



UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY

**UNU-LRT**

Land Restoration Training Programme

## NEWSLETTER



### UNU-LRT six-month training programme 2015

This year's six-month training programme started on 10 March. Thirteen fellows from seven different countries are participating in the training; seven women and six men. This is the first time that there have been higher numbers of women than men in the six-month training programme. The fellows come from Kyrgyzstan (2) and Mongolia (3) in Central Asia, and from Ethiopia (2), Ghana (1), Malawi (2), Namibia (1) and Uganda (2) in Sub-Saharan Africa. This year's programme is coming to its end and the fellows are busy working on their individual research projects under the guidance of their supervisor(s). There are more than 20 supervisors attached to the research projects this year from several institutions, including the Agricultural University of Iceland, Soil Conservation Service of Iceland, University of Iceland, University of Reykjavik, Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources, Environment Agency of Iceland, and the Icelandic Meteorological Institute.

This year five international guest lecturers taught at UNU-LRT. In early June, Dr Jeffrey Herrick, a renowned soil scientist with the United States Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Research Service (Jornada Research Unit) in New Mexico, gave lectures and hands-on training to the fellows on mobile apps that help define land potential. In his teaching, he focused on the Global Land-Potential Knowledge System (LandPKS) which has been designed to integrate local knowledge and global databases to support land management decisions. In the second week of June, two specialists from UNU-EHS (Institute for Environment and Human Security), Dr Julia Kloos and Dr Zita Sebesvari gave lectures on ecosystems and disaster risk reduction. Dr Kloos and Dr Sebesvari, who both work for the Environmental Vulnerability and Ecosystem Services (EVES) Section at UNU-EHS which focuses on research addressing vulnerability and resilience of social-ecological systems, emphasized the link between social and ecological systems and how disaster risks can be reduced by sustainable management, conservation and ecosystem restoration. In the last week of June, Dr Sabine Tischew, a professor in the Department of Agriculture, Ecotopology and Landscape Development at Anhalt University of Applied Sciences in Germany, met the fellows and gave a lecture on restoration of large-scale mining sites, which is an increasing challenge in many of the fellows' countries. The meeting gave the fellows a good opportunity to discuss the task and challenges for restoration ecologists working in mined sites with an experienced professional. Lastly, Ms Susan Muska, an American documentary film maker and a speech coach, returned this year to the UNU-LRT programme and trained the fellows in presentations and presenting skills, with emphasis on how to organize and deliver an effective presentation.



## UNU Rector visits Iceland

In early July, Dr David Malone, rector of the United Nations University and the Vice-rector Mr Max Bond, visited the four UNU programmes based in Iceland. UNU-LRT welcomed them in Gunnarsholt, the headquarters of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI), where the UNU-LRT fellows were staying at the time. Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, UNU-LRT Programme Director, introduced the programme and its mission and future goals. Three UNU-LRT fellows, from Ethiopia, Ghana and Kyrgyzstan, shared experiences from their work at home and told how they anticipate the training at UNU-LRT would benefit them and their institutions when back home. Furthermore, the UNU rectors were introduced to the activities and work of the implementing partners of UNU-LRT in Iceland, i.e. the Agricultural University of Iceland and the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland.

During the three-day visit, Rector Malone had several high-level meetings, including a meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson, and Iceland's president Mr Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, as well as former president Ms Vigdis Finnbogadottir.

Dr Malone joined the United Nations University in 2013. He is the sixth Rector of UNU and as such holds the rank of Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations.



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## UNU-LRT participates in a High-level Symposium in Ethiopia

The Programme Director of UNU-LRT, Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir, participated in the High-level Symposium on land degradation neutrality at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which was held in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia in July. The symposium was hosted by the Governments of Iceland and Namibia (on behalf of the Group of Friends on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought) in cooperation with the State of Qatar, United Nations University, the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), UNDP and Biovision.

