



**UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY**

GEOTHERMAL TRAINING PROGRAMME
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THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY NETWORK AND THE CO-OPERATION WITH ICELAND

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1. INTRODUCTION

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Alumni of the UNU Geothermal Training Programme,
Dear Colleagues,

It is a pleasure and privilege to represent our rector, Prof. Konrad Osterwalder, Under Secretary General of the United Nations, in this solemn ceremony commemorating the 30th anniversary of what could be called the “most sustainable programme of UNU”: the Iceland-based and Iceland-supported Geothermal Training Programme. Let me convey his congratulations and the profound appreciation of the support of Iceland and the work implemented by the programme. Given that UNU was founded in 1973 and became operational in 1975 it is not an exaggeration to claim, that what we denominate as UNU-GTP is the oldest ongoing programme and an excellent example of cooperation and networking with dedicated member states.

UNU-GTP is not only the subject of our common pride. It is, while legally not part of UNU, still piece and parcel of a community of Research and Training Centres and Programmes (RTC/Ps) dedicated to do research and human capacity building to address present and future problems faced by the UN, its member states and people. Indeed Dr. Ingvar B. Fridleifsson, my colleague and friend, is the longest serving director who has worked together with all the Rectors of UNU. You may say that he is the living institutional memory of the UNU Council and the Conference of the Directors.

UNU is a brainchild of the former Secretary General of UN U Thant, who felt the need of a think tank, a university within the UN System, autonomous and enjoying the academic freedom and yet embedded in the UN System to facilitate the participation of the academic and professional communities, universities, academia and individual scientists from all over the world to help solving the urgent problems of UN.

You can conclude from the facts that the UNU was conceived in a period which is popularly referred to as ‘the cold war’ and the Geothermal Training Programme was launched soon afterwards, that both Secretary General U Thant and that the Icelandic government, the UNU Rector and the National Energy Authority of Iceland were all visionaries, well ahead of their time. The real challenge, to conceive innovative solutions which may mature to be implemented, came for UNU first after the collapse of the bipolarity in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, those of us in the audience whose lifespan covers the last forty years certainly recall that irrespective of the first ‘oil shock’ after the Yom Kippur war in 1973 when the world faced a severe energy crisis, no one spoke about climate change or alternative energy sources. The far-sightedness and readiness of Iceland to share its expertise in geothermal energy prospecting,

exploration and management since 1978 is the reason why we can now claim several hundred well-educated experts in this field worldwide. Geothermal energy, where technically feasible, is certainly an important alternative source to fossil fuels. It is the undisputed achievement of UNU-GTP that we can claim today that we are ready for the challenge.

The excellent work of the UNU Fisheries Training Programme (UNU-FTP) since its establishment in 1998, and the first steps of the Land Restoration Programmes which started six months specialized training courses in Iceland on an experimental basis in 2008, further demonstrate the dedication with which the Government in Iceland and the scientific community in Iceland is strengthening the collaboration with the UNU in the transfer of advanced technology to the developing countries.

By knowing that Dr. Fridleifsson will present a review of the thirty years of UNU-GTP I would rather concentrate on introducing to you the UNU, its goals, organisation and its new strategic objectives formulated to serve the world even better. You will recognize that in the light of these strategies the recurring, formatted degree programme of the UNU-GTP was again much ahead of its time.

Every long journey starts with one little step, with one thought. And it was UN Secretary General U Thant who first thought of a United Nations university, a university “truly international in character and devoted to the Charter’s objectives of peace and progress“, in 1969. Since then this idea has become a reality and the UNU has come a long way. It has grown into an international community of students, researchers, scholars and experts from various backgrounds. This scientific community serves as a think tank for the UN system. It forms a bridge between the UN and the academic world, and between developed and developing countries.

UNU’s journey began over thirty years ago and it is its aspiration to keep on moving - to keep on moving with the times and furthermore, to even get ahead of its time to fulfil its task of insuring human survival and to improve living conditions for all mankind for generations to come.

2. UNU’S TASKS AND GOALS

2.1 Knowledge generation and knowledge transfer

First and foremost, the UNU aims at its goal by conducting intensive research into the current pressing global problems of mankind’s survival and development. Sustainability, human security, climate change, energy security and their interactions stand in its focus.

The UNU has devoted its self to generate knowledge on these issues to get a true insight into the structure and nature of the world’s most urgent problems. By getting to the bottom of these problems and by understanding them in their complexity, UNU is convinced to find answers and ways to help solving the problems. With this, it is always kept in mind that the true aim of research and education is not just to generate knowledge, but to share, to transfer and above all, to put it into action, to make changes for the better. In other words, the UNU acts on the maxim that knowledge is the most valuable resource when working towards peace and sustainable development and it is most probably the only resource that grows by sharing it.

The UNU’s primary goal is to provide applicable information, in a fast and convenient form, to those in need for it. By transforming knowledge into policy-relevant prescriptions, analyses, models and scenarios, the UNU is able to provide advice to its Member State’s policy and decision makers and hence puts research and generated knowledge into action.

