

II. Full description

The Dutch Fair Bank Guide is a dynamic database developed to benchmark the largest 10 Dutch consumer banks on various social, economical and environmental sectors and issues. It is an overview of the banks' policies on issues like climate change, human rights, labour rights, arms trade, transparency and sectors like oil/gas, fishery, banking, etc. The database is freely accessible to the general public. During the project period, the initiators of the Fair Bank Guide will assess the banks' policies every three months. Second, policies will be compared with case studies and draw conclusions about the extent to which the banks follow their own policies.

The Guide was formally launched on 22 January 2009 by Oxfam Novib, Amnesty International Netherlands, Dutch labour union FNV and Friends of the Earth Netherlands (Milieudefensie). The initiative was later joined by the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals as well as IKV Pax Christi.

Aim

The aim of the database is to initiate a 'race to the top' between banks on the subject of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Ideally, a self-reinforcing process will develop in which social, environmental and

economic standards are raised continuously. The Fair Bank Guide contributes to large banks' CSR policy and transparency on a wide variety of issues, benefiting a wide audience. It stimulates consumers to critically compare their own bank's CSR policy with that of other banks and to contact their bank in case of shortcomings in its CSR policy. An intensified dialogue between the initiators of the Bank Guide and larger Dutch banks is a possible outcome.

Context

The Fair Bank Guide was developed as a public benchmark on the social/environmental impact of banks complementing the existing benchmarks to compare banks on commercial issues, interest, prices and services.

Why did Oxfam Novib get involved?

The initiators of the Dutch Fair Bank Guide are convinced that socially responsible investment in the financial sector can contribute to poverty reduction, sustainable economic growth, combating social and environmental problems. Chain responsibility of products starts with their funding. If banks and asset managers uphold stringent sustainability requirements regarding the production of, and trade in products, a massive stroke can be made towards a sustainable society and global solidarity.

In 2011, Dutch banks and pension funds had over hundreds of billions of invested assets. Only a small fraction of this amount was invested in a sustainable way and could have a positive impact for millions of people in developing countries and for combating climate change.

The financial crisis was caused primarily by irresponsible behavior of financial institutions and has had enormous negative consequences worldwide. Better monitoring and regulation from governments as well as more responsible environment/social/governance policies & practices can help to redress this situation. Public benchmarks such as the Fair Bank Guide can help to improve the responsibility of banks.

Methodology

The Fair Bank Guide is an interactive tool and allows for an open and objective comparison of the policies of the 10 largest Dutch banks (measured by savings) plus the Triodos Bank in respect of a range of social themes and sectors (climate, labour, human rights, animal welfare, agriculture, etc.). Customers are offered several options to ask their bank to improve its CSR policies and practices. They can send a complaint or "yellow card" to their own bank or find direct links to switch to a more sustainable bank.



The themes and sectors that are included in the Fair Bank Guide (fair trade, combating climate change, corruption and tax evasion and a fairer agricultural policy) are relevant for sustainable livelihoods for women, men and children.

Southern partners and affiliates, particularly in emerging markets, are encouraged to launch Fair Bank Guides in their own country. Since 2010, Oxfam Novib and its Dutch partners have started a process to internationalise the Dutch experience and approached organisations. This resulted in a successful launch in Brazil of a BankWiser by the consumer organisation IDEC with partners like Friends of the Earth Brazil and

Brazilian Bank Unions on 28 April 2011. Oxfam Novib approached other potential partners in a number of other countries to start similar initiatives. In September 2011 a first preparatory meeting of local Indonesian partners was organized.

Results

- Eleven quarterly updates and six case studies (about investments in sustainable energy, controversial arms trade, human rights and the garment sector) were published and resulted in a huge media turnout. The Fair Bank Guide attracted some 80,000 – 100,000 unique visitors annually. Thousands have contacted their bank on CSR related issues, which led to increasing contacts between consumers and their banks. Three public seminars attracted some 120 representatives of banks, pension funds, multinationals, media, members of parliament, ministers, NGO's, trade unions and employers' organizations.
- Since the launch of the Dutch Fair Bank Guide, 15 banks have been benchmarked. With the exception of one bank all of them have formally improved their CSR policies on one or often more issues and sectors, like human rights, labor rights, biodiversity, arms trade corruption, agriculture, mining and forestry (105 policies in total).
- After the publication of a case study on investments in controversial arms trade all six assessed banks have improved their defense policies. Likewise most banks promised to improve transparency after the publication of a case study on transparency on investments.
- A successful launch with good media coverage of the Brazilian Fair Bank Guide "Guia dos Bancos Responsáveis" (GBR) <http://www.guiadosbancosresponsaveis.org.br/> and <http://www.gbr.org.br/> took place on



April 28, 2011. 80 representatives of five different Brazilian banks, media, scholars, employers' organizations, trade unions and NGOs joined the first public seminar. Five out of the six banks, benchmarked in the GBR, attended the seminar and joined the panel discussion.

III. Lessons learned

- Make use of new & social media. In the Netherlands an App was developed.
- Contextualise the Fair Bank Guide. In the case of Brazil it was important to include the issue of "transparency" and have a focus on case studies, in addition to CSR policies.
- Make sure that there is good and timely communication of press releases, reports etc. with the banks.

IV. Colophon

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This case used for ON's Annual Report 2011