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UNU-LRT

Land Restoration Training Programme



UNU Land Restoration Training Programme (UNU-LRT)

Annual Report 2015

United Nations University Land Restoration
Training Programme

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DIRECTOR'S SUMMARY FOR 2015

Dear friends of UNU-LRT,

The year 2015 was an active and fruitful year for UNU-LRT. The highlights of the year were the Programme's numerous participations in the international post-2015 development agenda discussions. Firstly, UNU-LRT participated in a side event at the Climate Conference (COP21) in Paris, which focussed on the challenges of land degradation, the goal of a land degradation-neutral world, the benefits of soil carbon sequestration and the importance of land restoration capacity building. At the side event, the UNU-LRT Director gave a talk on the importance of training people to become change agents in order to combat land degradation, restore degraded land and mitigate and adapt to climate change. UNU-LRT also participated in the high-level symposium on land degradation neutrality at the third International Conference on Financing for Development, which was held in Addis Ababa in July. Furthermore, UNU-LRT Director, staff and former fellows participated in a side event at the UNCCD COP12 in Ankara, Turkey, as well as in a symposium on capacity building at the World Conference on Ecological Restoration, which was held in Manchester, UK.

Another highlight of the year was the graduation of 13 fellows from the annual six-month training programme on 17 September. This year's cohort of fellows (seven women and six men) came from: Mongolia (3 fellows), Kyrgyzstan (2), Ethiopia (2), Ghana (1), Malawi (2), Namibia (1) and Uganda (2). There were four international guest lecturers, who lectured during the six-month training this year; including Dr Julia Kloos and Dr Zita Sebesvari from UNU-EHS, who lectured on ecosystems and disaster risk reduction, and Ms Susan Muska and Dr Jeffrey Herrick, who both revisited UNU-LRT.

The Programme's staff and fellows were honoured to welcome the UNU Rector, Dr David Malone, to Iceland in July. UNU-LRT welcomed the Rector at the headquarters of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI), where the UNU-LRT Director introduced the activities, priorities and future directions of the programme, and the fellows shared experiences from their work at home and assessed how they anticipated the training at UNU-LRT would benefit them and their institutions when back home at their workplaces.

Other activities of the Programme in 2015 included a workshop that was held in collaboration with Makerere University and the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) in Kampala (Uganda). The objective of the workshop was to explore how Ugandan partners could see UNU-LRT expand its activities within Uganda in coming years. Moreover, the Programme organized, in partnership with the SCSI and the UN Association in Iceland, a seminar to celebrate the 2015 International Year of Soils. Finally, the UNU-LRT Director went on a fact finding mission to Lesotho. This was the first time a representative from UNU-LRT visited the country, with the visit organised by the Ministry of Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation in Lesotho.

Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir
UNU-LRT Director



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 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, a total of 76 fellows have graduated from the programme, 37 women and 39 men. The fellows have come from the following countries in Africa and Central Asia: Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, Tunisia, Uganda, Mongolia, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

UNU-LRT is governed by a board consisting of representatives of AUI, SCSI, the Icelandic Forest Service (IFS), United Nations University (UNU) 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 of 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. Furthermore, UNU-LRT has a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/unulrt) and a twitter account (@UNULRT).

PROGRESS REPORT

SIX-MONTH TRAINING PROGRAMME 2015

The six-month training programme began on 10 March with 13 fellows, seven women and six men, from six countries: Mongolia (3 fellows), Kyrgyzstan (2), Ethiopia (2), Ghana (1), Malawi (2), Namibia (1) and Uganda (2). The group graduated on 17 September and received their certificates from the Rector of the Agricultural University of Iceland, Dr Björn Thorsteinsson, and the Permanent Secretary of State, Mr Stefan Haukur Johannesson, who also addressed the fellows and invited guests. Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, UNU-LRT Director, and Mr Sveinn Runolfsson, Director of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland and the Chair of UNU-LRT Board, also gave speeches, as did two of the graduating fellows, Ms Uuganzaya Myagmarjav from Mongolia and Mr Emmanuel Chidiwa Mbewe from Malawi, who spoke on behalf of the 2015 cohort of fellows. During the previous week, the fellows had presented the results of their respective individual research projects at an open seminar at the Keldnaholt research campus of AUI.

