



**UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY**

UNU-LRT

Land Restoration Training Programme

United Nations University
Land Restoration Training Programme
Strategic Plan 2017-2021

Combating land degradation with sustainable and
ecologically sound solutions

United Nations University Land Restoration Training Programme

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1. UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY LAND RESTORATION TRAINING PROGRAMME (UNU-LRT)

1.1. Background of the UNU Land Restoration Training Programme

UNU-LRT provides applied postgraduate level training in the broad field of restoration of degraded land and sustainable land management. The training is primarily for specialists from developing countries and UNU-LRT aims to assist developing countries in capacity development within this field. The programme was established in 2007 and became a United Nations University programme in 2010 with a quadrilateral agreement between the United Nations University, the Government of Iceland, the Agricultural University of Iceland and the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland. The UNU-LRT board is comprised of representatives of these four organisations, as well as a representative from the Icelandic Forest Service.

UNU-LRT has a strong commitment to the principles of UNU: that is, to contribute to resolving urgent global problems through generation and sharing of knowledge and capacity development in developing countries.¹ This is done by building and strengthening institutional and individual capacities to deal with issues related to land degradation and unsustainable land use in developing countries (Annex I).

The UNU-LRT programme is built on the knowledge and expertise gained within Iceland, which faced severe land degradation problems in the beginning of the 20th century. Nationally concerted efforts for over 100 years, aimed to halt soil erosion and restore lost and degraded woodlands, have created a considerable body of knowledge and experience which is of great relevance to a number of countries in all parts of the world (Annex II).

UNU-LRT is one of four UNU training programmes located in Iceland. The other UNU programmes are the Geothermal Training Programme (established 1979), the Fisheries Training Programme (1998) and the Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme (2013). The four UNU training programmes in Iceland collaborate and seek advice and support from each other, both in professional and practical issues.

1.2. The global perspective

Land degradation is a global challenge of major importance and has a severe impact on the environment, climate and human society. Land degradation, manifested in the deterioration of vegetation, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and eventually in a more persistent form as desertification, has led to conflicts, grinding poverty, hunger, and abandonment of farms and villages for cities in many parts of the world. Large proportions of developing countries and countries in transition are confronted with severe land degradation and problems resulting from unsustainable land use and climate change. Land restoration and sustainable land management are a critical part of the daunting challenge to confront poverty and achieve a secure livelihood in poor, rural communities in developing countries, communities that are frequently the most vulnerable and marginalised in their respective countries.

¹ http://i.unu.edu/media/unu.edu/attachment/48794/unu_strategic_plan_2015-2019_en.pdf

UNU-LRT mainly focuses on solutions to problems within the realm of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as well as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). UNU-LRT also works towards the newly initiated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which aim to protect our planet and its life forms, and ensure prosperity for the present and future generations. The SDG 15 reads: *“Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”*. The goal is at the heart of the post-2015 agenda. It addresses land degradation and desertification, which are some of the most important global environmental challenges. Achieving Goal 15 will also contribute to mitigation of climate change (Goal 13), alleviation of poverty (Goal 1), increasing food security and end hunger (Goal 2), ensuring availability and sustainable management of water (Goal 6), and fostering economic prosperity (Goal 8), as well as maintaining biodiversity and increasing the resilience of ecosystems and societies to future challenges.

2. VISION AND MISSION OF UNU-LRT

2.1. Vision

UNU-LRT aims to become one of the world's leading resources for restoration of degraded land. This includes development of the most advanced training programme for professionals in developing countries, faced with severe land degradation problems.

2.2. Mission

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.

The main concern of UNU-LRT is land degradation, soil erosion, unsustainable land use and desertification. Efforts to combat these problems are often hampered by lack of knowledge, capacity and social motivation in the affected areas. The programme assists people from developing countries to break down these barriers to effective management of natural resources, emphasising involvement of women in all steps of that advancement.

3. TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

UNU-LRT will work steadily towards its vision by setting goals and planning activities to achieve the goals. The goals are classified into four core functions with two outputs in each.

- I. Offering annually a six-month post-graduate training programme for professionals from developing countries faced with severe land degradation challenges.
- II. Facilitating the creation of a strong network and fruitful co-operation with leading organisations in land restoration and sustainable land management, across developing as well as developed countries.
- III. Supporting the creation of new knowledge and disseminating the experience, knowledge and expertise to where it is most needed.
- IV. Ensuring good quality and efficient, results-based management of the UNU-LRT programme.

