



UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY

**UNU-LRT**

Land Restoration Training Programme

United Nations University  
Land Restoration Training Programme  
Strategic Plan 2011-2016

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 UNU Land Restoration Training Programme

UNU-LRT provides postgraduate training for specialists from the developing countries in the broad field of restoration of degraded land and sustainable land management, and aims at assisting developing countries in capacity development within this field. The programme was founded in 2007 by the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), in partnership with the Agricultural University of Iceland (AUI) and the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI), and with support from United Nations University (UNU), as a part of the government's development co-operation efforts. An agreement of co-operation between UNU, the Government of Iceland, SCSI and AUI was signed by all parties in February 2010.

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.<sup>1</sup> UNU-LRT builds and strengthens 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 at halting soil erosion and restoring lost and degraded woodlands, has 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).

## 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 societies in developing countries, societies that are frequently the most vulnerable and marginalised in their respective countries.

This programme mainly focuses on solutions to problems within the realm of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). It also takes note of other international conventions and agreements that deal with environmental preservation and the alleviation of poverty, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), and the FAO Rome Declaration on World Food Security. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), initiated in 2001, with the objective of assessing the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being, ranks land degradation among the world's greatest environmental challenges.

The UN Millennium Declaration, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), provides the framework for the countries of the world to focus on the eradication of poverty, setting social equity goals and targets that aim at contributing to economic and social development. In September 2010, the Heads of State and Government met

at the UN General Assembly. Recalling the MDGs and commitments emanating from the Millennium Declaration they reaffirmed their resolve to work together for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples. The outcome document states that efforts to address environmental challenges to agricultural development, including soil degradation, will be accelerated. The activities of UNU-LRT are an important part of this advancement. The programme contributes directly to the 7<sup>th</sup> MDG: *Ensuring environmental sustainability*. It also contributes significantly to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> MDGs: *Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and Promote gender equality and empower women*.

## **2. MISSION AND VISION OF UNU-LRT**

### **2.1. 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 women's empowerment in all steps of that advancement.

### **2.2. 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.

### 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 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 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.

##### *I.1. Annual six-month postgraduate training programme for professionals from developing countries faced with severe land degradation challenges*

Activities:

- Finalize the six-month training curriculum before the end of 2011 to maximize the quality of the training, and involve current and potential future educators and supervisors in the curriculum development
- Develop the current specialized lines together with UNU-LRT studies committee and increase the number of specialized lines by two in 2016
- Engage high-quality educators from leading institutions in the field
- Invite an internationally renowned expert each year to contribute to the training programme with lectures and seminars

##### *I.2. Graduate a steadily growing number of fellows, targeting 72 fellows in the period 2011-2016, reflecting gender equality and diverse geographical distribution*

Activities:

- Train a gradually growing number of fellows, hosting 16 fellows by 2016
- Train equally many women and men, reflecting UNU-LRT emphases on gender equality
- Continue to strengthen institutional partnership in Ethiopia, Niger, Uganda, Ghana, Namibia, Mongolia, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan
- Establish institutional partnership in at least two new countries in Africa and/or Asia before 2016



## **II. Facilitating 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 SCSi, build on a strong academic 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 our 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 a visiting lecturer from a leading institution from abroad each year
- Use of social media to reach out to a multiplicity of audiences

### *II. 1. Fruitful co-operation with UNU programmes and institutions*

Activities:

- Visit UNU-INWEH, UNU-INRA, UNU-EHS and UNU-ISP before 2016 to establish co-operation
- Share experience and knowledge with the Icelandic UNU programmes, e.g. curriculum development, networking, fellows' project reports, and practical information

## **III. Supporting 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 will extend this work by offering scholarships for MSc and PhD education at Icelandic universities and short courses for professionals in developing countries.

### *III. 1. MSc and PhD education for outstanding former UNU-LRT fellows at Icelandic universities*

Activities:

- Enter into agreements between UNU-LRT and Icelandic universities regarding MSc and PhD education before 2013
- Explore opportunities for joint degrees between UNU and Icelandic universities

- Develop rules on the amount and type of support offered by UNU-LRT
- Offer two outstanding former fellows a scholarship for an MSc degree; the first one in 2014

### *III.2. Short courses on specialized issues in developing countries*

Activities:

- Develop and organize short courses on special issues in UNU-LRT partner countries in co-operation with UNU-LRT partner institutions.
- Run, before 2016, at least one short course on a special issue in a UNU-LRT partner country.

## **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 two years, writing 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.

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. In this vein, the programme will undergo an external, expert review after five years of operation.