There were four international guest lecturers who lectured at the training programme this year. Ms Susan Muska, an American documentary film maker and a speech coach, came for the second consecutive year to train the fellows in presentation techniques. She gave lectures and held interactive training sessions on how to give successful and high impact oral presentations. Dr Jeffrey Herrick



visited the training programme for the third time with lectures and practical training on the Global Land-Potential Knowledge System (LandPKS), which is a mobile app for sustainable land management, restoration, and monitoring. Two lecturers from UNU-EHS in Bonn, Dr Julia Kloos and Dr Zita Sebesvari, lectured for the first time in the six-month training programme. They gave lectures on ecosystems and disaster risk reduction, emphasising the link between social and ecological systems and how sustainable management, conservation and ecosystem restoration can reduce disaster risk. Throughout their sessions, the UNU-LRT fellows worked in groups on several case studies to identify the different components of disaster risk, such as exposure and vulnerability, and to identify ecosystem services and beneficiaries.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

Visit of the UNU Rector

In the beginning of July, the UNU Rector Dr David Malone visited the four UNU programmes hosted in Iceland: the Geothermal, the Fisheries, the Gender Equality and the Land Restoration Training Programmes. UNU-LRT welcomed the Rector at the headquarters of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI) where the



UNU-LRT fellows were staying at the time of the visit. A seminar was held at SCS I where UNU-LRT Director introduced the activities, priorities and future directions of the programme, and the fellows shared experiences from their work at home and assessed how they anticipated the training at UNU-LRT would benefit them and their institutions when back home at their workplaces. The research activities and international co-operation of the two implementing institutions of UNU-LRT, the Agricultural University of Iceland and SCS I, were also introduced.

The Directors of the other UNU programmes in Iceland attended the seminar at SCS I as well as the UNU Vice Rector, Mr Max Bond. The SCS I Director, Mr Sveinn Runolfsson, took Dr Malone and Mr Bond on a guided tour around the SCS I premises and went over the history of restoration in the area, which has been driven by research and innovation, as it has been in the whole of the country.

In his visit, Rector Malone had several high-level meetings, including a meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson and Iceland's president Mr Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, as well as a meeting with the former president, Madam Vigdis Finnbogadottir.

Dr Malone joined the United Nations University in 2013 and is the sixth Rector of UNU. In that role, he holds the rank of Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Workshop in Uganda

UNU-LRT held a successful workshop in Kampala, Uganda on 30 June and 1 July. The workshop was organized in collaboration with the Ugandan partners of UNU-LRT, the Makerere University and National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) on behalf of the District Local Governments. The objective of the workshop was to explore how Ugandan partners could see UNU-LRT expand its activities within Uganda in coming years. Former Ugandan fellows attended





the workshop, which was facilitated by Dr Jon Geir Petursson, a UNU-LRT Studies Committee member, lecturer and a supervisor.

There was a general consensus at the workshop that the recruitment of fellows from Makerere University and the District Local Administrations has been effective and that the training has proven to be very useful for the fellows when returning back to their positions. This has already generated a group of former fellows in Uganda at strategic positions, both in academia as well as out in the rural districts where sustainable land management and restoration measures are supposed to be delivered in practice. Furthermore, there was a great interest to seek ways to get short courses on land restoration and sustainable land management to Uganda in the coming years. More detailed outcomes of the workshop will be used to guide the next steps of UNU-LRT to strengthen its activities within collaborating countries, both in the fields of capacity building, training, and research collaboration.

High-level symposium on land degradation neutrality at the third International Conference on Financing for Development

UNU-LRT participated in a high-level symposium on land degradation neutrality at the third International Conference on Financing for Development, which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 13-16 July. The Governments of Iceland and Namibia (on behalf of the Group of Friends on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought) hosted a symposium, in co-operation with the State of Qatar, United Nations University, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Secretariat, UNDP and Biovision. At the symposium, Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir (UNU-LRT Director) and Mr Mulugeta Sebatleab, former UNU-LRT fellow and lecturer at Mekelle University in Ethiopia, gave talks and participated on an expert panel. Dr Aegisdottir focused on the importance of capacity building and leadership training in ecological restoration and sustainable land management in order to achieve a land degradation neutral world. Mr Sebatleab talked about land restoration challenges and opportunities in Ethiopia and stressed the importance of farmers' participation (both women and men) in land restoration activities. Moreover, he emphasized the importance of training opportunities for gaining experiences and sharing ideas. Other participants on the panel were Mr Simone Quatrini from the UNCCD Global Mechanism, Dr Hans R. Herren,



President and CEO of the Millennium Institute and President of Biovision, and Ms Alice Ruhweza from UNDP.

UNU-LRT participated in the World Conference on Ecological Restoration

UNU-LRT held a symposium on capacity building to restore resilient ecosystems in developing countries at the sixth World Conference on Ecological Restoration in Manchester, England. Besides presenting the UNU-LRT programme, two former UNU-LRT fellows from Mongolia and Ghana gave talks on the restoration needs and actions in their countries. Professionals from other capacity building initiatives shared their experiences and views on the needs and effectiveness of capacity building. Diverse issues were covered, ranging from the critical importance of socio-ecological resilience to ensure the welfare of poor people who often depend on natural resources, to the challenges of sustaining institutional capacity in politically unstable states, to exciting new mobile phone technologies that have the potential to increase the success of restoration practices and projects.

