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UNU-LRT

Land Restoration Training Programme



UNU Land Restoration Training Programme (UNU-LRT)

Annual Report 2014

United Nations University Land Restoration
Training Programme

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DIRECTORS' SUMMARY FOR 2014

The year 2014 has been exciting and fruitful for UNU-LRT. It was especially enjoyable for UNU-LRT to welcome the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Ms Monique Barbut, in June. It was an excellent opportunity to discuss the shared objectives of UNU-LRT and UNCCD, to combat land degradation and to restore degraded land.

UNU-LRT engaged in the discussion on the post-2015 development agenda this year. In February the Director, Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, was a keynote speaker at a panel discussion in New York which was held in connection with the United Nations work on the new sustainable development goals. This significant dialogue was on the need for a specific goal that addresses the importance of combating land degradation and desertification, restoring degraded land, and building capacity in this field.

Twelve fellows graduated from the six-month training programme on 18 September. The fellows came from Mongolia (2 fellows), Uzbekistan (1), Ethiopia (2), Ghana (3), Niger (2) and Uganda (2). This makes the total number of graduating fellows from the Land Restoration Training Programme 63; of these, 30 have been women and 33 men. UNU-LRT puts great emphasis on gender equality and is proud of having a nearly equal number of women and men in the graduating cohorts as well as in the groups of lecturers and supervisors in the training programme.

One of the two longer excursions in the six-month training programme was remodelled this year. The new theme of the trip is *Climate change and its consequences*. In that trip fellows get a comprehensive view of glacial changes in Iceland as an effect of climate change, through site visits, lectures and discussions.

Two international guest lecturers taught in the six-month training programme this year. Dr Richard Thomas from UNU-INWEH in Canada covered management of dryland resources, and Ms Susan Muska, an American documentary film maker and a speech coach, gave lectures and interactive training sessions on presentation techniques and how to give successful and high impact oral presentations.

The office facilities for the employees and fellows of UNU-LRT were improved substantially this year. The improved facilities are important for the growth and increased activities of UNU-LRT in coming years.

Three trips to UNU-LRT partner countries were organized this year to strengthen existing partnerships and establish new ones, and to interview candidates for the UNU-LRT six-month training programme.



UNU-LRT is governed by a Board of five members. The representative of the Agricultural University of Iceland, rector of the University Dr Agust Sigurdsson, stepped down from his position in June. He had served on the Board since the launch of the programme in 2007. We thank him for his excellent service to UNU-LRT. The Director, Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, went on a maternity leave on 1 May 2014. The Deputy Director, Ms Berglind Orradottir, served as the Acting Director during her leave. Ms Brita Berglund joined the staff on 15 May and worked for UNU-LRT until November 2014. Ms Berglund is a specialist in environmental communication at the Agricultural University of Iceland and a Certified Coach. Mr Muhammad Azfar Karim worked for UNU-LRT during the summer and was based at the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland headquarters in Gunnarsholt.

Berglind Orradottir and Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir





ABOUT UNU-LRT

The United Nations University Land Restoration Training Programme (UNU-LRT) was established in early 2010. The mission of UNU-LRT is to train specialists from developing countries to combat land degradation and restore degraded land, and to assist in strengthening institutional capacity and gender equality in the field of land restoration and sustainable land management in developing countries that are faced with land degradation.

The programme started as a three-year pilot project in 2007, aiming at becoming a UNU training programme by the end of the pilot phase. After a successful mid-term evaluation by an international evaluator, the programme was accepted as a UNU training programme. The programme is implemented jointly by the Agricultural University of Iceland (AUI) and the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI). UNU-LRT is also supported by a wide range of other Icelandic institutions, UNU programmes and international institutions.

Since the programme was launched in 2007, 63 fellows have graduated from the programme, 30 women and 33 men. The fellows have come from the following countries in Africa and Central Asia: Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Namibia, Niger, Tunisia, Uganda, Mongolia, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

UNU-LRT is governed by a Board of members that are representatives of AUI, SCSI, the Icelandic Forest Service, United Nations University and an expert nominated by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Moreover, a Studies Committee academically governs the programme, chaired by the UNU-LRT Director. The Studies Committee consists of members from leading research institutes and universities working in the field of land restoration and sustainable land management.

