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Land Restoration Training Programme



UNU Land Restoration Training Programme (UNU-LRT)

Annual Report 2017

United Nations University Land Restoration
Training Programme

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DIRECTOR'S SUMMARY FOR 2017

Happy anniversary UNU-LRT!

It is with great pleasure that I present to you the 2017 Annual report of UNU-LRT and subsequently celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the Programme. Since 2007, the Land Restoration Training Programme has gradually grown in size and magnitude and we are proud of what we have accomplished.

Since the Programme was launched, 101 specialists have graduated from the Programme, from 12 countries in Africa and Central Asia. Of these, fourteen graduated from this year's cohort of fellows from altogether eight countries in Africa and Central Asia. We were honoured to host several international guest lecturers to lecture at the programme this year, namely Dr Maryam Niamir-Fuller, an independent advisor on sustainability; Professor Lindsay Stringer, Professor in Environment and Development from the University of Leeds; Dr Daniel Waiswa and Dr Gerald Eilu, lecturers at Makerere University in Uganda; and Ms Susan Muska, an American documentary filmmaker and speech coach.

The year 2017 was eventful for UNU-LRT. You can read about the activities in the Annual Report but highlights included: 1) Participation of the UNU-LRT Director in the UNCCD COP13 in Ordos, China, in September, where UNU-LRT organized a side event together with Mongolian partners; 2) Participation in the UNFCCC COP23 in Bonn, Germany, in November, where UNU-LRT was invited to give a talk in a side event on "Climate change and land degradation"; 3) Participation of the Director and Deputy Director of UNU-LRT, as well as two former fellows, in a workshop at the Estoril Conferences in Portugal, entitled *Linking migration, land degradation, and land restoration: Potential for sustainable livelihoods*; 4) Launch of a new seven-week Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) developed by the ENABLE consortium that UNU-LRT is a part of; the MOOC is entitled *A Business Approach to Sustainable Landscape Restoration*; 5) Award of the first MSc scholarship at the Agricultural University of Iceland to a former fellow; and 6) Running of the first short course held by UNU-LRT in a partner country. The 9-day short training course, entitled *Sustainable land management, land*



restoration and linkages to climate change, was held in Kasese (Uganda). The organization and running of the course were done in collaboration with the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and Makerere University.

In 2017, UNU-LRT also started preparation for a short course in Mongolia on the effect of climate change and land use on land condition is under development. The aim of the course will be to increase the capacity of UNU-LRT partner institutions to work together on those issues, such as on the development of monitoring plans and research that land management guidelines can be based on. Furthermore, The UNU-LRT together with the three other UNU Programmes in Iceland went through an extensive external evaluation. The final evaluation report was published in October and the results were very positive and show that the four UNU training programmes are highly relevant to the trained specialists as well as to the Icelandic development co-operation strategy. The evaluation found that the four programmes provide high quality training with a good balance between theory, practice, and social needs. Further, it stated that the activities of the four programmes are all relevant to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, both directly and indirectly.

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, 101 fellows have graduated from the programme, 46 women and 55 men. The fellows have come from the following countries in Africa and Central Asia: Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, 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



the 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. More recently, the UNU-LRT has started organizing short thematic courses in partner countries and to offer scholarships to former fellows who have completed the six-month training programme to pursue graduate studies at Icelandic universities in land restoration and related subjects.

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 2017

The six-month training programme began on March 13, 2017, with the largest cohort of UNU-LRT fellows to date. The fourteen fellows, four women and nine men, came from eight countries: Ghana (3 fellows), Niger (1), Malawi (1), Uganda (2), Ethiopia (1), Lesotho (2), Uzbekistan (1) and Mongolia (3).

The curriculum of the six-month training programme is divided into eight modules. The first six modules are organized according to the UNU-LRT project cycle framework where the first three modules provide the programme's backbone, the basic knowledge and understanding needed to use the project cycle, which is then the focus of modules four to six. By applying the project cycle as a process management framework in the six-month training curriculum, the theoretical and practical aspects of land issues and project management are effectively linked. Modules one to six include lectures, practical training, exercises, diverse field visits and individual and group work. Module seven is on special topics that vary from one year to another and includes each year's international guest lecturer(s). The last module (module eight) focuses on the development of



individual research projects, an integral part of the training programme, where fellows work closely with their supervisors in Iceland on a research topic of their choice. The individual research projects are aimed at increasing knowledge and developing relevant skillsets on a topic relevant to the work of the fellows in their home countries.