UNU-LRT Friendship Forest

Since 2008, the UNU-LRT fellows have stayed for about two months at the headquarters of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI) in Gunnarsholt in South Iceland, where they work on their research projects and get to know the work of SCSI. In 2015, the SCSI Director Mr Sveinn Runolfsson initiated a project called the Friendship Forest, where UNU-LRT fellows were each given a tree to plant in a prospective UNU-LRT Friendship Forest, close to SCSI headquarters. Future UNU-LRT fellows will continue the tradition to plant trees in the area each year before moving from Gunnarsholt, and will have the opportunity to enjoy the trees as they grow. The fellows planted rowan trees (*Sorbus aucuparia*), a native species that grows in the birch woodlands and forests in Iceland.

At the event, Mr Runolfsson, addressed the fellows and informed them about the history of the site chosen for the UNU-LRT Friendship Forest. The area was covered by sand and without vegetation about four decades ago, but has been reclaimed successfully pursuant to the National Endowment Gift in 1974. The National Endowment Gift was based on a resolution by the Icelandic Parliament



regarding land reclamation and land conservation commemorating 1100 years of settlement of the country. This resolution was passed unanimously by the Parliament at a celebratory session of the Parliament in summer 1974.

UNU-LRT presented at UNCCD COP12 in Ankara

From 12 – 23 October, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) hosted its Twelfth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP12) in Ankara, Turkey. At COP12, delegates focused on solutions to issues related to desertification, land degradation and drought, including how to pursue the target to achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN) and how to align the recently adopted Global Goals for Sustainable Development with the goals and action programmes of UNCCD. It was emphasized that by restoring degraded land and promoting sustainable land management, many of the Global Goals will be more attainable, including increased food and water security, less hunger and poverty and reversed negative climate change impacts.

UNU-LRT organized a side event at COP 12, which presented the annual six-month training programme as a model for providing the capacity building necessary to support land degradation neutrality initiatives. At the event, Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir presented the activities of the six-month programme and Mr Azamat Isakov, Director of CAMP Alatau in Kyrgyzstan and former UNU-LRT fellow, shared how the UNU-LRT training has contributed to capacity building of his organization. Dr Jeff Herrick, Soil Scientist at USDA Agricultural Research Service and a multiple times guest lecturer at UNU-LRT six-month training programme, reviewed the key lessons learned on how to design a capacity building programme to achieve LDN.

UNU-LRT also participated in another side event at COP12 on the Global Land-Potential Knowledge System (LandPKS) which allows the potential of land to be defined by using mobile apps. The LandPKS is designed to integrate local knowledge and global databases to support land management decisions. The UNU-LRT fellows 2015 received lectures and hands-on training in using the apps, and at the event a video with their feedback was released.



Seminar on soils, climate change and the Global Goals for sustainable development

To celebrate the International Year of Soils 2015, UNU-LRT organized throughout the year short public meetings on issues related to soils, in partnership with the SCSl and the UN Association in Iceland. In those meetings, topics such as soils & food, soils & education, soils & economy, and soils & cities, were covered. At the end of the series of meetings, a seminar was held to mark the International Year of Soils and the importance of soils, where it was discussed expansively, and connected to the new Global Goals for sustainable development. During the seminar, the importance of soils and ecosystem restoration to reach the Global Goals and to fight climate change (Goal #13) was emphasized. A panel of people from different arenas of society shared their thoughts on how they believe individuals as well as communities, nations and corporations could contribute to solving the pressing global issues related to soils and land health, which have a direct link to climate change.

The UNU-LRT Director co-chaired the seminar with the Chair of the UN Association in Iceland. It was a very informative and positive meeting, which was attended by a large number of people, among them Madam Vigdis Finnbogadottir, the former President of Iceland, who put great emphasis on land restoration during her presidential years, and still does. She now serves as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for languages.

Side event at the Climate Conference (COP21) in Paris

UNU-LRT participated in a side event at the Climate Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, this week. The title of the side event was Desertification and Land Restoration – The Climate Connection. The side event focused on the challenges of land degradation, the goal of a land degradation-neutral world, the benefits of soil carbon sequestration and the importance of land restoration capacity building. UNU-LRT Director Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir gave a talk on the importance of training people to become change agents in order to combat land degradation, restore degraded land and mitigate and adapt to climate change. Ms Monique Barbut, the Executive Secretary of UNCCD, linked climate change and land degradation neutrality in her talk and emphasized the importance of land for us to be able to reach the goals of the other Rio conventions (CBD and FCCC) and for reaching the Global Goals. Others presenting at the event were Mr Sveinn Runolfsson, Director of SCSl and Dr Davdin Davgadorj from



the Permanent Mission of Mongolia to the UN. The Icelandic Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources, Ms Sigrun Magnúsdóttir, gave opening remarks at the event, which was organized by the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources of Iceland.

