



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

GRÓ
LRT

Land Restoration
Training Programme
Under the auspices
of UNESCO

December 2021

Season's greetings!

The year 2021 was fruitful for GRÓ LRT despite the continued COVID-19 pandemic. We welcomed 17 fellows in the six-month training programme in the beginning of April, three weeks later than in normal years, though. Regular visits to partner institutions had to be put on hold again this year because of the pandemic, consequently affecting all our in-country activities. Still, GRÓ LRT was able to support a two-day course in Mongolia on sustainable management of ecosystems, organised by three of our long-standing partner institutions there.

Read on to see our key highlights from the year 2021.



New promo video

For the last two summers, GRÓ LRT has been working with a cinematographer filming restoration sites and GRÓ LRT activities, to produce teaching and promotional materials. The first promo video has been published, which gives people a glimpse into what GRÓ LRT is all about. The video contains footages of the environment where our training takes place, and our partners and former fellows might see some familiar faces there. Check out our [new promo video](#).



UNITED NATIONS DECADE ON
**ECOSYSTEM
RESTORATION**
2021-2030

UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030

In February, GRÓ LRT was approved as an official Supporting Partner of the *UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030*, but the Decade was officially launched at the World Environment Day on 5 June 2021. As a Supporting Partner, GRÓ LRT helps promote and amplify the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and continues to promote ecological restoration through its channels, networks and targeted capacity-building activities.

The aim of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration is to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean, for the benefit of people and nature. You can read about the Decade on its official website: www.decadeonrestoration.org. We urge you all to actively take part in the Decade – to help make it a success.



The six-month training programme

We were delighted to receive 17 fellows here in Iceland in early April, after having to cancel the six-month training last year because of COVID-19 restrictions. The 2021 cohort of fellows came from eight countries in Africa and Central Asia: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Malawi, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Uganda. All of them are experts in their respective countries, working on issues related to ecosystem restoration and land management.

The first sessions of this year's six-month training were conducted online as the fellows had to undergo a 5-day quarantine upon arrival in Iceland. Otherwise, we were able to run the programme as normally and we were fortunate to stay healthy, staff and 2021 cohort of fellows alike, with no COVID-19 infections.

As usual, the fellows went on numerous field trips and excursions as a part of the six-month training. Those outings are essential for connecting the classroom lectures to actual restoration- and degradation cases, and they also give the fellows the opportunity to discuss challenges and successes in land restoration with various stakeholders and local people. The highlight of this year outings was though, without question, the hiking to the active volcanic eruption on the Reykjanes Peninsula on 30 April, where the fellows experienced new land in the making.



In the latter part of the six-month training, the fellows conducted an individual research project under the supervision of specialists from institutes and organizations in Iceland. The fellows presented their project findings in open seminars at the Keldnaholt Campus of the Agricultural University of Iceland, on 16 and 17 September. As always, the projects covered a wide range of issues under the umbrella of land restoration and sustainable land management. The diverse issues covered reflect the various topics and tasks that the fellows are dealing with in their work in their home countries. Carrying out a project and bringing back home the project findings is key in GRÓ LRT's approach to support capacity building in its partner institutions. [Here](#) you can find the titles of the fellows' projects and the names of their supervisors.

On 27 September, the 17 GRÓ LRT fellows graduated from the six-month training. The graduating cohort of 2021 is the first group of fellows to participate in the six-month training after the Land Restoration Training Programme became part of *GRÓ International Centre for Capacity Development, Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Societal Change*, in January 2020. Since the Programme started in 2007, 156 fellows have been graduated with an equal gender balance or 49% women and 51% men.



Visit to the president of Iceland

Just before the graduation, the GRÓ LRT fellows had the honour of visiting the President of Iceland, Mr Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, at Bessastaðir presidential residence.

The President warmly welcomed the group at his premises and gave a short remark on the importance of land restoration, referring to an ongoing wetland restoration project at the estate of Bessastaðir, where ditches have been filled with the aim of reducing carbon emissions from the land. The President's introduction sparked a lively discussion on the importance of land restoration and sustainable land management in the fight against climate change and for securing peoples livelihoods and wellbeing. The importance of partnership and working together on solutions to the global environmental challenges was also prominent in the discussions.



