



UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY

**UNU-LRT**

Land Restoration Training Programme

## NEWSLETTER



### Greetings from UNU-LRT

The first half of the year 2014 has been exciting for UNU-LRT. In February the Programme Director was a keynote speaker at a panel discussion in New York which was held in connection with the United Nations work on the new sustainable development goals. The Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Ms Monique Barbut, visited UNU-LRT in the beginning of June where there was good opportunity to discuss the pressing global issues of land restoration, food security and sustainable land management. Furthermore, the Stockholm-based Ethiopian Ambassador to the Nordic countries, Ms Woinshet Tadesse, and the Brussels-based ambassador of Niger, Mr Adani Illo, paid UNU-LRT a visit in the spring months.

UNU-LRT continues to grow and this year 12 fellows from six different countries started on 11 March in the annual six-month training programme. This year's fellows come from Ethiopia, Ghana, Mongolia, Niger, Uganda and Uzbekistan, five women and seven men. The training is organized as in previous years with lectures, diverse assignments and field practices for the first three months followed by three months of individual project work and excursions around Iceland. The fellows have just moved back from their two months' stay in Gunnarsholt, the headquarters of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland, where they focused on their individual projects. The last weeks of the UNU-LRT fellows' stay in Iceland lies ahead, with a visit from an international guest lecturer, presentation and submission of their individual projects, and finally graduation on 18 September.

The office facilities of UNU-LRT at Keldnaholt research campus of the Agricultural University of Iceland, where UNU-LRT has its headquarters, have improved considerably this year. These facilities include more spacious offices for the fellows, a meeting room and a new teaching space. Furthermore, new living quarters were brought into use this summer in Gunnarsholt. They provide housing for additional ten fellows with private bathrooms and kitchen facilities. Those improved facilities are important for the growth and increased activities of UNU-LRT in coming years.

UNU-LRT is governed by a Board of five members. This summer the representative of the Agricultural University of Iceland, the rector of the University Dr Agust Sigurdsson, stepped down from his position. At his last Board meeting in June Dr Sigurdsson was thanked for his long service and many contributions to UNU-LRT. He has served on the Board since the launch of the programme in 2007. At the occasion the Chair of the Board, Mr Sveinn Runolfsson, presented him with a gift in token of his

excellent service on the Board.

The Programme Director, Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, went on maternity leave in May and since then Ms Berglind Orradottir has been acting as Programme Director. The programme hired an additional staff member, Ms Brita Berglund, to join the programme staff team from May until Dr Aegisdottir's return. Ms Berglund is a specialist in environmental communication at the Agricultural University of Iceland and has been teaching at the UNU-LRT programme since 2011. Ms Berglund is also a Certified Coach and has offered coaching lessons for the UNU-LRT fellows since 2009.

---



### Visit from the Executive Secretary of UNCCD in Iceland

The Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Ms Monique Barbut, visited Iceland and the UNU-LRT programme in the beginning of June 2014. During her two day stay, Ms Barbut visited South Iceland where she was introduced to the land degradation and desertification challenges of the country, but severe land degradation has led to the formation of barren desert areas in spite of the humid climate. This reminds us of the importance of globalizing the issue as land degradation is not limited to the dry areas of the world but affects ecosystems all over the world. She was also introduced to the success of land restoration in Iceland which has taken place despite the enormous land degradation in previous centuries. Iceland's achievement in land restoration has put the county in the front row globally in the field of land restoration, which is also one of the reasons why the UNU Land Restoration Training programme is based in Iceland.

The UNU-LRT fellows, staff and Studies Committee had the privilege of meeting with Ms Barbut in a closed meeting where there was an opportunity to discuss the pressing global issues of land restoration, food security and sustainable land management. Ms Barbut also gave a talk entitled *A Secure Future – Powered by the Land* at the auditorium of the National Museum of Iceland, which the UNU-LRT fellows attended.

More than 90% of the foods humans consume are linked to soil so a great deal is at stake for humanity to maintain fertile soils and healthy ecosystems. Soil plays a very important role in water distribution as well as the sequestering of carbon, which is becoming more and more important due to

the rising CO<sub>2</sub> level in the atmosphere. Land degradation and loss of soil have become serious problems all across the globe and in developing countries especially as large numbers of people base their livelihood on subsistence and small scale farming.