The UNU-LRT programme hosted several international guest lecturers in 2017: Dr Maryam Niamir-Fuller, an independent advisor on sustainability, Ms Susan Muska, an American documentary film-maker and speech coach, and Professor Lindsay Stringer, Professor in Environment and Development from the University of Leeds. UNU-LRT also received visits by specialists from partner institutions in Uganda in May. Dr Daniel Waiswa and Dr Gerald Eilu, lecturers at Makerere University in Kampala, gave a lecture to the fellows on the status and management of invasive species in Uganda.

The main international guest lecturer this year, Dr Niamir-Fuller, visited the training programme in August. She gave lectures to the UNU-LRT fellows on rangelands, livestock, and land restoration, focusing on how to move towards sustainability in the extensive and intensive livestock sectors. She also gave a keynote talk at an open seminar at the National Museum of Iceland, presenting ideas on how different sectors can co-operate to achieve an integrated implementation of the SDGs. Dr Niamir-Fuller has extensive experience in the field of sustainable development as the Special Advisor to the Executive Director of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) on the Post-2015 Agenda and SDGs, and formerly as the Director of the Division of the Global Environment Facility Co-ordination (DGEF) at UNEP.

The fellows presented the findings of their research projects at an open seminar on 4 September, and they graduated on 13 September. The graduation ceremony took place at the Keldnaholt research campus of the Agricultural University of Iceland, and the fellows received their certificates from the Permanent Secretary of State, Mr Sturla Sigurjonsson. The ceremony also included speeches by Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, UNU-LRT Director, Dr Arni Bragason, Chair of the UNU-LRT Board and Director of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland, Dr Björn Thorsteinsson, Rector of the Agricultural University of Iceland, and two



of the graduating fellows, Ms Badam Ariya from Mongolia and Mr Emmanuel Lignule from Ghana. The ceremony was closed by a performance by Ms Beatrice Dossah from Ghana with a song inspired by Beatrice's project work at UNU-LRT. Accompanying her in the performance was Mr Emmanuel Mwachungu from Malawi on guitar.

The following day the UNU-LRT fellows and staff visited the President of Iceland, Mr Gudni Th. Johannesson, at the presidential residence at Bessastadir. Mr Johannesson warmly welcomed the fellows and showed them the archaeological findings in the permanent exhibition in the basement of the presidential residence. The fellows got the opportunity to introduce themselves and exchange some thoughts about land restoration, climate change and other pressing global environmental issues.

SHORT COURSES

Short course in Uganda

A short training course entitled "Sustainable land management, land restoration and linkages to climate change" was organized in Kasese, Uganda, between September 25 and October 4. The 9-day course was organized in co-operation with the Ugandan partner institutions of UNU-LRT, the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and Makerere University. Twenty-five environmental officers from 18 different districts in western Uganda participated in the course. The curriculum development team included specialists from both Uganda and Iceland. The Ugandan team consisted of Dr Jerome Sebadduka Lugumira, a soil scientist at NEMA, Ms Evelyn Mugume, a District Environment Officer in Kasese municipality and former UNU-LRT fellow in 2014, and two lecturers from Makerere University: Dr Daniel Waiswa and Dr Gerald Eilu. The Icelandic Team was comprised of Professor Asa L Aradottir (AUI) and Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, the UNU-LRT Director. During the course itself, Professor Olafur Arnalds (AUI) also joined the team of experts. The participants in the course took part in interactive lectures, group assignments and exercises as well as two short field trips to visit restoration sites. The final day of the course was devoted to a comprehensive evaluation of the content and practicalities. The



outcome of the evaluation showed that the course was very well received by the participants and that they felt better equipped to deal with unsustainable land use in this time of climate change.

Preparations for a short course in Mongolia

A short course in Mongolia on the effect of climate change and land use on land condition is under development. Climate change effects are apparent in Mongolia but changes in land use over the last decades have also affected land condition. There is a lack of capacity to distinguish between the effects of climate change and land use and their interaction. The course will help the participants to understand better the factors that influence land condition and how good management can curb the negative effects of climate change. The aim of the course will also be to increase the capacity of UNU-LRT partner institutions to work together on those issues, such as on the development of monitoring plans and research that land management guidelines can be based on.