I. Offering annually a six-month postgraduate training programme for professionals from developing countries faced with severe land degradation challenges.

The aim of UNU-LRT is to build bridges between the available knowledge and research on combating land degradation and desertification and the people most threatened by these processes. There is a great need for specialists in the field of sustainable land management and restoration of degraded land, who can provide guidance and assistance to the rural poor, thereby enhancing their livelihoods in a sustainable way.

1.1. Annual six-month post-graduate training programme for professionals from developing countries faced with severe land degradation challenges

Activities:

- Continue to improve the training curriculum to maximize the quality of the six-month training
- Engage high-quality educators from leading institutions in the field
- Invite internationally renowned experts to contribute to the training programme with lectures and seminars
- Formalise cooperation with key partner institutions in partner countries by signing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs)

1.2. Graduate a steadily growing number of fellows, targeting 80 fellows in the period 2017-2021, reflecting gender equality and diverse geographical distribution

Activities:

- Train a gradually growing number of fellows, hosting 20 fellows by 2021
- Train equally women and men, reflecting UNU-LRT emphases on gender equality
- Continue to strengthen institutional partnership in Africa and Asia
- Establish institutional partnership in new countries in Africa and/or Asia before 2021, reflecting the growing number of fellows and diverse geographical distribution

II. Facilitating the creation of a strong network and fruitful co-operation with leading organisations in land restoration and sustainable land management, across developing as well as developed countries.

The two institutes, AUI and SCSU, build on a strong academic and practical foundation, a diverse training environment and highly competent staff, and a network of institutions, agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs) in Iceland. Both institutes have strong international connections and collaborate with a number of institutions and organisations within the land management arena.

Collaboration between leading organisations, both within and outside the UNU system, strengthens capacity and builds knowledge within the field for all entities. For UNU-LRT it strengthens the capability to offer good quality training in the developing countries where short courses are held, and it is beneficial for the advancement of the curriculum.

II.1. Strong network among leading organisations in land restoration and sustainable land management across developing as well as developed countries

Activities:

- Staff of UNU-LRT promote the programme every year, in meetings and/or conferences in Iceland and abroad
- Produce, update and distribute information about the programme
- Facilitate network activities by using the UNU-LRT homepage
- Two newsletters sent every year to former fellows and partner institutions
- Invite visiting lecturers from leading institutions from abroad
- Use of social media to reach out to a multiplicity of audiences

II.2. Fruitful co-operation with international organizations, including the UNU

Activities:

- Continue to cooperate with other UNU institutions and programmes
- Collaborate with main international players in land restoration and sustainable land management
- Formalise cooperation with key regional partners through MoUs
- Share experience and knowledge with the UNU programmes in Iceland, e.g. regarding curriculum development, networking, fellows' project reports, and practical information

III. Support the creation of new knowledge and disseminating the experience, knowledge and expertise to where it is most needed.

In the UNU Charter, Article 1, paragraph 1, it is stated that "The United Nations University shall be an international community of scholars engaged in research, post-graduate training and dissemination of knowledge..." UNU-LRT works towards this goal through the annual six-month postgraduate training, and by creating research and education opportunities in the field of sustainable land management and land restoration for outstanding professionals in developing countries.

III.1. Short courses on specialized issues in developing countries

Activities:

- Continue to develop and organize short courses on special issues in UNU-LRT partner countries in co-operation with UNU-LRT partner institutions.
- Develop and implement short courses in Africa and Asia before 2019.
- Explore opportunities to offer customer designed short courses in the field of land restoration, sustainable land management and related fields.

III.2. Create research and education opportunities in the field of land restoration and sustainable land management for outstanding professionals

Activities:

- Enter into agreements between UNU-LRT and Icelandic universities regarding MSc and PhD studies for outstanding former fellows before 2021
- Explore opportunities for joint degrees and research cooperation between UNU, partner universities and research institutions.
- Develop rules on the amount and type of support offered by UNU-LRT
- Publish research outputs in scientific journals, conference papers, web articles and other forms.