The main activity of UNU-LRT is an annual intensive six-month postgraduate training programme on land restoration and sustainable land management. The



first half of the training is dedicated to course work which includes lectures, practical training, field visits, exercises and group work where the focus is on active participation by each fellow. In the latter half of the training the focus is on individual research projects which are tailored to the academic and practical background and needs of the individual fellows and their institutions.

UNU-LRT has a webpage (www.unulrt.is) where information about the programme, the latest news and the individual projects of former fellows are accessible. In addition, UNU-LRT has a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/unulrt).

PROGRESS REPORT

SIX-MONTH TRAINING PROGRAMME 2014

The six-month training programme began on 11 March with 12 fellows, five women and seven men, from six countries: Mongolia (2 fellows), Uzbekistan (1), Ethiopia (2), Ghana (3), Niger (2) and Uganda (2). The group graduated on 18 September and 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. A week earlier the fellows had presented the results of their respective individual research projects at an open seminar at the Keldnaholt research campus of AUI.

This was the second year of implementing the new UNU-LRT curriculum. The topics in the curriculum are divided into eight modules where the first six

modules are organized according to the UNU-LRT project cycle. The aim of using the project cycle is to assist with understanding the link between science and theory, and the practical aspects of land issues and project management. In addition to lectures, short field visits and group work, the fellows also go on two excursions to experience for themselves land degradation in Iceland and the various measures that have been taken to reclaim and restore the land. This year, one of these longer excursions, to the south-east of Iceland, had a new theme: *Climate change and its consequences*. The effects of the retreat of glaciers during the last century are very vivid in this part of Iceland and the fellows got a comprehensive view of glacial changes as an effect of climate change. During the trip the fellows had the opportunity to learn from experts on environmental issues, meteorology and geology and got an introduction to research work on changes in the weather and the environment and what measures have and can be taken to meet the challenges posed by climate change.

The international lecturers of 2014 were Dr Richard Thomas from UNU-INWEH in Canada, who visited the programme for the third consecutive year and gave lectures on management of dryland resources, and Ms Susan Muska, an American documentary film maker and a speech coach. Ms Muska visited the training programme in September and gave lectures and interactive training sessions on presentation techniques and how to give successful and high impact oral presentations. 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. Shortly after Ms Muska's training the fellows presented their individual projects at an open seminar.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

[Keynote from UNU-LRT at a panel discussion on land degradation in New York](#)

Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, the UNU-LRT Director, was the keynote speaker at a panel discussion organized by the Permanent Mission of Iceland and the Group of Friends on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought, in partnership with UNCCD, FAO and IAEA, in New York city on 28 February. The panel discussion was planned in connection with the United Nations work on sustainable development goals (SDGs) which will build upon the Millennium Development Goals and merge with the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Iceland, along with other states, has accentuated the need for a goal that addresses the importance of combating land degradation and desertification, restoring degraded land and building capacity in this important field.



In her talk, Dr Aegisdottir went over the Icelandic experience on restoration of degraded land which spans over a hundred years. She emphasized the importance of capacity building within the field in order for it to succeed. In the meeting the importance of unity among nations toward a progressive objective on restoration of degraded land and combating desertification was also discussed. It is not only a concern for particular countries but a question of securing continuing ecosystem services by natural systems which are essential to ensure food security for all.

The Executive Secretary of the UNCCD visits UNU-LRT

The Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Ms Monique Barbut, visited Iceland and UNU-LRT on 1 and 2 June. Ms Barbut met with the fellows, employees and Studies Committee of UNU-LRT. At the meeting, the Acting Director gave a brief introduction to UNU-LRT and then there was an open discussion by the meeting's participants. The fellows shared their thoughts on challenges in their home countries and how they foresee the training at UNU-LRT will be beneficial in their work when they return home. Ms Barbut acknowledged the activities of UNU-LRT and pointed out how the programme fills the objectives of the UNCCD. She also talked about the necessity of globalizing the issue, as land degradation and desertification are not only concerns of the world's dry areas but affect people and countries all over the world through, for example, the problem of food insecurity. Restoring degraded land has furthermore a direct link to risk reduction of natural disasters such as floods and droughts. Moreover, she spoke about the importance of assuring women's rights to land which would help increase food production. It was an honour to receive Ms Barbut at UNU-LRT and an excellent opportunity to discuss shared objectives: combating land degradation and desertification.