The curriculum development team met in Iceland in October 2017. The curriculum development team consists of the following experts from Mongolian partner institutions: Dr Bulgamaa Densambuu (from the National Federation of Pasture User Groups of Herders, NFPUG, and former LRT fellow), Dr Bayigal-Amar Tulaikhuu and Dr Khishigjargal Mookhor (Mongolian University of Life Sciences, MULS), and Dr Bat-Oyun Tserenpurev (Information and Research Institute of Meteorology, Hydrology and Environment, IRIMHE). The Icelandic experts were UNU-LRT Deputy Director Berglind Orradottir and Dr Isabel Barrio (UNU-LRT), and Dr Kristin Svavarsdottir and Dr Bryndis Marteinsdottir (SCSI). The course will be run in Mongolia in late June 2018.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

A new Massive Open Online Course on A Business Approach to Sustainable Landscape Restoration

UNU-LRT has developed with its partners in the ENABLE consortium a seven-week Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) entitled *A Business Approach to Sustainable Landscape Restoration*. The MOOC was launched on 1 May 2017 and is open for all and free of charge. The course has already attracted more than 1600 learners from all over the world. The course is designed for business



students and professionals as well as anyone with an interest in business-driven landscape restoration. It offers comprehensive knowledge of landscape degradation and restoration from both the perspective of natural science as well as from an economics and business perspective. The MOOC is an exciting opportunity to spread the knowledge of how restoring degraded landscapes can return natural, social, and financial capital that supports people's livelihoods and wellbeing. The course can be accessed on Coursera: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/landscape-restoration-sustainable-development>

The main goal of the ENABLE partnership is to establish an educational platform to create awareness about integrated landscape management based on sustainable business models. Such education can bridge the gaps between ecology and economy, environment and business, theory and practice, global and local scales, and help deal with global challenges as defined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The activities of ENABLE include: 1) developing education material on landscape restoration and integrated landscape management based on sustainable business models; 2) creating an electronic innovative and learning platform, i.e. Community of Practise; and 3) organizing large-scale, high-impact events to disseminate the project's results. The educational material developed by ENABLE will be in the form of two massive open online courses (MOOCs) and five study cases developed for use by business schools.

Open seminar on climate change, land use and management and UN SDGs

UNU-LRT co-organized an open seminar in May 2017 on *Climate Change and Land Management in Uganda* at the Harpa Concert Hall in Reykjavik, with the Institute of International Affairs at the University of Iceland. The keynote speaker was Dr Jerome Sebadduka Lugumira, soil scientist at the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), a partner institution of UNU-LRT in Uganda. In his talk, Dr Lugumira outlined the effects of climate change on agro-based land in Uganda and how the country has adapted its policies to tackle the emergent challenges. He also discussed the institutional challenges facing the implementation of the policies. The UNU-LRT Director, Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, and Dr Jon Geir Petursson, Director at the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources and UNU-LRT Studies Committee member, also provided inputs to the meeting.



External evaluation of UNU programmes in Iceland

In 2017 the four UNU Programmes in Iceland went through an extensive external evaluation carried out by the Scandinavian consultancy company NIRAS Indvelop (<http://www.niras-indevelop.se/>).

The UNU-LRT evaluators visited Ghana, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Malawi, where they interviewed former fellows and (in most cases also) contacts from partner institutions of UNU-LRT. Interviews with former fellows from other partner countries (Niger, Mongolia, and Kyrgyzstan) were carried out via Skype. The main evaluator of UNU-LRT, Dr Ingrid Hartmann, also visited Iceland in the first week of April and interviewed people that are (and have been) closely connected to UNU-LRT, as well as current fellows of UNU-LRT.

The final evaluation report was published in October (see the final report [here](#)). The results of the evaluation were very positive and show that the four UNU training programmes are highly relevant to the trained specialists (the fellows) and their institutions, i.e. the partners of the UNU programmes in developing countries. The programmes are also very relevant to the Icelandic development co-operation strategy. The evaluation found that the four programmes provide high quality training with a good balance between theory, practice, and social needs. Further, it stated that the activities of the four programmes are all relevant to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, both directly and indirectly. Some recommendations were put forward in the report and UNU-LRT will carefully explore these to improve the programme further.