UNCCD is one of three conventions that were created at the UN's Earth Summit (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. The objective of the Convention is to combat land degradation and desertification which is also the aim of UNU-LRT, which works towards this objective through capacity building, i.e. by disseminating knowledge on the processes of land degradation and desertification and their driving forces – which are essentially the same all over the world – as well as presenting ways of sustainable land use and restoration of ecosystems.



### **UNU-LRT Programme Director a keynote speaker in New York**

The Programme Director of UNU-LRT, Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, was the keynote speaker at a panel discussion organized by the Permanent Mission of Iceland and the Group of Friends on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought, in partnership with UNCCD, FAO and IAEA, in New York in February this year.

The panel discussion was planned in connection with the United Nations work on sustainable development goals (SDGs) which will build upon the Millennium Development Goals and merge with the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Iceland, along with other states, has accentuated the need for a goal that addresses the importance of combating land degradation and desertification, restoring degraded land and building capacity in this important field.

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



### **UNU-LRT fellows participate in Seminar on Performance Management in the Development Sector**

In May this year, the UN Association in Iceland organized an open seminar together with the UNU Programmes in Iceland, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Institute of International Affairs at the University of Iceland, on performance management in the development sector with focus on the UNU Programmes in Iceland. Fellows from all UNU Programmes in Iceland, i.e. the UNU Land Restoration Training programme (UNU-LRT), the Geothermal Training programme (UNU-GTP), the Fisheries Training programme (UNU-FTP) and the Gender Equality Studies and Training programme (UNU-GEST), represented their programmes and gave a talk on their perspectives on how the training would or could assist them in their further endeavours in the future. Presenting on behalf of the UNU-LRT programme was Ms Irene Jemilatu Yenuyet Yaro from Ghana. She described the challenges she faces as a Programme Officer at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the Eastern Region in Ghana with the mining sector, and how she anticipates the training will benefit her in her work.



### **News from former fellows**

Since completing the six-month training, the UNU-LRT 2013 cohort has accomplished various achievements such as finishing university degrees and getting promotions.

A few months after completing his training in Iceland in September 2013, Mr Mohamadou Habibou Gabou from Niger was promoted to Director in one of Niger's ministries in the town of Birni N'Gaouré,

in the Region of Dosso, one of Niger's eight regions. Before, Mr Gabou was working for the Ministry of Hydraulics and Environment in the capital city Niamey, but that Ministry has since been split into two ministries, the Ministry of Hydraulics and the Ministry of Environment, Urban Sanitation and Sustainable Development, where Mr Gabou is now a Director.

Early this year, another former fellow got promoted, Mr Azamat Isakov from Kyrgyzstan who was elected a Director at CAMP Alatoo, a public foundation established in 2004 in Kyrgyzstan which promotes sustainable improvement of mountain regions of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Previously Mr Isakov was a Coordinator for a pasture management project at CAMP Alatoo.

Two fellows from the 2013 cohort have completed their master's degrees this year. Mr Salifu Wahabu a Programme Officer at EPA in Ghana defended his M.Phil. in Environmental Sciences in February, at the University of Ghana, and Ms Merkeb Woldu, an Instructor at Mekelle University in Ethiopia, finished her MSc in Tropical Land Resource Management in July at Mekelle University. Furthermore, Mr Enock Ssekuubwa, an Assistant Lecturer at Makerere University in Uganda and a former fellow of the 2013 cohort, has received a PhD scholarship for research on evaluating forest function under different restoration methods in Kibale National Park in Western Uganda.

## UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY - LAND RESTORATION TRAINING PROGRAMME

AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND | KELDNAHOLT | IS - 112 REYKJAVIK, ICELAND |  
[UNULRT@UNULRT.IS](mailto:UNULRT@UNULRT.IS) | [www.unulrt.is](http://www.unulrt.is)

---

You have received this email because your email address is registered on the mailing list UNU-LRT mailinglist.

If you wish to unsubscribe, you can to click [here](#).

If the link does not work you can copy the following URL in a browser: <http://www.unulrt.is/en/moya/maillinglist/unsubscribe/3/aGFsbGRvcvcmF0QGxiaGkuaXM>