### *IV. 1. Strategies to evaluate the six-month UNU-LRT programme to ensure quality*

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 training of UNU-LRT
- Collecting information on former fellow's career development, research and outreach activities
- Collecting information from partner institutions on living conditions/livelihoods of local people
- Collecting and comparing information on land health and degradation changes from partner institutions

### *IV. 2. Efficient and effective management of the programme*

Activities:

- Strategic plan revised every two years
- 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 annual reports
- Publish all reports from fellows in the six-month training, which meet the standards of UNU-LRT
- Develop the website [www.unulrt.is](http://www.unulrt.is)
- Develop a gender equality strategy for UNU-LRT in 2012
- Search for and apply for additional financial support
- 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 UNU-LRT fellows the opportunity to continue their studies. To fulfil the agreement the following assumptions have to be made:

- Satisfactory housing and training 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 and programme management
- Adequate financial resources secured to fulfil the needs of UNU-LRT, including for project growth

## ANNEX I

### Organisation of the programme

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).

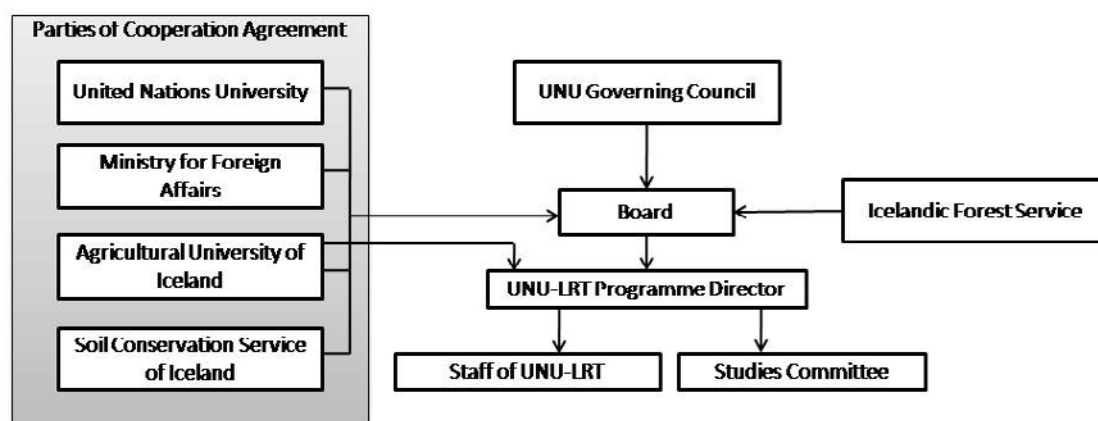


Figure 1. Organogram of the UNU-LRT programme

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

Only specialists from developing countries can be offered a UNU-LRT fellowship. 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 all 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.

### **Programme curriculum**

The curriculum of the six-month training is being revised. The revision is based on feedback from the fellows, as well as evaluation of the structure and content of the programme undertaken by lectures, trainers, the studies committee, and project managers.

Currently the six-month training programme is divided into the following nine modules:

- 1) *Orientation and introduction to Icelandic society*
- 2) *Land use and degradation: setting the scene.* Fellows get a good overview of the extent, severity and drivers behind land degradation and desertification.
- 3) *Processes and principles of land degradation, restoration and sustainable land management (SLM).* The main processes, principles and interactions of land degradation, restoration and SLM are covered in detail.
- 4) *Environmental governance and land management planning.* Development and development co-operation, land tenure and gender issues, and the role of stakeholders in restoration and SLM projects are covered. Fellows learn how to engage communities in environmental planning and decision making.
- 5-6) *Specialized lines.* The specialized lines already offered are: i) Land degradation assessment/Land restoration, and ii) Sustainable land management. More specialized lines will be developed in the future.
- 7) *Practical training.* Fellows practice what they are taught in modules 2-6 such as stakeholder analysis, land health assessment, statistics and use of GPS and GIS.
- 8) *Field trip around Iceland.* Exposure to land degradation problems in Iceland as well as an introduction to different land use practices, and conservation work.
- 9) *Individual project work.* Specialization with reference to the academic and practical background and needs of the individual fellows. This 13 week specialization includes writing a comprehensive report, which is published if it meets UNU-LRT standards.

### **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, and the evaluation results are included in annual reports.

## 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 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><u>Goal:</u> 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, emphasising women's empowerment in all steps of that advancement</p> <p><u>Purpose:</u> To reduce land degradation in developing countries and restore already degraded land.</p>					
1	<p>Annual six-month post-graduate training programme for professionals from developing countries faced with severe land degradation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finalize the six-month training curriculum before the end of 2011</li> <li>Increase the number of specialized lines by two in 2016</li> <li>Engage high-quality educators from leading institution</li> <li>Invite internationally renowned experts each year to contribute to the training programme with lectures and seminars</li> </ul>	<p>Finalized curriculum</p> <p>Education and experience of educators</p>	<p>Curriculum</p> <p>Annual reports</p>	<p>AUI and SCSi will continue to improve the facilities they offer the programme</p> <p>AUI and SCSi will encourage, support and make it feasible for their staff members to contribute to the activities of UNU-LRT</p>
2	<p>72 graduate fellows, reflecting gender equality and diverse geographical distribution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train a gradually growing number of fellows, hosting 16 fellows by 2016</li> <li>Train as many women as men</li> <li>Continue to strengthen institutional partnerships in Ethiopia, Niger, Uganda, Ghana, Namibia, Mongolia, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan</li> <li>Establish institutional partnerships in at least two new countries in Africa and/or Asia before 2016</li> </ul>	<p>Number of fellows and countries</p> <p>Number of men and women</p>	<p>Annual reports</p>	<p>Adequate financial resources from MFA</p> <p>Political situation in partner countries</p> <p>Gender equality in partner countries</p>