At the symposium, the UNU-LRT Programme Director and Mr Mulugeta Sebhatleab, former UNU-LRT fellow and lecturer at Mekelle University in Ethiopia, gave talks and participated on an expert panel at the Symposium. Dr Aegisdottir focused on the importance of capacity building and leadership training in ecological restoration and sustainable land management in order to achieve a land degradation neutral world. Mr Sebhatleab talked about land restoration challenges and opportunities in Ethiopia and stressed the importance of farmers' participation (both women and men) in land restoration activities. Moreover, he emphasised the importance of training opportunities for gaining experiences and sharing ideas.

According to a press release after the Conference, the Conference resulted in a ground-breaking agreement to provide a foundation for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's)

that will be adopted by world leaders in the UN's General Assembly this September.



### UNU-LRT Workshop in Uganda

On 30 June, UNU-LRT hosted a two-day workshop in Kampala for the former Ugandan UNU-LRT fellows, facilitated by Dr Jon Geir Petursson, a member of the UNU-LRT Studies Committee and Director General at the Department of Land and Natural Heritage at the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources in Iceland. The workshop objective was to explore how Ugandan partners could see UNU-LRT expand its activities within Uganda in coming years. The workshop was organised in collaboration with the two cooperating partners of UNU-LRT in Uganda, the Makerere University, which hosted the workshop, and the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA), which serves as the contact agent for local governments at the District level, as they are the actual beneficiaries/recipients of the collaboration with UNU-LRT.

There was a general consensus at the workshop that the recruitment of fellows from both Makerere University and the District's Local Governments has been effective and that the training has proven to be very useful for the fellows when returning back to their work. The training of Ugandan fellows at UNU-LRT from the beginning in 2007 has already generated a group of former fellows in Uganda at strategic positions, both in academia as well as out in the rural Districts where sustainable land management and restoration measures are a big part of the district officers' work. The UNU-LRT Team would like to extend its thanks to Dr Jon Geir Petursson and the two cooperating partners in Uganda, NEMA and Makerere University, for their collaboration on this task, as well as the former fellows that attended and contributed to the outcome of the workshop.



### New partner country: Lesotho

In May, the UNU-LRT Director went on a fact-finding mission in Lesotho, in Southern Africa. The mission was a response to a collaboration interest of the government of Lesotho on combating land degradation and restoring degraded land. During the mission, the UNU-LRT Director was introduced to land degradation challenges and restoration work in Lesotho, as well as learning about the activities of the Ministry of Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security. Specialists from the two ministries were interviewed as potential candidates for training at UNU-LRT. The mission was successful and UNU-LRT looks forward to a fruitful collaboration.

Photo: Meeting at the Ministry of Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation in Lesotho: Honourable Minister Mr Kabelo Mafura, Principal Secretary Ms Doreen Chaoana and UNU-LRT Director Dr Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir.

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### UNU-LRT Friendship Forest

In August the UNU-LRT fellows planted the first trees in a prospective UNU-LRT Friendship Forest, close to SCSi headquarters in South Iceland. Future UNU-LRT fellows will continue the tradition to plant trees in the area each year, and will have the opportunity to enjoy the trees as they grow. The fellows planted rowan trees (*Sorbus aucuparia*), a native species that grows in the birch woodlands and forests in Iceland.

At the tree-planting event the Chair of the UNU-LRT Board and the Director of SCSi, Mr Sveinn Runolfsson, addressed the fellows and informed them about the history of the site chosen for the UNU-LRT Friendship Forest. The area was covered by sand and without vegetation about four decades ago, but was reclaimed successfully pursuant to the National Endowment Gift in 1974. The National Endowment Gift was based on a resolution by the Icelandic Parliament regarding land reclamation and land conservation commemorating 1100 years of settlement in Iceland. This resolution was passed unanimously by the Parliament at a celebratory session of the Parliament in the summer of 1974. The site chosen for the UNU-LRT Friendship forest is thus very appropriate and demonstrates what is possible when determination and joint efforts are the driving force for changes.





**UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY LAND RESTORATION TRAINING PROGRAMME**

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