Visit from the World Bank

An Advisor of Agriculture and Rural Development at the World Bank, Dr Erick Fernandes, together with Professor Kevin Anderson, paid UNU-LRT a visit in March. Both of them have been involved in work and research on climate change. They were welcomed by Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdóttir, and introduced to the activities of UNU-LRT. Dr Fernandes has worked for the World Bank for 18 years and is currently developing and operationalizing a multi-sector framework and quantitative modelling approach to enhance landscape-level resilience to climate change. It includes crops, forestry, pasture, aquatic & hydropower issues, biodiversity, and infrastructure, at nested geospatial scales e.g. field-watershed-basins. Dr Anderson is a Professor of Energy & Climate Change at the University of Manchester as well as the Deputy Director of Tyndall Centre – for Climate Change Research (<http://www.tyndall.ac.uk/>).

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 in Gunnarsholt, the fellows are also requested to fill out evaluation sheets. At the end of the six-month training, the programme is evaluated thoroughly, both by filling out an anonymous written evaluation as well as by group discussion with the fellows. In 2015, this evaluation day took place on 16 September. The results of the evaluation were very positive. The fellows were very pleased with the organisation of the two excursions, which both scored high. The focus of the former trip, to the south and south-east of Iceland, was land degradation, restoration, and climate change. The latter trip was made to the west and north of Iceland with focus on land degradation, restoration, implementation, and land care. When in Gunnarsholt, the fellows met weekly for Master Mind meetings for the second consecutive year. The fellows were divided into three groups and the UNU-LRT staff member facilitated the meetings. There was general satisfaction with the meetings, which the fellows found useful.



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 of 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.

Lesotho

In 2015 the UNU-LRT Director went on a fact-finding mission to Lesotho. This was the first time a representative from UNU-LRT visited the country and the mission was a response to a collaboration interest of the government of Lesotho on combating land degradation and restoring degraded land. During the mission, the UNU-LRT Director was introduced to land degradation challenges and restoration work in Lesotho, as well as learning about the activities of the Ministry of Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security. Specialists from the two ministries were interviewed as potential candidates for a training at UNU-LRT.

UNU-LRT PRESENTATIONS

Presentations

Aegisdottir HH, Orradottir B (2015) Change agents of the future: What capacities do they need? Presentation given by Dr HH Aegisdottir in the Symposium Capacity Building to Restore Resilient Ecosystems in Developing Countries at the SER sixth World Conference on Ecological Restoration, 23-27 August, Manchester, England.

Amoako EEA (2015) Land restoration in Ghana: Capacity building gaps. Presentation in the Symposium Capacity Building to Restore Resilient Ecosystems

in Developing Countries at the SER sixth World Conference on Ecological Restoration, 23-27 August, Manchester, England.

Densambuu B (2015) The need for capacity building to restore resilient ecosystems in Mongolia. Presentation in the Symposium Capacity Building to Restore Resilient Ecosystems in Developing Countries at the SER sixth World Conference on Ecological Restoration, 23-27 August, Manchester, England.

Orradottir B, Aegisdottir HH (2015) Capacity building in ecosystem restoration. Poster presented at the SER sixth World Conference on Ecological Restoration. Manchester UK, 23-27 August 2015.

Other

Orradottir B, Aegisdottir HH (2015) Healthy Ecosystems, Healthy Earth, Healthy People. This brief article was a part of the UNU experts' series of brief articles exploring the issues and realities underlying each of the 17 SDGs during the days leading up to the UN Sustainable Development Summit, 25–27 September 2015. <http://unu.edu/publications/articles/healthy-ecosystems-earth-people.html>

UNU-LRT organized a symposium at the SER 2015 sixth World Conference on Ecological Restoration - Towards Resilient Ecosystems: Restoring the Urban, the Rural and the Wild. Manchester UK, 23-27 August 2015. The title of the symposium was *Capacity Building to Restore Resilient Ecosystems in Developing Countries*.

UNU-LRT was presented in an article, and interviews were taken with four fellows, in the Icelandic newspaper *Bændablaðið*, 20 April 2015.

Publications

Gabou MH, Maisharou A (2015) Management Practices/Techniques Commonly Used in Niger Republic, West Africa. Pages 305-314 in Lal R, Singh BR, Mwaseba DL, Kraybill D, Hansen DO, Eik LO (eds.). Sustainable Intensification to Advance Food Security and Enhance Climate Resilience in Africa. Springer, Switzerland.

Isakov A, Thorsson J (2015) Assessment of the land condition in the Kyrgyz Republic with respect to grazing and a possible development of a quoting system on the local governmental level. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.



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