

## Graduation GRÓ FTP Fellows – 26. April 2023

Dear Fellows, Directors and Staff of the GRÓ Fisheries Training Programme and the Marine and Freshwater Research Institute, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear friends,

It gives me great pleasure to join you in celebrating the graduation of 22 fellows, that have now completed six months of intensive training here at the GRÓ Fisheries Training Programme. The group graduating today comes from fourteen countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, including the Carribean.

I convey to the fellows, heartfelt congratulations of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ms. Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir, who sends you her best wishes. Congratulations!

Dear fellows,

It feels like only a few weeks since I met you in this room to tell you about GRÓ, the Centre for Capacity Development, Sustainability and Societal Change. GRÓ runs four training programmes that are hosted at different institutions here in Iceland, that work on building capacity in fields where Iceland has particular expertise and that can play a crucial part in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The four areas really represent the pillars that made it possible for Iceland to rise from extreme poverty in the first decades of the last century, to prosperity.

This year the four GRÓ training programmes will be 100 years old. Combined they have been operating for exactly one century. The Geothermal Training programme is 44 years old, the Fisheries Training Programme was established 26 years ago, the Land Restoration Training Programme is sixteen and the Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme 14. See? Together that makes 100! GRÓ itself is only 3 years old, as it was in 2020 that these four training programmes, that had previously been run as part of the United Nations University, joined under the umbrella of GRÓ, that operates under the auspices of UNESCO.

Dear fellows,

When we met in mid-November you had recently arrived in Iceland. And now, half a year later, you have completed the training here at the GRÓ FTP – where you have added many new tools to the toolbox and mastered your expertise on sustainable fisheries.

One of the wisdoms we have taken from the Vikings is that travelling gives you wisdom. And of course, the Vikings were great travellers, so they knew what they were talking about!

I am certain you are going back home, not only with new knowledge about fisheries, but with new friends and empowering experiences. You survived the Icelandic winter, which was unusually cold. That's a feat in itself! At the Laugardalur swimming pool you were introduced to the favourite pass time of the Icelanders – soaking in hot water – and some of you took swimming lessons. You toured the Northern part of Iceland to learn about the Icelandic fish industry, and then completed your studies in different parts of Iceland. Some of you here in the capital area, and others in Hólar or Akureyri in the North. The Sustainable Aquaculture group also travelled to the Faroe Islands, on an invitation from the Faroese government, where the group attended a workshop on fish farming. Iceland and the Faroe Islands are close neighbouring nations and we in Iceland welcome that we are now expanding our already deep cooperation into new areas and taking the first steps to work together in the field of international development cooperation.

Dear fellows,

This truly is a time for round numbers. Not only are the four GRÓ programmes combined 100 years old. Today, there are 22 fellows graduating, which means that the total number of graduates will go from 1.578 to 1.600. In addition, 101 fellows have finished a Master's degree on a GRÓ scholarship, and last week the 22<sup>nd</sup> doctor that has been supported by GRÓ, dr. Hang Thi Nguyen, a former GRÓ FTP fellow, defended her PhD thesis. Also, more than 4.000 fellows have attended short courses in partner countries.

Dear fellows, you are now a part of the GRÓ alumni network of 1.600 fellows around the world. Of these 464 are FTP alumni. We are very proud of our alumni and of the work they are

doing at home. One of the things we are working on at GRÓ currently is to strengthen the alumni network, so that you can not only stay in touch with us at GRÓ, with each other and previous fellows of your programme, but also other alumni from the other GRÓ programmes.

I travelled to Kenya and Uganda last month where I met alumni from the four programmes, including dr. Margaret Masette, a 1999 alumna of the Fisheries Training Programme. It was impressive to hear about the work she and the other alumni have undertaken following their stay in Iceland. As Margaret said herself, she is “now retired - but not tired” and still working on advancing sustainable fisheries in her home country Uganda, including by supervising students at Makerere university. This is just one example of many.

Dear fellows,

Now you will now return back home, to your institutions, to put to good use the skills and knowledge you have acquired during your time in Iceland. We look forward to staying in touch with you and hearing of your achievements.

Congratulations! I wish you all the best in your future endeavours!