



VISION

‘Soya doesn’t come from the Amazon’

The forest fires in the Amazon have been all over the news in recent weeks. Millions of euros have now been raised to put out the fires, and in the Netherlands there is a debate about soya imports. ‘That won’t solve the problem,’ says Amazon researcher Bart Kruijt of the Water Systems and Global Change group (WSG).

Donating money won’t help?

‘Brazil’s economy is not strong but if the will is there, they can easily raise the money themselves to put out the fires. Donations don’t solve the real problem; that is a question of political choices.’

Bolsonaro initially turned down the offer of help.

‘That discussion was about neo-colonialism. “The rest of the world wants to decide what goes on in the Amazon.” The Brazilians hate that idea. They are always cagey when it comes to foreign interference. Whenever we do a research project there, it always has to be in partnership with Brazilian scientists.’

So what would be a solution to this problem?

‘The policy of previous Brazilian governments has worked for the past 15 years. Deforestation has declined considerably over that period. However, Bolsonaro is sending a message that he is not prepared to invest in the conservation of the Amazon. We need to look for ways of exploiting the area’s natural wealth sustainably. The Amazon forest produces its own rain and sequesters large amounts of CO₂, while new medicines are still being discovered there. You can use those strengths to improve living standards among local communities and give them an alternative to felling and burning.’

Should we call a halt to Dutch imports of soya?

‘In a talk show last week, it was claimed that an area of forest equivalent to dozens of football pitches is being felled every minute for the production of soya. That may have been the case 15 years ago but a stop has been put to that. Now most deforestation is for livestock farming. There is still a link to soya because livestock farmers have been pushed out of the areas where soya cultivation is allowed. But saying you should stop importing soya from Brazil is not an effective approach.’ **TL**