IV. Ensuring quality and efficient, results-based management of the UNU-LRT programme.

Ensuring efficient and transparent management of the programme is essential. To do so, UNU-LRT will use a number of key strategic issues including, but not limited to, revision of its strategic plan every four years, writing and publishing reports about its activities, and making budget plans and reports. Strategies to evaluate the training offered by UNU-LRT will be developed to ensure the highest quality and relevance of the training. The people that work for the programme are its most valuable resource. The management of UNU-LRT will thus focus on ensuring a good working environment that encourages achievements of both individuals and teams working for the programme. The UNU-LRT management will also put effort in raising funds and seek clients for customer-built training, to ensure sustainable growth of the Programme.

UNU-LRT implementation follows a result-based management approach, which incorporates the logical framework (Annex III) and aims to ensure that the programme achieves the results sought after. An adaptive management approach is used in which the programme can fine-tune its design and operation as new information becomes available. In other words, it constantly strives for the best quality in its operation and management.

IV.1. Strategies to evaluate the activities of the UNU-LRT programme to ensure quality and efficiency

Activities:

- Continuous evaluation of the six-month training curriculum
- Development of a questionnaire for fellows to fill out at the beginning, at the end of, and two years after the six-month training

- Development of an ideal process for fellows' institutions to evaluate the impact of the six-month training on institutional capacity building
- Collecting information on former six-month fellows' career development, research and outreach activities
- Collecting information from partner institutions on land health, degradation changes and living conditions of local people
- Develop a strategy on how best to evaluate the result of short courses in partner countries

IV.2. Efficient and effective management of the programme

Activities:

- UNU-LRT board meetings at least three times a year
- Studies committee meetings at least four times a year
- Generate budget plan and finance report annually
- Write and publish annual reports on the UNU-LRT website
- Publish all reports from fellows in the six-month training, which meet the standards of UNU-LRT
- Continue to develop the website www.unulrt.is
- Continue to implement the UNU-LRT Gender Equality policy
- Continue to search for and apply for additional financial support
- Continue to seek clients for customer-built training
- Strengthen good contact with and between educators of the programme by holding meetings to reflect on their experiences and develop UNU-LRT educational activities

4. PREREQUISITES IF GOALS OF UNU-LRT ARE TO BE ACHIEVED

According to the agreement on UNU-LRT, the programme shall offer a six-month training course in Iceland, deliver capacity development initiatives in developing countries, including short-term courses, and create links to other UNU entities. The programme shall also offer outstanding professionals (former UNU-LRT fellows and others) research and education opportunities. To fulfil the agreement the following assumptions have to be made:

- Satisfactory housing, training and research facilities secured for UNU-LRT. The AUI and SCSi take the needs of UNU-LRT into account when planning future housing and facilities
- Appropriate number of UNU-LRT staff members, and supervisors with increased number of fellows
- AUI and SCSi encourage, support and make it feasible for their staff members to contribute to the activities of UNU-LRT (e.g. give lectures, supervise)
- Opportunities provided to UNU-LRT staff for continuing education in the field of land restoration, sustainable land management, as well as on issues related to developmental co-operation, education, programme management and leadership.
- Adequate financial resources secured to fulfil the needs of UNU-LRT, including for project growth

ANNEX I

Organisation of UNU-LRT

UNU-LRT is funded by the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs but the executing agency with financial responsibility for the programme is the Agricultural University of Iceland (AUI). The programme is implemented jointly by the AUI and the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI) (Fig. 1).

