Eva Youkhana

Environmental peace and development in Colombia: postcolonial perspectives in the bilateral graduate school addressing the SDGs

The "Doctoral Studies Support Program for Environmental Peace and Development in Colombia" (DSSP) was launched in December 2017 between the Center of Development Research (Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung – ZEF) at the University of Bonn and the Institute of Environmental Studies (Instituto de Estudios Ambientales – IDEA) at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. DSSP is financed by the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst – DAAD) and is one of 7 bilateral graduate schools addressing the SDGs. The program aims at consolidating cooperation relationships between German higher education institutions and academic peers from countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia, most of them countries with ongoing colonial structures of power (coloniality).

One of DSSPs main objective is to critically reflect the role of higher education and study the epistemic foundations that represent diverse perspectives on ecology, development and the environment. Knowledge and education are embedded in social identities, institutions, representations and discourses and thus state their role in the constitution of social order and power relations. We argue that knowledge and the educational system in Latin America are consequences of colonial and post-colonial legacies. The ongoing utilitarian approach towards education and practices, the standardized assessment (PISA, AHELO) with global classifications of educational indicators do not give justice to the diverse forms of knowledge production. The rejection and exclusion of local, indigenous and/or non-academic forms of knowledge production leads to epistemological asymmetries and the hierarchization of higher education landscapes (geopolitics of knowledge) that reflect the Eurocentric nature of the global educational system. The decolonization of (higher) education needs more educational justice, the diversification of knowledge, the use of decolonized methodologies in teaching and research, and more inclusive structures and opportunities for the marginalized populations.