

Greetings from UNU-LRT

The year 2014 will soon come to an end and the year 2015 commence, which has been appointed as the International Year of Soils by the UN General Assembly. We thank our collaborators for good cooperation in 2014 and wish you all a prosperous New Year 2015 and success in raising awareness of the importance of soils and land restoration.



2014 Graduation

On 18 September, 12 fellows graduated from the UNU-LRT six-month training programme, five women and seven men from six countries: Mongolia (2 fellows) and Uzbekistan (1) in Central Asia and Ethiopia (2), Ghana (3), Niger (2) and Uganda (2) in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The graduation ceremony is always a festive occasion and a time to look back on results and successes. With the graduating fellows of 2014, the total number of fellows that have graduated from the Land Restoration Training Programme since the beginning has reached 63 fellows, 30 women and 33 men.

The fellows received their certificates from the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Iceland, Mr Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson, and the Director General for the Ministry's Directorate for International Development Cooperation, Ms Maria Erla Marelsdottir, who is also a Board Member of UNU-LRT. The Minister addressed the fellows and invited guests, as did Dr Magnus H. Johannsson who spoke on behalf of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland, Dr Aslaug Helgadóttir, Vice Rector of the Agricultural University of Iceland and Ms Berglind Orradóttir, Acting Programme Director of UNU-LRT. The Minister emphasized in his speech the dedication of Icelandic authorities to combating land degradation and restoring degraded land, and moreover Iceland's will to include targets to halt and reverse land degradation in the new Sustainable Development Goals. Two graduating fellows, Ms Yulduzhon Abdullaeva from Uzbekistan and Mr Godwin Poreku from Ghana, also talked about their experience in Iceland. A few days later the fellows travelled back to their home countries.



Susan Muska – visiting lecturer

UNU-LRT received a visiting lecturer in the beginning of September. Ms Susan Muska, an American documentary film maker and a speech coach, gave a two day workshop for the UNU-LRT fellows on presentation and presenting techniques. In the workshop the fellows got an opportunity to rehearse their upcoming presentations on their final reports. Ms Muska gave some very important advice and taught and showcased practical techniques on how to execute an oral presentation. She used a videotape recorder to guide and train the fellows in their techniques of presenting a short talk where the main points come across clearly.

Ms Susan Muska has also worked for the UNU Gender Studies and Training programme.



News from former fellows

In our Newsletter from September this year we reported about this year's achievements of former fellows of the UNU-LRT. All of the reported achievements were from the 2013 group of fellows. We still have some news from that group as well as news from this year's fellows and from fellows in earlier years.

Mr Aboubacar Gadagé from Niger, who graduated in September this year, was a National Programme Officer at the Ministry for the Environment, Urban Sanitation and Sustainable Development, in the capital city of Niamey when he entered the six-month training programme. He has now been promoted to a position as Departmental Director of the Environment in Baleyara, a town in the Tillaberi Region in West Niger.

Mr Mohamadou Habibou Gabou, also from Niger and who was in the UNU-LRT 2013 cohort, has co-authored a chapter in the book *Sustainable Intensification to Advance Food Security and Enhance Climate Resilience in Africa*, edited by Rattan Lal et al. The book, which was published recently by Springer, is divided into nine parts and Mr Gabou's chapter is in Part V: Rehabilitation of Degraded Land through Forestry and Agro-Forestry. The name of the chapter is "Management Practices/Techniques Commonly Used in Niger Republic, West Africa".

Ms Wellencia Clara Mukaru from Namibia, who graduated with Mr Gabou in 2013, recently started work on her PhD at Tübingen University in Germany. In her PhD study she aims to develop robust solutions and innovative strategies for sustainable management and stabilisation of geo-biosphere feedback in savannahs across a broad range of climatic conditions and spatio-temporal scales. Ms Mukaru will more specifically look at effects of CO₂ elevation on shrubs.

Also from Namibia, but from the UNU-LRT group of 2010, Mr Hiskia Mbura finished his Master's degree in Integrated Water Resource Management from the University of Queensland in Australia earlier this year.

Finally we have news from Mr Abraham Rutabatiina Mwesigye who was one of the fellows in the first group in 2007 who helped shape the training programme. Mr Mwesigye is a lecturer at the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at Makerere University in Uganda. He is also working on his PhD at Makerere University, looking at the effect of the copper mining industry in Uganda on soil, water, foods and forage. Mr Mwesigye got the ideas for his PhD studies during his training at the Land Restoration Training Programme in 2007. The training has also contributed to his teaching at Makerere University where he now teaches a course on land degradation and restoration. Looking back he finds the training has been very beneficial in his academic and professional life.

The UNU-LRT Team congratulates all of them on their achievements.

New videos on UNU-LRT's website

In November, UNU-LRT launched three new videos on its website. In the videos, three fellows of the 2014 cohort share their experiences of participating in the UNU-LRT six-month training programme. The three former fellows are Mr Mulugeta Sebatleab Tesfay from Ethiopia, Mr Osman Fuseini from Ghana and Ms Sumjidmaa Sainnemekh from Mongolia. There are four other videos on the website that were recorded and published in 2013 with fellows from the 2013 cohort: Mr Azamat Isakov from Kyrgyzstan, Mr Idrissa Soumana from Niger, Ms Olive Chemutai from Uganda and Ms Wellencia Clara Mukaru from Namibia. Here you can find a link to the videos on our UNU-LRT website <http://www.unulrt.is/en/videos>



Looking to the new year ahead

UNU-LRT is looking forward to the year ahead – the year that has been appointed as International Year of Soils by the UN General Assembly. Soil is a crucial natural resource. Soils are the basis for over 90% of food production on land, as well as for production of materials used to make clothes, shelter, furniture and other things needed for our existence. Soils store and filter water, within them nutrients are recycled, and soils are vital for maintaining our planet's biodiversity. Soils play a key role in the carbon cycle and are a considerable carbon sink. They therefore play an important part in combating climate change, and land restoration is one of the solutions to mitigating climate change. Moreover, halting land degradation and restoring degraded land is an important component of protecting our soils for the well-being of people today and for future generations. The importance of soils is thus undisputable.



On 1 January Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, the UNU-LRT Programme Director, is returning to work after a maternity leave. During her leave Ms Brita Berglund was hired temporarily as a staff member. The UNU-LRT Team would like to extend its appreciation to Ms Berglund for her work and commitment to UNU-LRT.