2.2 Capacity development

Another UNU objective is to contribute to capacity development. It works on strengthening individual and institutional capacities, particularly in developing countries. One of its tasks is to prevent intellectual isolation of ambitious students in developing countries which might result in an outflow of intellectual-scientific potential which would further worsen their chances of development. Therefore, UNU helps institutions in developing countries towards self-reliant development and enables scholars and scientists to take part in UNU research activities. For example, it gives scholars from developing countries the opportunity to receive postgraduate training at UNU institutions under the condition that they have to return to their home institution after the training has been completed.

To further expand capacities, the UNU concentrates on increasing human resources, training the trainers, improving institutional capacities, supporting the growth of academic communities in developing countries and generating new technologies and methods to promote research, training and learning.

Especially in the past decade, new IT technologies have opened up extremely valuable possibilities to enhance capacity development. Online learning has been implemented as an effective and comparatively inexpensive tool through which quality educational programmes can be made available to a large number of participants.

A very effective way and essential measure to develop capacities is through establishing and maintaining a wide range of relationships, in other words: networking which will be addressed again at a later point.

2.3 Financing

In this sense, maintaining good public relations is also essential to the United Nations University when it comes to insuring its own future and funding base. Its activities depend on voluntary financial contributions from governments, agencies, international organizations, foundations and private companies as it does not obtain any funds from the regular UN budget.

3. THE UNU SYSTEM

The UNU system can be described as a decentralized, global and interdisciplinary network. At its centre are over a dozen UNU Research and Training Centres/Programmes (RTC/Ps) (Figure 1). These programmes all scrutinize major processes that are profoundly changing our world, with a particular emphasis on the concerns of developing countries.

The UNU Centre, i.e. its headquarters, is located in Tokyo, Japan and to put U Thant's vision of a truly international university into practice, so far 14 UNU RTC/Ps are located in all continents.

3.1 The UNU Network

Since the beginning of UNU, the concept of networking has been an integral part of the organisation. The 14 RTC/Ps do not only collaborate with each other, they also work within a broader network of UNU Associated Institutions. Currently there are 21 institutions of academic excellence that have been designated by the University Council to supplement the work of UNU.

Furthermore, the UNU maintains cooperation with other UN system organizations through its liaison office in New York (UNU-ONY) and its liaison office at UNESCO in Paris which present UNU's research results and make them available to the UN Secretariat and UN Permanent Delegations, as well as NGOs, academics and civil society.

The UNU Hexagon

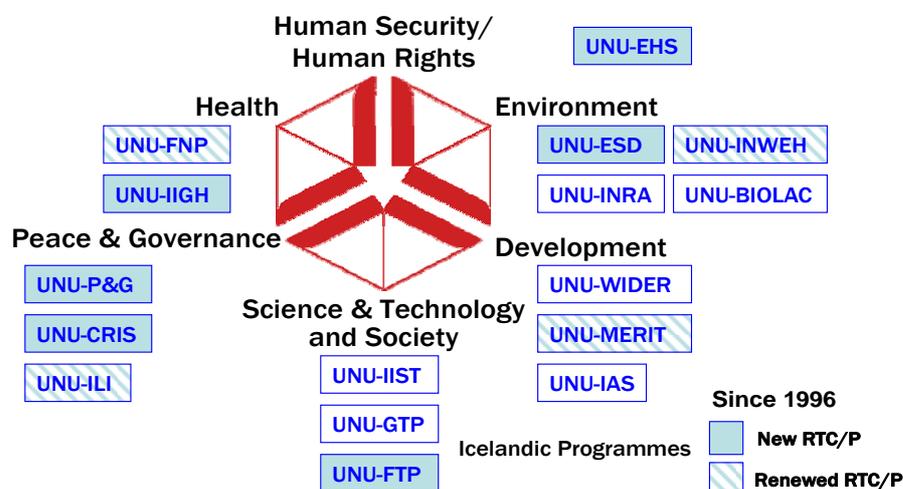


FIGURE 1: The UNU Hexagon listing current UNU training programmes

Overall, UNU is in contact with hundreds of cooperating institutions and individual scholars and researchers worldwide. This is why the United Nations University network is often and rightly so referred to as a “network of networks”. Besides, the UNU plays a major part in co-ordinating and expanding the international network of scientific institutions that provide informational and educational material on a wide range of subjects.

In principal, networking has become a lot easier during the last decades due to both the disappearance of rigid political/military blocks and the development of information and communication technologies. Nonetheless, it has become a new intellectual challenge to exploit the potential of these new technologies.

4. NEW STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

UNU is heading to become a true postgraduate university. Graduate programmes at MSc and PhD level will soon become additional proofs of our dedication to instil the thoughts of sustainable, human centred, policy-relevant, interdisciplinary science into the minds of the most brilliant researchers worldwide.

The ‘twinning programme’ is conceived to rectify the biased distribution of UNU RTC/Ps on the globe (Figure 2). Institutes, based almost exclusively in donor countries are encouraged to open their second, third or ultimately even their fourth campuses in emerging and developing countries.

Alumni, like the several hundred recipients of UNU-GTP diplomas are among our most cherished assets to help make these strategies become realities.