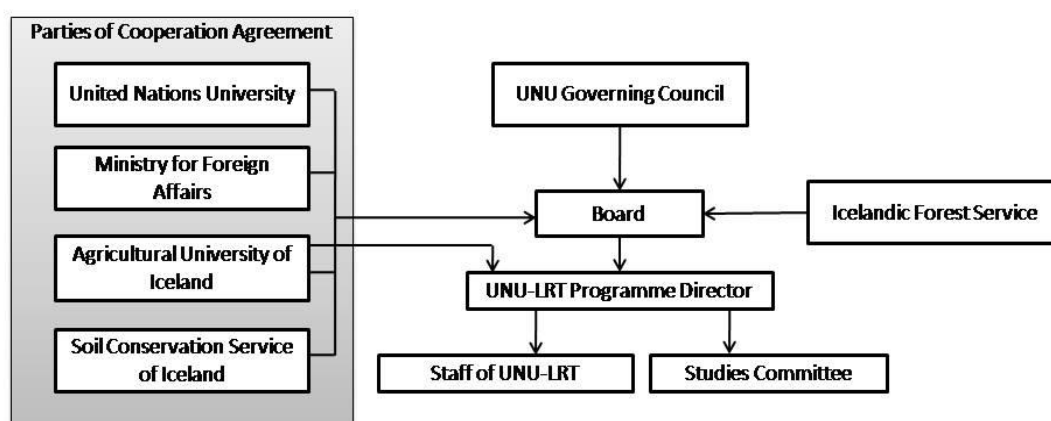


Figure 1. Organogram of the UNU-LRT programme

The AUI is founded on previous research and educational institutes with a long history of research related to assessment of land condition, grazing management, soils and soil erosion, soil conservation research and land restoration; all emphasizes that reflect national priority to combat land degradation and desertification. The university is also involved in international climate change research, focusing on both ecosystem carbon flux and carbon sequestration in relation to reclamation and land use change.

The SCSI has its headquarters at Gunnarsholt, South Iceland, but operates district offices in most parts of Iceland. The main goals are mitigation of land degradation and desertification, restoration of degraded land, ecosystem protection and sustainable land use. Tools include improved understanding of the problems and solutions, education and advice, enhanced land user responsibility and participatory approaches, and regulatory tools. Support schemes include the highly successful *Farmers Heal the Land* and *Land Improvement Fund* projects, which reflect an increasing focus on land user and community involvement. The SCSI also has direct involvement in reclamation work. The institute has well supported professional facilities, including remote sensing and geographic information systems (GIS) tools, and it operates processing facilities for seeds of species used in reclamation work.

The six-month training programme is run at the AUI research facilities at Keldnaholt in Reykjavík and the SCSI headquarters at Gunnarsholt. The AUI and the SCSI offer a solid learning and training environment for the fellows by, for example, providing numerous experts in the field of: soil erosion, desertification processes and assessment methods; the ecology of degradation processes; restoration ecology with focus on degraded and desertified land; land use and restoration planning; sustainable grazing management (open land, rangelands) and soil conservation.

Selection of countries and fellows for six-month training programme

Only specialists from developing countries can be offered a fellowship to attend the UNU-LRT six-month training. Priority is given to countries facing severe land degradation and desertification challenges and where there is need for capacity building and training, which the programme can offer. The institutional and organisational structures in partner countries are studied to facilitate careful selection of visiting fellows. A solid routine exists for selecting fellows to participate in the six-month training programme and qualified candidates are interviewed personally. Candidates have to be proposed by institutions or organisations in their home countries and have to fit the following criteria: 1) have at least one university degree, 2) have at least one year of experience working in the field of specialisation that he/she will pursue at UNU-LRT, 3) be able to communicate in English (speak, read and write) since the UNU-LRT working language is English, and 4) be preferably under the age of 40. The training of the fellows is considered a contribution to building the capacity of the institute or organisation in partner countries.

Curriculum of the six-month training programme

The overall goal of UNU-LRT six-month training programme is to train working professionals in developing countries in the methods and theories of sustainable land management and restoration of degraded land, and to strengthen their capacities to advance and implement those activities in their home countries.

The programme aims to provide the specialists with comprehensive understanding of issues that must be addressed to successfully manage and restore land. The programme equips fellows with appropriate knowledge, courage and confidence to act independently, to interpret and apply their knowledge and to act on inferences they make based on this knowledge. The programme is also committed to promoting gender equality by maintaining gender balance in the admission of fellows as well as providing a gender-sensitive learning environment.

The teaching and learning methods at UNU-LRT emphasise active participation of all fellows in an interactive setting. These include lectures, field and in-class demonstrations and exercises, practical training and application, group work, workshops, and field trips.