3	<p>Stronger institutions in developing countries, and greater awareness and insight of the needs of professionals and institutions in developing countries</p>	<p>Strong network among leading organisations in land restoration and sustainable land management across developing as well as developed countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff of UNU-LRT promote the programme every year, in meetings and/or conferences in Iceland and abroad</li> <li>• Produce, update and distribute information on the programme</li> <li>• Facilitate network activities by using the UNU-LRT homepage</li> <li>• Two newsletters sent every year to former fellows and partner institutions</li> <li>• Invite a visiting lecturer from a leading institution each year</li> <li>• Use of social media to reach out to a multiplicity of audiences</li> </ul>	<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>Technical information</p> <p>Annual Report</p> <p>Newsletters</p> <p>Brochures/leaflets on the programme</p>	<p>Adequate financial resources from MFA</p> <p>Goodwill from leading organisations</p>
4		<p>Fruitful co-operation with UNU programmes and institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit UNU-INWEH, UNU-INRA, UNU-EHS and UNU-ISP before 2016</li> <li>• Share experience and knowledge with the Icelandic UNU programmes</li> </ul>	<p>Number of visits to UNU programmes and institutions</p> <p>Number of co-operative activities</p>	<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	<p>Increased knowledge, new research opportunities, projects and funding sources</p>	<p>MSc and PhD education for outstanding former UNU-LRT fellows at Icelandic universities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enter into agreements between UNU-LRT and Icelandic universities regarding MSc and PhD education before 2013</li> <li>• Explore opportunities of joint degrees between UNU and Icelandic universities</li> <li>• Develop rules on the amount and type of support offered by UNU-LRT</li> <li>• Offer two outstanding former fellows a scholarship for an MSc degree; the first one in 2014</li> </ul>	<p>Agreement with Icelandic universities</p> <p>Number of former fellows graduated with MSc degree</p>	<p>Annual Report</p> <p>MSc diploma</p>	<p>Adequate financial resources from MFA and available grants</p> <p>Goodwill from Icelandic universities</p>

6		<p>Short courses on specialized issues in developing countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and organise short courses on special issues in co-operation with partner institutions</li> <li>• Run at least one short course on special issues in a UNU-LRT partner country before 2016</li> </ul>	<p>Number of short courses held and developed</p>	<p>Annual report</p>	<p>Adequate financial resources from MFA and available grants</p> <p>Capability and goodwill of institutes in partner countries</p>
7	<p>Growth of UNU-LRT into a larger and well recognized programme that meets the continuously changing needs of its constituents</p>	<p>Strategies to evaluate the six-month UNU-LRT programme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous evaluation of the six-month training curriculum</li> <li>• Develop questionnaire for fellows to fill out at the beginning, at the end of, and two years after the six-month training</li> <li>• Develop an ideal process for fellows' institutions to evaluate the training of UNU-LRT</li> <li>• Collect information on former fellows career development, research and outreach activities</li> <li>• Collect information from partner institutions on living conditions/ livelihoods of local people</li> <li>• Collect and compare information on land health and degradation changes from partner institutions</li> </ul>	<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>Feedback from 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"> <li>• Strategic plan revised every two years</li> <li>• UNU-LRT board meetings at least three times a year</li> <li>• Studies committee meetings at least four times a year</li> <li>• Generate budget plan and finance report annually</li> <li>• Write annual reports</li> <li>• Publish reports from fellows in the six-month training that meet UNU-LRT standards</li> <li>• Develop the website</li> <li>• Develop a gender equality strategy in 2012</li> <li>• Search for and apply for financial support</li> <li>• Strengthen good contact with and between educators of the programme by holding meetings</li> </ul>	<p>Number of meetings</p> <p>Quality of budget plan</p> <p>Up to date website</p> <p>Amount of external grants</p>	<p>Strategic plan</p> <p>Minutes from meetings</p> <p>Budget plan and finance report</p> <p>Annual reports</p> <p>Fellows reports</p> <p>Gender equality strategy</p> <p>Website</p> <p>Minutes from educators meetings</p> <p>External, expert review every five years</p>	
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