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Land Restoration Training Programme

NEWSLETTER

Dear reader/friends of UNU-LRT.

The year 2018 has so far been very fruitful and busy at UNU-LRT. Among the highlights of the year has been the largest group up until now in the UNU-LRT six-month training programme, or 17 fellows, and for the first time, we received fellows from our new partner country, Tajikistan, in Central Asia. The first short course was held in Mongolia this year and another short course is planned later this month in Uganda. UNU-LRT had strong representation at the SER (Society for Ecological Restoration) – Europe Chapter 2018 conference in Reykjavik, and much more.

Below we bring you some of the highlights of the year so far.



The six-month training programme

On 12 March, 17 specialists, 10 women and seven men, started the UNU-LRT six-month training programme. The fellows this year came from Ethiopia, Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Malawi, Mongolia, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The last country listed is a new partner country of UNU-LRT.

The main international lecturer at UNU-LRT this year was Dr Richard Thomas, Scientific Coordinator of ELD (the Economics of Land Degradation Initiative) and Consultant to ICARDA (International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas). Dr Thomas has vast experience in managing and implementing research projects on natural resources management and a great deal of his work has been on strengthening managerial and institutional capacity by building networks between scientists from many parts of the world, including Africa, Asia and Latin America. Dr Thomas' main focus in his teaching was on the ELD approach and methodology. ELD is a global initiative for sustainable land management and economic benefits of land and land-based ecosystems. The initiative aims at making the economics of land degradation an integral part of policy strategies and decision-making by

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increasing the political and public awareness of the costs and benefits of land (see www.eld-initiative.org).

This was the fourth time Dr Thomas has been a guest lecturer at UNU-LRT, as he lectured at the training programme in 2012, 2013 and 2014, then as the Assistant Director (Dryland Ecosystems) at UNU-INWEH (UNU Institute for Water, Environment and Health).

Another returning international lecturer was Ms Susan Muska, who equipped the fellows with organizing and presentation skills, as she has done for several consecutive years now. Finally, the American visiting lecturer at the Agricultural University of Iceland, Dr Matthew H. Bowker, from the School of Forestry at Northern Arizona University, gave a lecture on development of biocrust as restoration material.



Graduation

On 14 September, the 17 fellows graduated from the UNU-LRT six-month training programme. The total number of graduated fellows since the launching of the programme in 2007 is now up to 118 fellows from 13 countries.

At the graduation ceremony, the Permanent Secretary of State, Mr Sturla Sigurjonsson addressed the fellows and invited guests, as well as Dr Arni Bragason, the Chair of the UNU-LRT Board and Director of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland, Dr Saemundur Sveinsson, Rector of the Agricultural University of Iceland, and the UNU-LRT Director, Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir. A special guest at the ceremony, Dr Barron Joseph Orr, the Lead Scientist at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), also addressed the fellows and other invited guests. It was a great honour to have Dr Orr at the graduation ceremony. Last but not least, two of the graduating fellows, Ms Robiya Turdimatovna Nabieva from Tajikistan and Mr Iddrisu Latif Nasare from Ghana, also spoke on behalf of the graduating fellows.

One week before the graduation ceremony, the 17 fellows had presented their individual research projects in an open seminar at Keldnaholt, the research campus of the Agricultural University in Reykjavik and home of UNU-LRT. The research projects are a part of their final output of the six-month training. As always, the individual projects covered a wide range of issues under the umbrella of land restoration and sustainable land management. The project subjects included topics such as production of native grass seeds for reseeding of degraded rangelands in Lesotho, factors affecting survival of agroforestry trees in Malawi, use of compost to restore soil fertility in Uzbekistan, designing a restoration plan for the mountainous landscapes of Tajikistan, assessing stakeholders' perceptions of the posting of a reclamation bond at the small-scale mining sector in Ghana, and assessing community-

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Programme offers
training of specialists
from developing
countries to combat
land degradation and
restore degraded
land. The
Programme aims to
assist partner
institutions in
strengthening
institutional capacity
and gender equality
in the field of land
restoration and
sustainable land
management in
developing countries.

based pasture management in Kyrgyzstan. The diverse issues covered in the research projects reflect the various tasks that the fellows deal with in their work at home.

Seventeen former fellows were also present at the graduation ceremony as they were attending the SERE 2018 conference in Reykjavik that same week (see item below). It was very enjoyable to have so many former fellows at the graduation ceremony as well as the special guest of UNU-LRT, Dr Barron Orr.



Good representation of UNU-LRT at the SER Europe 2018 conference in Reykjavik, Iceland

The Society for Ecological Restoration (SER) – the Europe Chapter, held its biennial conference in Reykjavik on 9-13 September. SER Europe is a network of restoration experts, exchanging knowledge and expertise for the promotion of ecological restoration in Europe, as it says on the website of the organisation (see: <https://chapter.ser.org/europe/>). All the fellows of the 2018 cohort participated in the conference as well as the UNU-LRT-sponsored former fellow Joel Owona, who is a Master's student at the Agricultural University of Iceland, and 16 former UNU-LRT fellows who travelled especially to Iceland to attend the conference. They were all sponsored by UNU-LRT.

