

Networking with Bonn institutions



Foto UNU-EHS

Jakob Rhyner

20.07.2016 BONN. Swiss national Jakob Rhyner gives an interview on the role of UN University and how it is connected in Bonn.

Jakob Rhyner is the Vice-Rector and Director of the Institute for Environment and Human Security of the UN-University (UNU-EHS) in Bonn. Here are excerpts from his interview with Ute Warkalla.

Why does the UN need its own university?

Jakob Rhyner: This question was of course asked before its establishment. On the one hand, one knew that the UN needed the scientific expertise, on the other hand, it was difficult to get answers from the universities on interdisciplinary questions, especially basic problems in the area of development assistance. At the time, the comprehensive view wished for by the UN was missing. Now, this interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach is found practically everywhere.

However, are there still differences between the UNU and other universities?

Jakob Rhyner: Universities are primarily scientific institutions and this should not change. We work scientifically but our attention is not only on scientific profiling. We work together with various organizations to find concrete suggestions for solutions, always keeping in mind the 17 global development targets. Our purpose is also that of a “think tank.” That means, it is not only expected that we present solutions to current problems but we also have to take on problems that our partners will present to us in ten years.

With which partners does the UNU work?

Jakob Rhyner: We work with other UN organizations such as the climate secretariat (UNFCCC) but also NGOs and ministries. We are already strongly networked with many Bonn institutions. From this aspect, Bonn is for us a stroke of luck. We work closely with the Center for Development Research (ZEF). Together with the Geography Institute of the University of Bonn, we offer our own Master’s program. As well, I am on the advisory board for the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC). In the field of research on insurance against consequences of climate change, the UNU is part of a consortium of which Germanwatch is also a part – these are just a few examples of our connectedness in Bonn.

The UNU is already working with the Medical Faculty to prepare a postgraduate Master’s for those already working in the medical field. Does the UNU have further plans for expansion in education?

Jakob Rhyner: The major educational activities are well looked after by the universities, this would not be our place. But such experiments – that’s how I would call it – like the Master’s program, which we as a UN organization offer together with the classic universities, for that we remain open. As well, I would like that such experimental and tried and tested educational modules can also be used in other parts of the world.