After the six-month training, the participants should have:

- comprehensive understanding of the issues that must be addressed to successfully manage and restore land.
- knowledge and skills necessary to evaluate and interpret landscapes (land literacy)
- understanding of socioeconomic drivers of land degradation, and the barriers that prevent the mitigation of land degradation
- knowledge and skills necessary to design and implement ecologically sound restoration of degraded landscapes
- peoples skills and leadership skills necessary to do participatory project planning, implementation and monitoring
- understanding of gender equality perspectives in the field of land restoration and sustainable land management

The curriculum of the six-month training contains the following eight modules:

Module 1: *Scientific methods and dissemination skills*

Module 2: *Course principles and frameworks*

Module 3: *Biophysical fundamentals of land management*

Module 4: *Sustainable land management (SLM) and restoration planning*

Module 5: *Implementation*

Module 6: *Evaluation and lessons learned*

Module 7: *Special topics* that vary from one year to another, e.g. sessions by international guest lecturers

Module 8: *Individual research project* that the fellows work on throughout the major part of the training under the supervision of expert(s)

The topics in the first six modules taught in UNU-LRT six-month training programme are organized according to the UNU-LRT project cycle framework. The project cycle is used as a framework for process management throughout the training sessions and the modules are strategically placed within the cycle. The first three modules provide the programme's backbone, the basic knowledge and understanding, needed to use the project cycle, which is the focus of modules four to six.

The aims of the six-month training programme are reached by emphasizing both the theoretical knowledge and understanding of land degradation and restoration processes and principles, and the process management needed to be able to bring about changes. By applying the project cycle as a process management framework in the UNU-LRT programme curriculum we link the science and practical aspects of land issues and project management. Furthermore, by doing a research project the fellows gain experience in applying and synthesizing knowledge, and critically analysing and summarizing topics related to land restoration and SLM, and come up with realistic recommendations and strategies.

Evaluation of the six-month programme curriculum

The six-month training programme is evaluated by the fellows on a weekly basis while courses are in process and after excursions. An overall evaluation of the six-month training is carried out at the end of each training programme. During these evaluations, the fellows give feedback both orally in group discussion, and by filling out anonymous forms. The programme director reports on the outcome of these evaluations to the board and studies committee.

ANNEX II

Iceland's experience

When Iceland became a sovereign state in 1918, after more than six centuries under colonial rule, it was among the poorest countries in Europe. It was also faced with severe land degradation problems caused by over-exploitation through wood cutting and overgrazing under harsh natural conditions. To halt the destructive forces, unique legislation was passed in 1907 aimed at halting soil erosion and restoring lost and degraded woodlands. Iceland's over 100 years of such nationally concerted effort is one of the longest standing in the world. The numerous success stories about stabilising desertified land and making it productive serve as examples to demonstrate how current international objectives can also be achieved. Such actions are important in carbon sequestration into soils and vegetation, restoring biological diversity and in providing opportunities for productive land use.

Although all problems have not been solved, wide ranging experience and knowledge has been gained in Iceland through the last century on how to combat land degradation and desertification and on restoration and sustainable land use. At the same time Icelandic society has developed from being one of the poorest in Europe to a modern society with competent research and university sectors.

Having seen the adverse consequences of desertification, the Icelandic nation and its political and academic leaders are highly committed to fighting land degradation and restoring degraded ecosystems. The intellectuals are conscious of the need to share Iceland's cold desert experience with developing countries despite often different climatic conditions. To do this, the focus is on understanding ecosystem functioning and the principles of land degradation, restoration and management.

The need for capacity building within this field of expertise is great in the developing countries where land degradation and desertification are directly threatening food security and well-being. The knowledge and experience gained in Iceland are of much relevance to these countries, and the programme is a venue for making that knowledge available.

ANNEX III

A Logical Framework Matrix

	Outcomes	Outputs	Activities	Indicators	Means of Verification	Assumptions
<p>Goal: To train specialists from developing countries to combat land degradation and restore degraded land, and to assist strengthening institutional capacity in the field of land restoration and sustainable land management in developing countries, emphasising involvement of women in all steps of that advancement</p> <p>Purpose: To reduce land degradation in developing countries and restore already degraded land.</p>						
1	Strong, advanced and well recognized six-month training programme that provides former fellows with strong professional network	Annual six-month post-graduate training programme for professionals from developing countries faced with severe land degradation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to improve the six-month training curriculum Engage high-quality educators from leading institution Invite internationally renowned experts to contribute to the training programme with lectures and seminars Making MoUs with key partner institutions 	Updated curriculum Education and experience of educators Number of MoUs	Curriculum Annual reports MoUs	AUI and SCSI will continue to improve the facilities they offer the programme AUI and SCSI will encourage, support and make it feasible for their staff members to contribute to the activities of UNU-LRT
2		80 graduate fellows, reflecting gender equality and diverse geographical distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train a gradually growing number of fellows, hosting 20 fellows by 2021 Train as many women as men Continue to strengthen institutional partnerships in Africa and Asia Establish institutional partnerships in at least new countries in Africa and/or Asia before 2021 	Number of fellows and countries Sex ratio of fellows	Annual reports	Adequate financial resources from MFA Political and security situation in partner countries Gender equality in partner countries