Ms Barbut also visited South Iceland. The excursion was organized by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs with SCSi and UNU-LRT. Ms Barbut was introduced to land degradation and desertification challenges in Iceland and how the formation of barren deserts, in spite of a humid climate, came about. Successes and failures in land restoration in Iceland were also introduced and the opportunity used to introduce UNU-LRT.

During her visit, Ms Barbut gave a talk entitled *A Secure Future – Powered by the land* at an open meeting at the National Museum of Iceland. The meeting was held by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources, UNU-LRT, AUI, SCSi, the Institute of International Affairs, and the Institute for Sustainability Studies.

UNU-LRT visited by ambassadors

UNU-LRT was visited on separate occasions by two ambassadors: the ambassador of Ethiopia to the Nordic countries, Ms Woinshet Tadesse, and the Brussels-based ambassador of Niger to Iceland, Mr Adani Illo. Both ambassadors were introduced to the activities and facilities of UNU-LRT and to the group of fellows, particularly the fellows from their respective countries. The fellows discussed with the ambassadors the benefits of the programme to their institutions.

Seminar by UNU Programmes and UN Association in Iceland

On 14 May a seminar was held on performance management in the development sector, focusing on the UNU programmes in Iceland. A presentation was given by the Studies Director of UNU-GEST on behalf of the four UNU programmes on assessing the results of the United Nations University training programmes in Iceland. Fellows from all four UNU programmes gave a talk about their experiences and expectations of the training. Presenting on behalf of UNU-LRT was Ms Irene Jemilatu Yenuyet Yaro from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Ghana. She described the challenges with the mining sector she faces as a Programme Officer at EPA in the Eastern Region in Ghana. The seminar was held by the UN Association in Iceland in cooperation with the UNU programmes in Iceland, the Institute of International Affairs, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and took place in Askja at the University of Iceland.



UNU-LRT website

Four videos with interviews with fellows from the 2013 programme were published on the UNU-LRT website and YouTube in autumn 2013. In 2014 three additional videos with fellows from the 2014 programme were added to the website and to YouTube. The biannual UNU-LRT newsletters were sent out to partners, former fellows and friends of the programme at the beginning of September and in December, as well as being published on the UNU-LRT website.

Improved housing facilities for UNU-LRT

The office facilities for employees and fellows of UNU-LRT at Keldnaholt, the research campus of AUI, were improved substantially following a renovation of the premises. These facilities include more spacious offices for the fellows, a meeting room and a new teaching space. This improves the working conditions for everyone involved in the Programme. Additionally, new living quarters were brought into use in June at the headquarters of SCSl in Gunnarsholt. They provide housing for ten additional fellows, which is important for the growth and increased activities of UNU-LRT in coming years.

EVALUATION OF UNU-LRT

Every year the UNU-LRT six-month training programme is evaluated weekly throughout the three month period of lectures, short field visits and group work. After the two excursions during the summer and after lectures at Gunnarsholt, the fellows are also requested to fill in evaluation sheets. At the end of the six-month training, the programme is evaluated thoroughly, both by filling in an anonymous written evaluation as well as by group discussion with the fellows. In 2014 this evaluation day took place on 17 September, the day before graduation. The result of the evaluation showed that the fellows were generally satisfied with the six-month training programme and the content of the programme. There was general satisfaction with the organization and outcome of the individual research project work. The fellows stressed that they learned a lot from the individual project work and that it provided them with many skills such as analytical, organizational and writing skills. The fellows were also pleased with



the two field excursions in the summer, especially to the south-east of Iceland where the theme was *Climate change and its consequences*. This new theme for the excursion was well received and appreciated.

UNU-LRT SITE VISITS

The candidates for the UNU-LRT six-month training programme are carefully selected. They are proposed by institutions that have been identified as playing a significant role in land restoration and sustainable land management in UNU-LRT partner countries in Africa and Central Asia. The training of the fellows is considered to be a contribution to capacity building of their institutions. The UNU-LRT employees conduct site visits to the UNU-LRT partner countries and the selected institutions. Personal interviews are conducted with each candidate who is proposed by his/her institution. Each candidate needs to have at least one university degree, one-year experience working in the field of specialization that he/she will pursue at UNU-LRT, and have a permanent position at the institute, have good English skills, and be under the age of 40.

