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GRÓ
LRT

• Land Restoration
• Training Programme
• Under the auspices
• of UNESCO

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Season's greetings!

The year 2022 was fruitful for GRÓ LRT and we were able to take up activities that stopped at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The six-month training programme, with 19 fellows this year, became eligible for ECTS credits and the first GRÓ LRT PhD scholarship recipient finished a doctoral degree from the Agricultural University of Iceland. Regular visits to partner institutions resumed with visits to Ghana, Malawi and Uganda, as well as GRÓ LRT organized with partners a training course in Ethiopia, the first GRÓ LRT in-country training since 2019.

Read on to see our key highlights from the year 2022.



GRÓ LRT six-month training programme eligible for 30 ECTS credits

The GRÓ LRT six-month training became eligible for ECTS credits as from 2022. This means that fellows completing the training successfully will, in addition to GRÓ LRT Certificate of Completion, also receive a Postgraduate Diploma in Ecosystem Restoration and Sustainable Land Management (30 ECTS) from the Agricultural University of Iceland. This change does not have much impact on the content and structure of the six-month training; the programme curriculum continues to be divided into eight modules and is organised according to a project cycle framework. Yet, the six-month training is now also organised as two academic courses, each 15 ECTS, within the Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences at the Agricultural University of Iceland.



First GRÓ LRT PhD scholarship recipient finishes a doctoral degree from the Agricultural University of Iceland

On 10 November, Ms Sumjidmaa Sainnemekh successfully defended her PhD dissertation in the field of environmental sciences at the Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences of the Agricultural University of Iceland. She is the first former fellow to complete a PhD degree with a scholarship from GRÓ LRT. Dr Sainnemekh attended the six-month training in 2014 and came back to Iceland in 2019 to start her PhD studies.

Dr Sainnemekh's thesis is titled *Patterns and drivers of rangeland degradation in Mongolia*. Her supervisors were Professor Isabel C. Barrio and Professor Ása L. Aradóttir, Agricultural University of Iceland, Dr Brandon Bestelmeyer, United States Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Research Service, Jornada Experimental Range, New Mexico State University and Dr Bulgamaa Densambuu, Mongolian National Federation of Pasture User Groups. [Here](#) you can find a summary of her thesis.

The defence took place at the Keldnaholt Campus of the Agricultural University of Iceland in Reykjavík and was also streamed on Teams. The opponents were Dr Leslie Roche from the University of California Davis in the US, and Professor David Kemp from Charles Sturt University in Australia, who attended the defence on Teams.



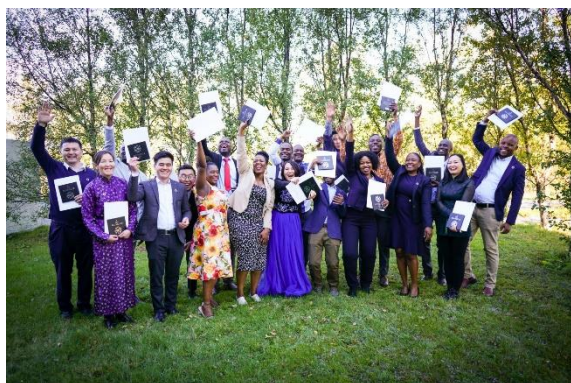
Short course in Ethiopia

GRÓ LRT organized a new 5-day training course in partnership with the [Economics of Land Degradation \(ELD\) Initiative](#) and Arba Minch University. The course is titled *Integrated approaches for land restoration through sustainable land management* and was held in Arba Minch in Ethiopia on 28 March to 1 April 2022.

The aim of the course is to raise awareness on the economic benefits of ecosystem restoration and sustainable land management (SLM), teach the main steps involved in planning SLM and ecosystem restoration projects, and provide an overview on valuation techniques. The target group for the course are district development assistance workers specialized in natural resource management. Participants in the course were twenty.

The course was organized in a hybrid format, combining in-class sessions, field visits and pre-recorded lectures. GRÓ LRT's main contribution was in the form of pre-recorded lectures, given by Dr Thorunn Petursdottir from the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland and Professor Asa L. Aradóttir and Professor Olafur Arnalds, both from the Agricultural University of Iceland. Their lectures focused on social-ecological systems, land literacy and degradation processes, and on approaches and principles in restoration of degraded land.

The course was held at the Haile Resort in the city of Arba Minch. The surrounding Lake Chamo watershed was used as a case in the course to study the effects of land degradation on various ecosystem services and on how SLM and restoration can reverse the degradation and produce a range of benefits for the society. Photo: Arba Minch University.



