



UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY

**UNU-LRT**

Land Restoration Training Programme

## NEWSLETTER

### Season's greetings!

We are almost at the end of the year 2019. We would like to thank all of our collaborators for the good cooperation this year and we look forward to a continuing fruitful cooperation.

The year 2019 is a special year for our Programme. After a long and successful collaboration with the United Nations University, the Land Restoration Training Programme has joined hands with the other three UNU training programmes in Iceland, on Fisheries, Gender Equality and Geothermal Energy, to form GRÓ: *the International Centre for Capacity Development - Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Societal Change*, which will become a UNESCO Category 2 Centre as of 1 January 2020. We look forward to continuing our strong collaboration with a new identity under the auspices of UNESCO.

The year has been busy as usual and below we bring you some of the highlights of the year. We send our best wishes for the festive season ahead and wish you a Happy New Year.

Hafdis Hanna, Berglind, Halldóra and Brita



### The six-month training programme

The six-month training on land restoration and sustainable land management started on 18 March with the largest group of fellows so far, 11 women and 10 men from 10 countries in Africa and Central Asia: Ethiopia, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Niger, Uganda, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. During the training, the fellows got an opportunity to participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> *International Spirit of Humanity Forum*, held in Reykjavik in May. This year we received a lecturer from Uganda, Dr Jerome Lugumira, project manager at NEMA (National Environment Management Authority), to teach the fellows about soils and geomorphology as related to land condition.

The fellows went on two excursions during the training, one to the south- and southeast of Iceland where the focus was on climate change and how it affects ecosystems and societies in the area, and another to the north where the focus was on land degradation, restoration implementation and land care.

An important part of the fellows' training is to conduct an individual research project on a topic relevant to the needs of each fellow's institution and/or country. On 5 and 6 September, the fellows presented their project findings in open seminars at the Keldnaholt Research Campus of the Agricultural University of Iceland. Like previous years, this year's projects were very diverse and they can be read at the website of UNU-LRT in the coming months.

On 18 September, the 21 UNU-LRT fellows graduated from the six-month training. At the graduation ceremony, the Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources, Mr Gudmundur Ingi Gudbrandsson, addressed the fellows and other guests. Mr Gudbrandsson emphasized the importance of land restoration and sustainable land use to reach the Sustainable Development Goals and create sustainable societies. The Chair of the UNU-LRT Board and Director of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland, Dr Arni Bragason, also spoke at the ceremony as well as Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, the Director of UNU-LRT, and Dr Ragnheidur I Thorarinsdottir, the Rector of the Agricultural University of Iceland. Lastly, two fellows from the graduating cohort, Ms Annett Mlenga from Malawi and Mr Haqrizobek Nurmamadov from Tajikistan, gave a speech on behalf of the graduating fellows. We warmly congratulate the fellows of 2019 on their achievements!



With the fellows of 2019, the total number of graduated fellows is now 139, 48% of them women and 52% men.

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### First UNU-LRT MSc scholarship recipient finishes a degree at the Agricultural University of Iceland



Mr Joel C Owona, a former fellow from Uganda, completed a Master of Science at the Agricultural University of Iceland on 23 September. He is the first former fellow to complete an MSc degree in Iceland with a scholarship from UNU-LRT. Mr Owona attended the six-month training programme in 2008 and came back to Iceland in 2017 to start his MSc studies.

Mr Owona did his MSc research on changes in carbon-stock and soil properties following afforestation in southwest Iceland. The aim of the research was to evaluate the influence of afforestation on several ecosystem variables at three sites in southwest Iceland and to assess the influence of forest age and type on the same variables. He studied the influence of afforestation on four major ecosystem pools of the forest, i.e. dead wood, ground vegetation, litter layer and soil organic carbon, while another MSc student measured the above ground tree biomass at the same sites.

Mr Owona's supervisors were Professor Bjarni Didrik Sigurdsson at the Agricultural University of Iceland and Berglind Orradottir, UNU-LRT Deputy Director. In addition to the UNU-LRT scholarship, Reykjavík Energy also supported the research.

UNU-LRT congratulates Joel C. Owona on his achievement.

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## Good representation of UNU-LRT at the SER 2019 World Conference in Cape Town, South Africa



The Society for Ecological Restoration (SER) held its biannual World Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, 24-28 September this year. This was the first time an African country hosted the conference. A large group of the UNU-LRT alumni, especially from Africa, attended the conference with a sponsorship from UNU-LRT, and staff and representatives of partner institutions also attended.

UNU-LRT hosted a symposium at the conference entitled *Land restoration for improved livelihood in Africa: Challenges and opportunities*. A part from the talk from the UNU-LRT Director on capacity building for restoring land, four other speakers presented their work in the symposium, among them two former UNU-LRT fellows, Mr Mulugeta Sebhatleab Tesfay from Ethiopia (fellow in 2014) and Ms Setrida Mlamba from Malawi (fellow in 2018). Dr Gerald Eilu, a lecturer at Makerere University, a UNU-LRT partner institute, gave a review on land restoration training in Eastern Africa where he outlined the short courses that UNU-LRT and the Ugandan partners have developed and hosted in Uganda for the past three years. Lastly, Dr Noëline Raondry Rakotoarisoa, Chief of Section at MAB Networking, Biosphere Reserves and Capacity Building at UNESCO, introduced an approach by UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme to ecological restoration in the Lake Chad Basin area.

In addition to the two former UNU-LRT fellows mentioned above, 13 other former fellows attended the conference, nine from Africa and four from Central Asia. They introduced their work back home and/or their research from the UNU-LRT six-month training, either in oral presentations or in posters.