UNU-LRT representative at CONDIR at UNU

In 2017 UNU-LRT took over the rotational responsibility of representing the UNU Programmes in Iceland to the UNU, from the UNU Geothermal Training Programme (UNU-GTP). The 2017 Conference of Directors (CONDIR) was held at



the UNU headquarters in Tokyo (Japan) in mid-December. The UNU-LRT Director, Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, attended the meeting on behalf of the UNU Iceland-based programmes.

UNCCD COP 13

The UNU-LRT Director participated in the UNCCD COP13 in Ordos, Inner Mongolia (China) in early September 2017. UNU-LRT organized a side event together with Mongolian partners entitled “*Partnering to Restore Healthy Ecosystems: Lessons from Iceland and Mongolia*”. The opening remarks were given by Mungalag Ulambayar from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism in Mongolia. UNU-LRT Director gave a short overview of the activities of UNU-LRT and how the training has influenced Mongolian fellows. Bayarmaa Chimedtseren from the Green Gold Project in Mongolia gave a talk on the work of this UNU-LRT partner institution in Mongolia. The event ended with a short presentation from five former UNU-LRT fellows who gave examples of successful achievement of sustainable land management practices based on multi-stakeholder collaboration. The side event was well received, and the presenters were interviewed by the local television after the event.

UNFCCC COP 23

UNU-LRT was represented at the UNFCCC COP23 in Bonn, Germany, in early November 2017. UNU-LRT was invited to collaborate on a side event on “Climate Change and Land Degradation”, jointly organized by the Centre for Development Research of the University of Bonn (ZEF), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and UNU-EHS. At the event, the UNU-LRT Director gave a talk entitled “Climate Change - Land Degradation Interactions: Biophysical aspects” and participated in a panel discussion together with Youba Sokona, Vice Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Claudia Ringler, Deputy Director of the Environment and Production Technology Division of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and John Muleso Kharika, Head of the Science, Technology and Implementation Unit of UNCCD.

Conference on Land Use and Climate Change

UNU-LRT was represented at a half-day conference on land use and climate change organized by the Agricultural University of Iceland. The conference was organized at the Harpa concert hall and was intended for the general public in Iceland. UNU-LRT fellows Ms Beatrice Dossah from Ghana and Mr Richard Komakech from Uganda gave two short (6 min) talks on “Effects of climate change on land and livelihoods in Africa and Central Asia” and “Climate change in Africa and Central Asia: What needs to be done?”

Workshop at Estoril Conferences

The Estoril Conferences are a biennial event in Estoril, Portugal. The theme of the 2017 conference was Global Migration: Leaving home in a globalized world. UNU-LRT held a workshop at the Estoril Conferences on 31 May together with its partners in the ENABLE consortium. The theme of the workshop was *Linking Migration, Land Degradation, and Land Restoration: Potential for sustainable livelihoods*. At the workshop, two former UNU-LRT fellows, Dr Bulgamaa Densambuu from the Green Gold Pasture Management and Animal Health project in Mongolia and Mr Moustapha Ibrahim from the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development in Niger, shared their experiences on restoration work in their countries. In their talks they showcased the benefits that land restoration brings to local communities, such as employment, food security and business opportunities, thus improving the livelihoods and living conditions of local people and reducing the need to migrate.

The ENABLE workshop started with a talk on the importance of leadership skills to successfully restore landscapes. It was followed by talks on the extensive damage caused by land degradation and the multiple benefits large-scale landscape restoration brings. Local cases from Portugal and Spain were introduced, showcasing the challenges and opportunities in restoring landscapes. Then the diverse capacity needs for resilient ecosystems and societies were discussed and capacity building at UNU-LRT introduced, followed by the cases from Niger and Mongolia presented by the former UNU-LRT fellows.

First UNU-LRT MSc scholarship recipient

In 2017, UNU-LRT awarded for the first time an MSc scholarship. An open call to former UNU-LRT fellows was issued early in 2017 for applications on a competitive basis for an MSc degree at the Agricultural University of Iceland, for a project on measuring carbon sequestration rates in soils afforested during the past 50 years in three areas in Iceland. UNU-LRT received good applications from former fellows, and it was Mr Joel Owona, a former fellow from Uganda, who was granted the scholarship. Mr Owona arrived in mid-June and started immediately to work on his MSc project.

UNU-LRT 10-year anniversary

The Land Restoration Training Programme was launched in 2007 with a seven-week pilot training course in land restoration and sustainable land management. Five participants from four countries were invited to Iceland from August to October, in connection with an international forum on Soil, Society and Global Change which took place on 31 August – 4 September 2007, celebrating the centenary of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI).

