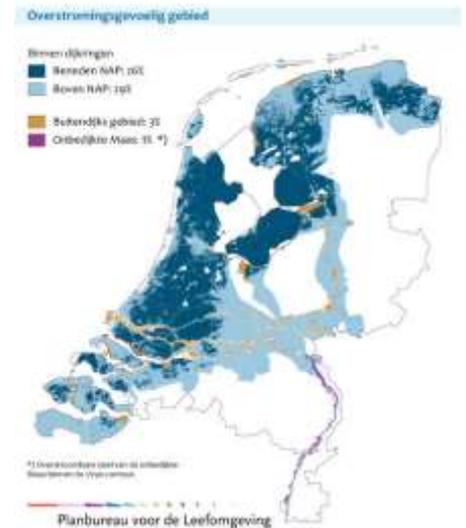


Artikel Ojito de Agua

Although Colombia is extremely diverse in landscape, with amazonas, mountains, plains, deserts and coastal areas, there's one thing that connects all these very different areas: water. For the páramos, the coastal areas, but even the deserts, where an occasional storm brings the necessary rain, water is vital. With the current trends in climate change, now could not be a better time to issue a proper monitoring and management system of water nationally.

Where I come from, water is both friend and enemy. Since 26% of the country lies below sea level (it's called paises bajos for a reason), protection against sea level rise and heavy storms is extremely important. However, water is also big business: water management has created a lot of jobs and due to the need for protection, the Dutch are famous for their expertise about water protection structures, which we now export. Unfortunately, a water disaster (1953) was necessary for the Dutch to finally start acting on the restructuring of the countries' protection against the water, which was insufficient at the time due to tough times after World War II. After this water disaster, a great plan came into action to build innovative new protection structures, also known as the Deltaplan.



Currently I am volunteering for Fundación Montecito, which, among many other objectives, tries to improve the quality of the lake, the living conditions and consciousness around Lago de Tota. Unfortunately, bad practises and management caused heavy pollution of the lake, issuing the need for action and better protection. Living in this area for about two months gives a proper indication of how complicated the situation at this lake is. Many stakeholders with very different backgrounds and interests act in and around the lake, making it easy to point fingers to who is causing pollution. I genuinely hope this area will not need a big water disaster (either in quantity or quality) for the stakeholders to realize that good collaboration is of highest importance. The need for an independent organisation in which all stakeholders are represented is extremely important. Furthermore, this organisation should be transparent and function in a simple, organized way for everyone to understand. Also collaboration with other areas is important, as the water flow in Lago de Tota affects the whole watershed and beyond. Although we are enemies in soccer matches, we Dutchies have to collaborate with our neighbours, the Germans, to manage the river discharges in both wet and dry seasons. The same counts for the local actors at the lake here: collaboration is necessary to overcome the complicated problems. It is very easy to point a finger to one of your neighbours for the cause of any type of problem, but the solution can only be found in collaboration, as you could never solve all those problems on your own.

I believe that Colombia has great opportunities in developing new, innovative and collaborative forms of water management. Hereby, both technical and governance aspects are very important. I am sure that Lago de Tota is not the only example of a lake under threat and that every region in Colombia might have a similar situation for a wetland. When properly organised, water management in such a huge variety of landscapes is an amazing opportunity to gain expertise and create many jobs. Just as Holland, Colombia might be able to export their unique water expertise in the future. However, good governance, transparency and collaboration are necessary, and hopefully Lago de Tota will soon be an example on these themes.

http://www.pbl.nl/sites/default/files/cms/afbeeldingen/nap_dijkvingen_72dpi.jpg