Finally, UNU-LRT represented the ENABLE consortium at the conference with a poster entitled *Massive open online courses on business-driven landscape restoration*. The online courses are available to all who have internet access at the following sites: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/landscape-restoration-sustainable-development> & <https://www.coursera.org/learn/bmi-sustainable-landscape-restoration>.

It was a great reunion of former UNU-LRT fellows and staff and a stimulating conference where everyone found something of interest within the field of ecological restoration.



## Short courses in Mongolia and Uganda



In May, UNU-LRT ran a training course in Mongolia for the second time on “[Communicating Knowledge for Sustainable Rangeland Management under Climate Change – Improving Analytic and Reporting Skills](#)”. The goal of the course is to provide training to communicate and synthesize knowledge on environmental monitoring, so that it can be translated into effective policy making for sustainable rangeland use. The majority of the 25 participants were land managers and environmental-, rangeland- or agricultural specialists who work in selected districts (soums) in Mongolia, where resilience based rangeland- and herding management is being piloted.

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), jointly developed the seven-day course. The course included two days of interactive lectures followed by a field trip where participants explored grazing and climate change impacts in different landscapes. In the latter part of the course, the rangeland health monitoring system in Mongolia was used as a case study to explain the different elements of a basic project framework. During this part, participants worked together in smaller groups to explore the different components of the basic project framework.

A short course was also organised in Uganda in October on sustainable land management, land restoration and linkages to climate change, in collaboration with the Ugandan partners: the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and Makerere University. This was the third time that UNU-LRT ran this course in the country and this time it was held in Soroti, Eastern Uganda, with 25 participants, six women and 19 men.

The target group of the course were environment-, agricultural-, natural resources- and forest officers in districts in Eastern and Northern Uganda. The course consisted of five modules: Land literacy (1), Land degradation (2), Land restoration (3), Sustainable land management (4) and Global and local policy arrangements related to land health, climate change and biodiversity (5). Three field visits were undertaken where the participants got a chance to relate the lectures to real life situations.



Short courses will be given in both Uganda and Mongolia in 2020. UNU-LRT thanks the course teams of both short courses for their commitment and hard work, which helped make the courses a success!

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## New MOOC and learning platform from the ENABLE project

UNU-LRT is a part of the ENABLE consortium, a partnership of organisations working towards establishing an educational platform to create awareness about the functioning of ecosystems and the benefits of sustainable landscape



management. Such education can bridge the gaps between ecology and economy, environment and business and help deal with global challenges as defined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The ENABLE consortium has created a second massive open online course (MOOC) on [Business Model Innovation for Sustainable Landscape Restoration](#). This new eight-week course was launched on 14 February and is open for all and free of charge. The course aims to equip learners with practical business tools to restore landscapes. It is designed in three phases that move the participants from ideas towards the successful implementation of a new business model for sustainable landscape restoration with social, cultural, and financial returns. Each step of the process is illustrated with three real cases of landscape restoration from Iceland, Spain and Portugal. A teaser video can be watched [here](#) and registration for the course can be done [here](#).

The ENABLE consortium has also developed and launched an online space for a growing community of people involved in large-scale landscape restoration. The platform is for people to meet, share knowledge and learn about landscape restoration. On the platform, you can for example find landscape restoration stories on how restoration is bringing multiple benefits to societies around the globe. We specially point out the stories from our partners in Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Ghana, as well as a story about a large-scale woodland restoration project in Iceland. The platform was created to help build and energize a restoration community that can accelerate landscape restoration based on sustainable business models. You can sign up and share your experiences on [www.4returns.earth](http://www.4returns.earth)

ENABLE is a strategic partnership that has been co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union for the last three years. The grant period has now ended and a final report has been submitted to the Erasmus+ project Results Platform. Besides UNU-LRT, the ENABLE consortium consists of Rotterdam School of Management at Erasmus University, Commonland, the Spanish National Research Council (CEBAS-CSIC), and the Nova School of Business and Economics.



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## News from former fellows

We have heard from two former UNU-LRT fellows who were granted PhD degrees recently.

Akbar Akhmedov from Uzbekistan successfully defended his PhD on 28 December 2018. The PhD defence was held at the Institute of Botany, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The title of his dissertation is "Ontogenetics structure and populations state of rare and endemic species of the genus *Lagochilus bunge* (Lamiaceae Lindl.) in the flora of Uzbekistan". Congratulations Dr Akbar Akhmedov!

Jesayah Nakanyala from Namibia successfully defended his PhD in Vegetation Ecology on 8 November 2019. The PhD defence was held at the University of Namibia. The title of his dissertation is "Rooting strategies of savanna shrubs in the Kalahari Basin: Implications for coexistence of woody and herbaceous plants and shrub encroachment in the African savannas". Congratulations Dr Jesayah Nakanyala!



Dr Akbar Akhmedov



Dr Jesayah Nakanyala

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## Changes in our team



Ms Brita Berglund started working for UNU-LRT from mid-summer this year. Brita has worked with the training programme for several years as a teacher/lecturer, supervisor and personal coach but is now employed on a full time basis. Brita started working full time at UNU-LRT when two former part time employees, Ms Katrin Bjornsdottir and Ms Salome Hallfredsdottir, left UNU-LRT for other engagements this summer.

Brita has a background in geography, soil science and environmental communication and has recently filled the position as the Head of Education and Quality Management within the Agricultural University of Iceland.

We thank Katrin and Salome for their good work at UNU-LRT and warmly welcome Brita to the team!

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### **UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY LAND RESTORATION TRAINING PROGRAMME**

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