GRÓ LRT six-month training programme

We welcomed 19 fellows in mid-March to the six-month training. The 2022 cohort of fellows came from eight countries in Africa and Central Asia: Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Malawi, Mongolia, Nigeria, Uganda and Uzbekistan. Seventeen fellows came from GRÓ LRT's partner institutions in respective countries, and two participated as representatives of UNESCO MAB's World Network of Biosphere Reserves, coming from Mount

Mulanje Biosphere Reserve in Malawi and Omo Biosphere Reserve in Nigeria. This is the first time we receive a fellow from Nigeria.

As usual, the first three months of the training consisted mostly of lectures, group work and exercises, but also field trips and excursions. Those trips are essential for connecting the classroom lectures to actual restoration- and degradation cases, and give the fellows the opportunity to discuss challenges and successes in land restoration with various stakeholders and local people.

In the latter part of the six-month training, each fellow conducted an individual research project under the supervision of specialist(s) from institutes and organizations in Iceland. The projects covered a wide range of issues under the umbrella of land restoration and sustainable land management (SLM), including wetland restoration, stakeholder engagement in restoration interventions, soil seed banks under sheep grazing, use of remote sensing to monitor land degradation, and successes and challenges in adoption of SLM technologies, to mention a few. The diverse issues covered reflect the various topics and tasks that the fellows are dealing with in their work at home. 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 list with the titles of the fellows' projects and the names of their supervisors.

On 14 September, the 19 GRÓ LRT fellows graduated from the six-month training. Since the beginning of the Land Restoration Training Programme in 2007, 175 specialists have graduated from the annual six-month training programme; 53% of them have been men and 47% women, from 14 partner countries.



Guest lecturers from the ELD Initiative and Makerere University in the six-month training

Dr Richard Thomas, the Scientific Coordinator of the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative, gave a two-day course on the economics of land dynamics in GRÓ LRT six-month training programme this year. In his lectures, Dr Thomas introduced the ELD framework for the consideration of the economic values of land. He talked about the valuation of ecosystem services, instruments to incentivise sustainable land management, and introduced the 6+1 ELD approach and methodology to assess the economics of land management. The theory and basic elements of cost benefit analysis was also covered, but that method is used to assess whether an action or project is worth undertaking.

Dr Gerald Eilu, Associate Professor in the Department of Forestry, Biodiversity and Tourism at Makerere University in Uganda, was the second international guest lecturer in the GRÓ LRT six-month training programme. Prof. Eilu gave a full-day lecture on biodiversity and its importance for human societies, addressing the issue in the context of ecosystem services, international frameworks and strategies for biodiversity conservation.



Visit to the President of Iceland

At the end of the GRÓ LRT fellows stay in Iceland, they had the honour of visiting the President of Iceland, Mr. Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, at Bessastaðir presidential residence.

The President warmly welcomed the GRÓ LRT fellows and staff at his premises. He gave a short remark on the importance of land restoration and Iceland's experience in dealing with land degradation. The President told the fellows also about wetland restoration activities on the Bessastaðir estate, where ditches have been filled with the aim of reducing carbon emissions from the land and improving habitat for birds. Then, the President and guests stepped outside to look at the wetland restoration site on the estate. The President's introduction and the ongoing wetland restoration work at Bessastaðir sparked a lively discussion on ecosystem restoration and sustainable land management and of the importance of working together on solutions to the global environmental challenges.



Visits to Ghana, Malawi and Uganda

GRÓ LRT Deputy Director and Operations Manager visited Ghana, Malawi and Uganda this year. The purpose of the visits was to meet the directors of partner institutions and interview potential candidates for GRÓ LRT Fellowship to attend the annual six-month training in coming years. In Uganda, Ms Halldóra Traustadóttir GRÓ LRT Operations Manager also gave a public lecture at Makerere University's School of Forestry, Environmental and Geographical Sciences on *Land restoration in Iceland: Linking knowledge with action through an international training programme*.

As always in GRÓ LRT's visits to partner countries, meetings with GRÓ LRT alumni were organized although it was not possible to meet all 72 specialists from Ghana, Uganda and Malawi that have graduated from GRÓ LRT six-month training in Iceland. Those get-togethers are always enjoyable and important for exchanging new developments and achievements, and to foster collaboration among former fellows.

Regular visits to partner institutions are important in fostering GRÓ LRT's collaborative partnerships with institutions that play a significant role in land restoration and sustainable land management in low and middle income countries.