3	Stronger institutions in developing countries, and greater awareness and insight of the needs of professionals and institutions in developing countries	Strong network among leading organisations in land restoration and sustainable land management across developing as well as developed countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff of UNU-LRT promote the programme every year, in meetings and/or conferences in Iceland and abroad • Produce, update and distribute information on the programme • Facilitate network activities by using the UNU-LRT homepage • Two newsletters sent every year to former fellows and partner institutions • Invite -visiting lecturers from a leading institution • Use of social media to reach out to a multiplicity of audiences 	<p>Number of conferences and meetings attended every year</p> <p>Quality of available information on the programme</p> <p>Number of visits to the UNU-LRT webpage</p> <p>Number of specialists attending the visiting lecturers' presentations</p>	<p>Reports</p> <p>Technical information</p> <p>Annual Report</p>	<p>Adequate financial resources from MFA</p> <p>Goodwill from leading organisations</p>
4		Fruitful co-operation with international organizations, including the UNU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to cooperate with other UNU entities • Collaborate with main international players in land restoration and sustainable land management • Share experience and knowledge with the UNU programmes in Iceland 	Number of co-operative activities	<p>Annual Report</p> <p>UNU Annual Report</p>	<p>Goodwill from UNU programmes and institutions</p> <p>Adequate financial resources from MFA</p>
5	Increased knowledge, new research opportunities, projects and funding sources	Research and education opportunities for outstanding professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enter into agreements between UNU-LRT and Icelandic universities regarding MSc and PhD education before 2021 • Explore opportunities of joint degrees and research cooperation • Develop rules on the amount and type of support offered by UNU-LRT • Publish research outputs in scientific journals, conference papers, web articles and other forms. 	<p>Agreement with Icelandic universities</p> <p>Number of graduated professionals</p>	<p>Annual Report</p> <p>Research projects</p>	<p>Adequate financial resources from MFA and available grants</p> <p>Goodwill from Icelandic universities and partner institutions</p>

6		Short courses on specialized issues in developing countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to develop and organise short courses on special issues in co-operation with partner institutions • Develop and implement short courses before 2019 	Number of short courses held and developed	Annual report	<p>Adequate financial resources from MFA and available grants</p> <p>Capability and goodwill of institutes in partner countries</p>
7	Growth of UNU-LRT into a larger and well recognized programme that meets the continuously changing needs of its constituents	Strategies to evaluate the activities of UNU-LRT programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous evaluation of the six-month training curriculum • Develop questionnaire for fellows to fill out at the beginning, at the end of, and two years after the six-month training • Develop an ideal process for fellows' institutions to evaluate the impact of the training of UNU-LRT • Collect information on former fellows' career development, research and outreach activities • Collect information from partner institutions on land health, degradation changes and living condition of local people 	<p>Number of submitted questionnaire forms from fellows and institutions</p> <p>Proportion of fellows still working in this field</p> <p>Published articles and presentations in conferences by former fellows</p>	<p>Evaluation report</p> <p>Reports from partner institutions or local government</p>	<p>Goodwill from former fellows and institutions</p> <p>Capability of institutions in partner countries</p>
8		Efficient and effective management of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNU-LRT board meetings at least three times a year • Studies committee meetings at least four times a year • Generate budget plan and finance report annually • Write and publish annual reports • Publish reports from fellows in the six-month training that meet UNU-LRT standards • Continue to develop the website • Continue to implement the UNU-LRT gender equality policy • Search for and apply for financial support • Seek clients for customer-built short courses and training • Strengthen good contact with and between educators of the programme by holding meetings 	<p>Number of meetings</p> <p>Quality of budget plan</p> <p>Up to date website</p> <p>Amount of external grants</p> <p>Amount of customer-built short courses</p>	<p>Minutes from meetings</p> <p>Budget plan and finance report</p> <p>Annual reports</p> <p>Fellows reports</p> <p>Website</p> <p>Minutes from educators meetings</p>	<p>Adequate UNU-LRT staff to seek additional financial resources</p>