All former fellows either gave a talk or presented a poster at the conference on issues they are working on in their home countries. A former fellow from the 2017 cohort, Ms Beatrice Dossah from Ghana, gave a keynote speech on means to raise awareness on environmental issues through the arts. UNU-LRT Director, Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, also gave a keynote speech on the commonalities of restoring ecological function and biodiversity to degraded landscapes across different biomes for improved livelihoods and climate change mitigation.

A special symposium on *How to use knowledge on land restoration to reach the UN Sustainable Development Goals* was organized by UNU-LRT at the conference. Three former UNU-LRT fellows, Mr Emmanuel Lignule from Ghana, Ms Malipholo Hae from Lesotho, and Mr Zhyrgalbek Kozhombardiev from Kyrgyzstan, gave separate talks at the symposium. One was on how land restoration can improve people's food security and income, another one on the drivers of rangeland degradation and benefits of restoration, and the third one on the cost of land degradation and economic benefits of reversing it. UNU-LRT Deputy Director Berglind Orradottir gave a talk on the role of land restoration in the UN 2030 agenda and Dr Barron Orr, the Lead Scientist for UNCCD, gave in his talk a global perspective on how SDG target 15.3 can help integrate and accelerate other SDGs.

We at UNU-LRT were extremely proud of all the fellows who did very well in presenting their research results at the conference.

UNU-LRT also co-organized a workshop at the conference with partners in the ENABLE consortium. The title of the workshop was *Chief Ecosystem Officers—and how the ENABLE consortium works to educate these*. In this interactive workshop, participants were introduced to the basic principles and concepts of integrated landscape management based on

sustainable business models. The Hekluškógar case study was presented and participants were engaged, through group discussions, in finding innovative solutions to finance the project and find business opportunities by combining knowledge from economy and ecology. Participants learned why bridging these two worlds is an important way to accelerate effective landscape restoration and sustainable land management.

The conference of the European chapter of SER was jointly organized by UNU-LRT, the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland, the Agricultural University of Iceland and the Icelandic Environment Association *Landvernd*.



First short course in Mongolia

A short course on *Communicating Knowledge for Sustainable Rangeland Management under Climate Change – Improving Analytic and Reporting Skills* was held in Mongolia, a partner country of UNU-LRT, from 29 June to 5 July this year. The seven-day course was jointly developed by UNU-LRT and three of its partner institutions in Mongolia: the Mongolian University of Life Sciences (MULS), the National Federation of Pasture User Groups of Herders (NFPUG), and the Information and Research Institute of Meteorology, Hydrology and Environment (IRIMHE).

The course was held at the Secret History Camp in the Tuv province, north-west of the capital city Ulaanbaatar. Twenty-four professionals, including researchers, lecturers, land managers and monitoring officers, participated in and successfully finished the course. Five former UNU-LRT fellows from the six-month training programme in Iceland were involved in various parts of the course. One of the former fellows was actively involved in the course development team and taught in the course, while others contributed to field demonstrations and training on the field day, and assisted with running the course.

The course started with two days of interactive lectures, followed by a field trip where participants explored grazing and climate change impacts at four sites: two steppe sites, a pine forest and a riparian area. During the field visit, participants reflected on the concepts and topics covered during the lectures. In the latter part of the course the focus was on the basic project framework, where the rangeland health monitoring system in Mongolia was used as a case study to explain the different elements of the framework. In this part of the course the participants were assigned to working groups, where they explored the different components of the basic project framework.

According to a thorough evaluation by participants, instructors and course assistants, this first UNU-LRT short course in Mongolia was a highly successful one. The on-site course team included three instructors from Iceland, five from Mongolia, and two additional support staff. UNU-LRT thanks all those for their commitment and hard work which helped make this course a success!



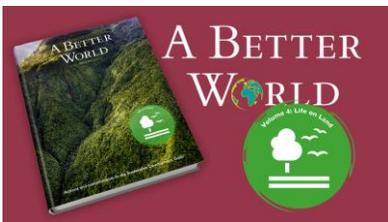
A Better World

Recently, the book A BETTER WORLD Volume 4 was published by Tudor Rose publishing company in cooperation with UNCCD. The book is part of a series of publications produced in partnership of Tudor Rose and the United Nations and its agencies showing practical implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. This edition looks at the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 15, which is to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. More specifically, Goal 15.3, which aims to strive towards Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) globally by 2030, was highlighted in this edition.

Among the contributors to the publication is UNU-LRT. The report by the UNU-LRT Director Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir and Deputy Director Berglind Orradottir, addresses *Land and quality education — building the capacities of the change agents of the future*.

The book was the graduation gift to the graduating fellows from the six-month training programme this year. The book is also available as a digital edition here: <http://digital.tudor-rose.co.uk/a-better-world-vol-4> and the UNU-LRT report starts here: <http://digital.tudor-rose.co.uk/a-better-world-vol-4/20/>

We hope you will enjoy reading the chapter and the book!



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