Short course in Mongolia on sustainable management of ecosystems

GRÓ LRT and three of its partner institutions in Mongolia held a two-day course on sustainable management of ecosystems in Mongolia, on 12-13 November 2021. The goal of the short course was to support sustainable management of ecosystems in Mongolia through communicating how land use and climate change impact ecosystems. The target group for the course was local decision makers and environmental experts; participants were twenty-five in total.

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) jointly developed the course with a support from GRÓ LRT. We thank the course team from MULS, NFPUG and IRIMHE for their commitment and hard work to make this course a reality!



Collaboration between GRÓ LRT and the Icelandic Red Cross

GRÓ LRT and the Icelandic Red Cross signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) this year, to establish a strategic collaboration between the two parties. The MoU expresses an interest in sharing of expertise, capacity training and collaborating in Red Cross development projects focusing on land restoration and environmental sustainability. We hope that our collaboration will lead to enhanced understanding and focus on land restoration and environmental sustainability in international development cooperation.



New Director General of the GRÓ Centre for International Development

The newly established UNESCO category 2 centre in Iceland, the *GRÓ International Centre for Capacity Development, Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Societal Change*, appointed a new Director General in June, when Ms Nina Björk Jonsdottir took over the position from Mr Fridrik Jonsson. Ms Nina Björk Jonsdottir has worked within the Icelandic Foreign Service since 2005 and has for example served as a Deputy Permanent Representative at the Permanent Mission of Iceland to UNESCO. We welcome the new Director General, and thank Mr Fridrik Jonsson for his service.

News from former fellows

Beatrice Dossah from Ghana, a fellow in 2017 and a GRÓ LRT scholarship recipient, graduated with an MA in Environment and Natural Resources from the School of Social Science at the University of Iceland. The title of her thesis is: *How do cultural believe systems of sacred groves contribute to environmental conservation, and what are their specific threats? A case study of the Gua Koo sacred grove in Pokuase, Ghana.*

Richard Rubongoya from Uganda, a fellow in 2019, finished his MSc degree in Environment and Natural Resources at Makerere University in Kampala. His thesis is entitled: *The performance of lagoons in sewage treatment in Fort Portal, Western Uganda.*

Retselisitsoe Johannes Stephen from Lesotho and fellow in 2019, completed his MSc in Range Management and Pasture Production. The topic of his thesis is: *Impact of shrub encroachment and comparison of different control methods in the montane rangelands of Lesotho: Case of Sehlabathebe, Qacha's Nek District.*

Dr Erdenechimeg Avidsuren from Mongolia and a GRÓ LRT fellow in 2021 finished her PhD from Inner Mongolia Agricultural University in Hohhot, China in late November. The topic of her thesis is: *Risk assessment of rangeland degradation in Arkhangai province, Mongolia.*

Dr Hadgu Hishe Teferi from Ethiopia, a fellow in 2011, finished his PhD at KU Leuven University in Belgium in October. The title of his thesis is: *Restoration Potential of Desa'a Forest, a Large Threatened Dryland Forest in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia*.

Dr Mariama B Diallo from Niger Republic and a fellow in 2016 published a paper in the journal Agroforestry Systems. The article is entitled: *Combined effect of trees and soil fertility management practices on millet yields in the Sahel*. [Here](#) is a link to the article.

Sumjidmaa Sainnemekh from Mongolia, a fellow in 2014 and currently a PhD student at the Agricultural University of Iceland with a PhD scholarship from GRÓ LRT, published her first PhD paper on rangeland degradation in Mongolia, in the Journal of Arid Environments. The article can be read [here](#).

Lastly, Hassane Yaye Abdou from Niger, a fellow in 2019, will defend his PhD thesis on 22 December from the University of Abdou Moumouni de Niamey.

The GRÓ LRT team congratulates the former fellows on their achievements.

Remember you can find us on social media! GRÓ LRT is on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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Árleynir 22, Keldnaholt | 112 Reykjavík | Iceland | grolrt@grolrt.is

