

CONCEPT NOTE

Nature-Based Solutions

United Nations University Land Restoration Training Programme

1. TITLE

Capacity building partnership in the field of land restoration and sustainable land management for the mitigation and adaptation of climate change – focus on developing countries

2. PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

2.1 Context and rationale

Land degradation is a global challenge that has a high impact on the environment, the climate and on human societies. It threatens human welfare and survival globally, but the effects are particularly acute in less developed countries of the world where resources to deal with these challenges are limited. The main concern of the United Nations University Land Restoration Training Programme (UNU-LRT) is land degradation, soil erosion and unsustainable land use. Efforts to combat these challenges are often hampered by lack of knowledge and capacity in the affected areas. The programme cooperates with local institutes in developing countries to break down these barriers to effectively manage natural resources, emphasising women's empowerment in all steps of that advancement.

By building up capacities in the field of land restoration and sustainable land management, UNU-LRT concurrently addresses climate change (both mitigation and adaptation), gender equality and human welfare (food security, poverty reduction).

UNU-LRT contributes to resolving urgent global challenges through generation and sharing of knowledge and through capacity building in developing countries. The programme strongly relates to UNCCD and other international conventions that deal with environmental preservation and the alleviation of poverty, as well as UNFCCC and CBD. Furthermore, the programme contributes directly to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular 1, 2, 4, 5, 12, 13, 15 and 17.

2.2 Target beneficiaries

The mission of UNU-LRT is to train specialists from developing countries to combat land degradation and restore degraded land, and to assist strengthening institutional capacity and gender equality in the field of land restoration and sustainable land management. UNU-LRT works with individuals and partner institutions in Africa and Central Asia that have been identified as playing a significant role in land restoration and sustainable land management in their respective countries. These include universities, research- and implementation institutions, environmental agencies, local governments, ministries and NGOs.

2.3 Proposed programme approach/methodology

The Programme proposes a partnership approach in nature-based solutions, especially in building capacities in developing countries in the field of land restoration and sustainable land management, with a special focus on climate change mitigation and adaptation. It is vital to build partnerships and scale up capacity building in nature-based solutions in order to address climate change and reach the SDGs.

UNU-LRT has 12 years of experience in building capacities of specialists coming from developing countries and has an excellent reputation of being a highly successful programme – as reported by external reviews.

The core activity of UNU-LRT is a six-month training programme, held annually in Iceland. Another important component of the work is organizing and running short courses in partner countries.

Six-month training programme

UNU-LRT offers annually an intensive six-month postgraduate training course on ecological restoration and sustainable management of ecosystems, custom built for professionals in partner countries faced with severe land degradation. The training provides participants with knowledge and skills needed to contribute to the activities within their own organizations and act as change agents back home. Candidates must hold a university degree and have at least one year of experience working in the field of specialisation that they will pursue during the programme.

The first three months of the six-month training is dedicated to lectures, practical training, field visits, exercises and group work where the focus is on active participation of each fellow. The topics covered include drivers of degradation, basic soil and erosion processes, interaction of climate change and land degradation, gender issues, restoration of ecological functions, land management planning, and communication and conflict management.

In the remaining three months of the training, the focus is on individual research work which is tailored to the academic and practical background and needs of the fellows, their home country and their institutions.

Courses in partner countries

UNU-LRT develops and delivers short courses in partner countries. These courses are designed and run in cooperation between specialists from UNU-LRT and the partner institutions, often engaging the expertise of former UNU-LRT fellows. To date, courses have been held in Uganda and Mongolia. The theme of the courses depends on the needs of the partners, but they have included the interaction of sustainable land management and climate change, as well as issues on how to communicate knowledge for sustainable rangeland management under climate change.

Other activities

UNU-LRT contributes to the development of educational materials, such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and encourages the building of bridges between disciplines like business education and environmental sciences.

2.4 Gender, equity, and sustainability

Gender, equity and sustainability are at the heart of UNU-LRT, as can be seen the core values of UNU-LRT:

- *Sustainability*: today's problems have to be addressed in a way that fulfils the needs of present generations without compromising the needs of future generations. UNU-LRT applies principles of sustainability to all aspects of its educational and research activities.
- *Cooperation*: UNU-LRT works on strengthening the cooperation between individuals and partner institutions that play a key role in land restoration and sustainable land management in developing countries.
- *Gender equality*: UNU-LRT promotes gender equality in the field of land restoration and sustainable land management through gender-sensitive capacity building. This is done by integrating gender equality perspectives into the programme organization and training activities, as well as inviting equal numbers of men and women into the training each year.

2.5 Prospective partner's contribution and comparative advantage

Being based in Iceland, and building on the knowledge and experience that Iceland has gained with its massive land degradation challenges and now over a 100 years of land restoration activities gives a great comparative advantage. Iceland's nationally concerted efforts in restoring degraded ecosystems is one of the longest standing in the world and the numerous success stories about stabilising decertified land, serve as examples to demonstrate how current international objectives can also be achieved. UNU-LRT is implemented jointly by the Agricultural University of Iceland and the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland, and builds on the knowledge and expertise of different partners by liaising with a wide range of Icelandic institutions, as well as international institutions and organizations. UNU-LRT is funded by the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs as a part of the government's development cooperation efforts.

3. EXPECTED RESULTS

By building capacities of people who are in a key position to make real changes on the ground is vital to be successful in managing land in a sustainable way, preventing land degradation and restoring already degraded ecosystems, all important component in SDG 15. Achieving SDG 15 will help to mitigate climate change (Goal #13), maintain biodiversity (Goal #14), alleviate poverty (Goal # 1), increase food security and end hunger (Goal #2) and foster economic

prosperity (Goal #8), as well as increasing the resilience of ecosystems and societies to future challenges.

Thus it is vital that substantial and focused effort is put into achieving Goal #15. For that, we need strong partnerships in capacity building in nature-based solutions.