The first trial period for a full six-month training programme was held in 2008, with six participants. Gradually since then, the number of fellows has been growing steadily. In 2010, the LRT training programme became a part of the United Nations University (UNU), with a contract signed in the beginning of 2010 between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Agricultural University of Iceland, the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland and the UNU.

UNU-LRT SITE VISITS

UNU-LRT works with partner countries in Africa and Central Asia. Within each of these countries, partner institutions that play a key role in land restoration and sustainable land management are identified. The training of the fellows is considered a contribution to capacity building of their institutions. The institutions propose candidates for the UNU-LRT six-month training programme, who are then personally interviewed by UNU-LRT employees. To ensure the effectiveness of the training programme, the candidates should fulfil certain requirements: they should have at least one university degree, at least one-year of experience working in the field of specialization that they will pursue at the UNU-LRT programme, have a permanent position at the partner institution, have good English skills, and be under the age of 40.

Every year the UNU-LRT employees conduct site visits to the partner countries and the selected institutions, to conduct interviews with candidates for the six-month training programme and to strengthen partnerships with local institutions in those countries. In 2017, institutional linkages were established with a new partner country in Asia, Tajikistan, our 13th partner country. The UNU-LRT Deputy Director and Office Manager visited three partner countries: Malawi, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Malawi

In October 2017, the UNU-LRT Office Manager visited Malawi. Potential candidates for the UNU-LRT six-month training programme from four partner institutions were interviewed and an information meeting at the Embassy of Iceland in Lilongwe for the directors of these institutions was hosted by the Office Manager.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

In November 2017, the UNU-LRT Deputy Director visited Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. She interviewed candidates from partner institutions in Kyrgyzstan and visited the UN office in Bishkek to introduce the activities of UNU-LRT. In the first UNU-LRT visit to Tajikistan, the Deputy Director visited Dushanbe, Tajikistan's capital city, and Khorog in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) to establish links to organizations in Tajikistan that work on land issues, and to interview potential candidates for the UNU-LRT six-month training programme.

UNU-LRT PRESENTATIONS

Presentations

Aegisdottir HH, Orradottir B (2017) Capacity needs for resilient ecosystems and societies. Presentation given by Dr Aegisdottir at the workshop Linking migration, land degradation, and land restoration: Potential for sustainable livelihoods, at the Estoril Conferences, Portugal, 31 May 2017.

Aegisdottir HH (2017) Climate change - land degradation interactions: Biophysical aspects. Presentation at the panel discussion Climate change and land degradation. UNFCCC COP23, Bonn, Germany, 8 November 2017.

Aegisdottir HH (2017) Partnering to restore healthy ecosystems: Lessons from Iceland and Mongolia. Presentation held at the side event Partnering to restore healthy ecosystems: Lessons from Iceland and Mongolia. UNCCD COP13. Ordos, China, 7 September 2017.

Aegisdottir HH (2017) Frá landi til lofta og tilbaka (Eng. From earth to air and back). Invited talk at *Umhverfisþing* (Environmental Conference), Harpa Conference Hall, 20 October 2017.

Aegisdottir HH (2017) Sátt eða sundrung? Sambúð manns og náttúru í fjórum heimsálfum (Eng. Synergy or segregation? Interplay between man and nature in four corners of Earth). Plenary talk at the biannual conference on biology in Iceland, 28 October 2017.

Densambuu B (2017) Cases from Mongolia. Presentation at the workshop Linking migration, land degradation, and land restoration: Potential for sustainable livelihoods, at the Estoril Conferences, Portugal, 31 May 2017.

Ibrahim M (2017) Niger, in search of land sustainability. Presentation at the workshop Linking migration, land degradation, and land restoration: Potential for sustainable livelihoods, at the Estoril Conferences, Portugal, 31 May 2017.

Posters

Orradottir B, Aegisdottir HH, Arnalds O, Aradottir AL, Thorsson J (2017) Connecting economy and ecology through landscape restoration. Poster presented at the SER 2017 7th World Conference on Ecological Restoration - Linking science and practise for a better world. Iguassu Brazil, 27 August to 1 September 2017.

Publications

Marteinsdóttir B, Barrio IC, Jónsdóttir IS (2017) Assessing the ecological impacts of extensive sheep grazing in Iceland. *Icelandic Agricultural Sciences* 30:55-72.



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