The UNU-LRT Acting Director and Office Manager visited three partner countries in 2014: Malawi, Kyrgyzstan and Uganda.

MALAWI

The UNU-LRT Office Manager visited Malawi in January 2014. This was the second visit of a UNU-LRT representative to the country. The purpose of the visit was to interview potential candidates for the UNU-LRT six-month training programme as well as to strengthen cooperation between UNU-LRT and the Malawian institutions that were visited by UNU-LRT during the first visit to the country in 2012.

Malawi is among the poorest countries in the world and faces many environmental challenges. There is an increasing demand for farmland for food production due to rapid population growth. Four local institutions were visited as well as the Royal Norwegian Embassy to introduce the UNU-LRT programme and look for potential cooperation. The ICEIDA office/Embassy of Iceland provided assistance with

transportation during the visit. The institutions visited were: (1) Land Resources Conservation Service, which is a department within the Ministry of Agriculture in Malawi; (2) Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR); (3) Natural Resources College (NRC); and (4) Department of Mines.

KYRGYZSTAN

The Acting Director visited Kyrgyzstan in early October. The purpose of the visit was threefold: to strengthen existing institutional links, to establish new institutional links and to interview potential candidates proposed by these institutions for the UNU-LRT six-month training programme. Visits were made to local institutions and universities which UNU-LRT cooperates with and new potential partners. The institutions visited were: (1) CAMP Alatoo public foundation, (2) Kyrgyz National Agrarian University (KNAU), (3) Naryn State University named after S. Naamatov, (4) Forest Institute of the Academy of Science, and (5) the Pasture Department under the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation of the Kyrgyz Republic. The Forest Institute and the Pasture Department are new potential partner institutions. Staff members of these institutions and the universities were interviewed as potential candidates for the UNU-LRT six-month training programme in the coming years. Furthermore, Ms Orradottir introduced UNU-LRT at the UNDP Office in Bishkek.



UGANDA

The UNU-LRT Office Manager visited Uganda in October 2014. The purpose of the visit was to strengthen the connection with the two cooperating partners in Uganda which are Makerere University in Kampala and the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) on behalf of the Local District's Governments, and as well to interview potential candidates from those partner institutions. The Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEIDA) was the contact agent of UNU-LRT in Uganda and assisted the Office Manager with logistical matters in Uganda. Furthermore, the Royal Norwegian Embassy was visited to introduce the UNU-LRT training programme and explore possible cooperation for Ugandan fellows to participate in the six-month training programme.

UNU-LRT PRESENTATIONS

Presentations

Aegisdottir H.H. 2014. *UNU-LRT training for a sustainable future*. Presentation given at a panel discussion on Decertification, Land Degradation and Drought: Capacity Building, SDGs and the Post 2015 Development Agenda, 28 February, New York.

Barbut M. 2014. *A secure future – Powered by the land*. Presentation at an open seminar at the National Museum of Iceland, 2 June, Reykjavík, Iceland.

Orradottir B. and H.H. Aegisdottir. 2014. *UNU-LRT training for a sustainable future*. Poster presented at the *Landsýn* agricultural convention, 7 March 2014, Hvanneyri, Iceland

Yaro I.J.Y. 2014. *Applying new skills and knowledge in the home countries: Challenges with the mining sector in Ghana*. Presentation held at the seminar Performance Management in the Development Sector, 14 May, Reykjavík, Iceland.

Media appearance

An interview with one 2014 fellow, Ms Sumjidmaa Sainnemekh from Mongolia, was published in the Icelandic web magazine on development issues *Heimsljós*, 16 April 2014.

UNU-LRT was presented in a supplement publication of the Icelandic newspaper *Bændablaðið* 8 May 2014.

Other

UNU-LRT was presented, among the other UNU training programmes in Iceland, on the Reykjavik Culture Night on 23 August at the premises of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The UNU programmes were also presented to the employees of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs at a lunch meeting at the Ministry on 26 November.

PHOTO CREDITS

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