GRÓ LRT side event at the 34th session of the MAB-ICC

During the 34th Session of the International Co-ordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB-ICC) at UNESCO HQ in Paris in June, GRÓ LRT and the MAB secretariat co-hosted a side event titled *Linking Knowledge to Action in Ecosystem Restoration: Cooperation between GRÓ LRT and UNSECO-MAB*. The event started with opening remarks by Ms Noëline Raondry Rakotoarisoa, Director a.i. of the SC/EES Division and Secretary of the MAB Programme, followed by a lecture by Dr Sjöfn Vilhelmsdóttir, Director of GRÓ LRT where she talked about Iceland's experience of carrying out ecosystem restoration work for more than 100 years and the focus in the GRÓ LRT Programme on linking knowledge to action in land restoration and sustainable land management.

As part of GRÓ LRT and UNESCO-MAB cooperation, the GRÓ International Centre for Capacity Development, a UNESCO Category 2 Centre based in Iceland, will sponsor annually fellowship for two young professionals working for institutions and organisations that are a part of UNESCO MAB's World Network of Biosphere Reserves to participate in the GRÓ LRT six-month training in Iceland (2022-2026). The first two fellows from the MAB programme participated in GRÓ LRT six-month training this year.



GRÓ LRT at the Central Asian Rangelands Conference

GRÓ LRT was well represented at the international conference *Central Asian Rangelands: Global Challenges and Global Opportunities*, which was held 15-16 November 2022 at Samarkand State University in Uzbekistan. GRÓ LRT lecturers Dr Bryndís Marteinsdóttir, from the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland and GRÓ LRT academic committee member, and Dr Isabel Barrio, professor at the Agricultural University of Iceland, presented ongoing projects in Iceland titled *GróLind – Using Ecological Data to Promote Sustainable Land management* and *Learning from Icelandic sheep: 1,100 years of land use in subarctic rangelands*, respectively.

Several former GRÓ LRT fellows presented rangeland projects from their countries; including Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho as well as Uzbekistan of course. Dr Toshpulot Rajabov, a fellow in 2009 from Uzbekistan, was one of the key organizer of this conference, which was organized by Samarkand State University, a GRÓ LRT partner institution, in cooperation with the University of Nevada, Utah State University, ICARDA and GRÓ LRT.

News from former fellows

Ms Caroline Aboda, a fellow in 2018 from Uganda, defended her PhD at Makerere University in February 2021. The title of her dissertation is *An assessment of the social-economic vulnerability to resettlement due to land acquisition for petroleum development activities in Hoima, Uganda*. The study was supervised by Dr Patrick Byakagaba, Associate Professor Frank Mugagga and Associate Professor Goretti Nabanoga. Following the PhD

completion, Dr Aboda was promoted to a position as lecturer at the School of Forestry, Environmental and Geographical Sciences at Makerere University.

Ms Regina Ntebohelen Mating, a fellow in 2018 from Lesotho, has been promoted to the position of Chief Range Management Officer at the Ministry of Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation in Lesotho, as from mid-year 2021. One of her main duties is to supervise all rangeland management activities in the country and report directly to the Director of the Department of Range Resources Management.

Also from Lesotho, Ms Mamosa Mahlcompho Nei, a fellow in 2021, has advanced in her career to a Soil and Water Conservation Officer for the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LDHA), based in Mokhotlong District. Her main responsibilities will be to ensure the implementation of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (phase II), that the Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) strategy runs satisfactory, and to oversee LDHA is fully engaged in the ICM processes.

Two former GRÓ LRT fellows write a chapter in the book *Building global sustainability through local self-reliance: Lessons from landcare*, which was published in August. Ms Beatrice Dossah from Ghana, a fellow in 2017 and GRÓ LRT MSc scholarship recipient in 2019-2021, writes about *Place-based education for sustainability: a strategy that promotes environmental awareness in Ghana through the arts*. Her chapter builds on the research project she conducted as part of her GRÓ LRT six-month training in 2017. Dr Fred Yikii from Uganda, a fellow in 2009 and assistant lecturer in the Department of Environmental Management at Makerere University, co-authors a chapter on *Knowledge and progress: building bridges to empower community action*.

Upon arrival in their home country Lesotho after finishing the six-months training this year, Ms Moselantja Rahla and Mr Mokete Jacob Bereng were promoted, within the Ministry of Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation, to Project Field Officers to coordinate and facilitate the IFAD funded project Regeneration of Landscapes and Livelihoods (ROLL). The core mandate of the ROLL project is to regenerate degraded landscapes and improve livelihoods of rural communities in Lesotho.

Another fellow from this year, Mr Bayartulga Altankhuyag from Mongolia, received a Chevening Scholarship to study for a master's degree in Climate Change and Environmental Policy at the University of Leeds. He started his studies this autumn, only few weeks after graduating from GRÓ LRT six-month training.

And we have already mentioned that the first former fellow to complete a PhD degree with a scholarship from GRÓ LRT defended her PhD dissertation on 10 November. Congratulation Dr Sumjidmaa Sainnemekh!

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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