

# GRÓ·GEST 2024

## YEAR IN REVIEW



GRÓ·GEST  
Gender Equality Studies & Training Programme

  
UNIVERSITY  
OF ICELAND

GEST Cohort of 2024 in South Iceland May 2024

The staff of GRÓ GEST, the Gender Equality Studies and Training programme at the University of Iceland, sends their best holiday greetings to the programme's alumni, partners, and collaborators. We wish you joy, peace, and good health for this festive season.

The GRÓ GEST programme and its staff extend heartfelt gratitude to all our fellows, instructors, collaborators, and colleagues for their invaluable contributions over the past year. As 2024 draws to a close, our thoughts turn to our alumni affected by ongoing conflicts worldwide, unable to celebrate the holidays in peace. We hold hope that the new year will bring more peaceful time, and we remain inspired by the unwavering commitment of our alumni and collaborators to advancing gender equality and social justice. With wishes for a Happy New Year!

# The 2024 GRÓ GEST Programme

The GEST team welcomed the 2024 cohort of fellows in early January. It was the 16th GEST cohort, consisting of 23 gender equality professionals, 14 women, 8 men, and one other from 14 countries in Africa, Asia and West Balkans, including Rwanda, Madagascar, and Liberia for the first time.

After attending a few days of orientation and acclimatising, the fellows started the 20-week intense programme engaging in a comprehensive curriculum covering gender equality issues such as climate change, gender-based violence, and migration, building the capacity to address these challenges through research and practical projects. The programme is not only about lectures and classes, though. It is our hope that all our fellows go back home with good memories about the island in the north, its nature, the people living there and the other fellows that went on that five month journey at GEST.



*Visit to Althingi (Icelandic Parliament)*



*By Geysir in Haukadalur*



*Visiting Bjarkarhlíð*



*At Bessastadir, with president Guðni Th. Jóhannesson and first lady Eliza Reid*



*The GEST Cohort of 2024 with Dr. Joni Seager*



*GEST 2024 fellows' annual field visit to the South East of Iceland*

## South-East Iceland Field Trip

The 2024 GEST cohort travelled around the south of Iceland in mid-May, celebrating the fellows' completion of all written assignments, and to learn about the impact of climate change in Iceland.

The trip began with an early departure from the University of Iceland. Highlights included visits to Hvolsvöllur, Seljalandsfoss, Gljúfrabúi, Skógarfoss for a picnic lunch, Reynisfjara beach, and the Vatnajökull National Park visitor centre. The day ended with dinner at Freysnes and a visit to a local sheep shed during lambing season.

On day two, the group hiked the Svínafellsjökull glacier moraines, visited Skaftafell Visitor Centre, hiked to Svartifoss, and took a boat ride at Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon. After dinner at Hótel Smyrlabjörg, they traveled to Höfn for the night.

Day three was relaxed, with activities in Höfn, including exploring town, museums, and Vestrahorn.



*By Gljúfrabúi*



*Visit at Skaftárstofa by Kirkjubæjarklaustur*

# Graduation 2024

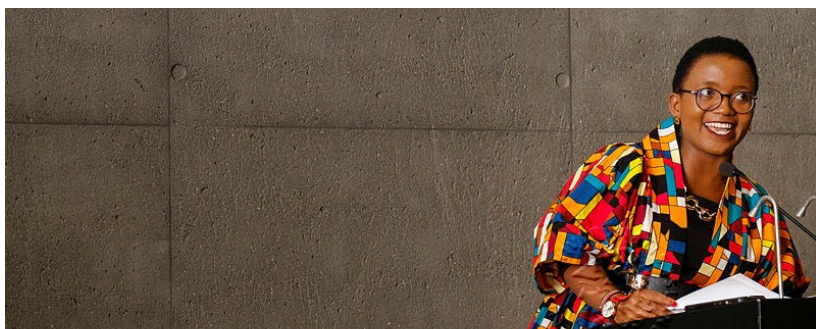
GRÓ GEST's graduation ceremony took place on 24 May. The 16th GEST cohort consisted of young gender equality experts from 14 countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Pakistan, Palestine, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Uganda, and for the first time Rwanda, Madagascar, and Liberia. The cohort included gender equality practitioners from a diverse backgrounds within government, activism, media, art, academia and more. With this year's cohort, the total number of GEST alumni has reached 241.

The ceremony was attended by GEST fellows, supervisors, staff, and distinguished guests including the Rector of the University of Iceland, and Martin Eyjólfsson, Permanent Secretary of State of Iceland.



From left: GEST fellow Ramatu Issah , Giti Chandra, GEST Research Specialist, GEST fellow Mihitha Basnayake and Thomas Brorsen Smidt, GEST Academic Coordinator.

The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Award was presented for outstanding final assignments in two categories: applied projects and research. **Mihitha Basnayake's *Towards Zero Period Poverty*** received the award in the applied projects category. This initiative aims to create a low-cost, biodegradable sanitary napkin production facility in Sri Lanka, promoting menstrual health and sustainability. In the research category, **Ramatu Issah's *Intersecting Forces: Religion, Culture, and Gender Dynamics in Child Marriage*** was recognized for its in-depth analysis of cultural and religious factors affecting child marriage in Ghana, offering practical recommendations.



Elizabeth Achola Mang'eni GEST fellow delivered the fellows' address



GEST 2024 fellows at graduation Photo by: Kristinn Ingvarsson, photographer, University of Iceland

The fellows' address was delivered by **Elizabeth Achola Mang'eni** from Kenya, in which she recounted some of the many joys and challenges of participating in the GEST programme. She also emphasized the symbiosis of the social and communal experience that is the GEST programme, and how it influences fellows' long-term ability to affect change. She said:

*"As we recall the friendships we have forged, the networks created, the mentors who guided us in our research and projects, and the countless lovely memories we shared, let us remember that these experiences have contributed to our growth as students and individuals one step closer, ready and equipped to contribute to making the world a better place for all."*

# GRÓ GEST Final Seminar

The **GRÓ GEST fellows** showcased their final assignments at the final seminar in May.

Addressing topics like sexual and reproductive health, gender equality in agriculture, and storytelling for social change.

This event marked a key milestone in their academic journey, with final assignments falling into two categories: project proposals, offering practical solutions to gender equality challenges in their home countries, and research contributions, blending academic rigor with insights of practical value to address local and global gender justice issues.

Through transformative learning experiences, strategic partnerships, and impactful initiatives, GRÓ GEST has empowered individuals to drive meaningful change in their communities and beyond.

## Final Seminar

Presentations of final assignments by GRÓ GEST fellows 2024

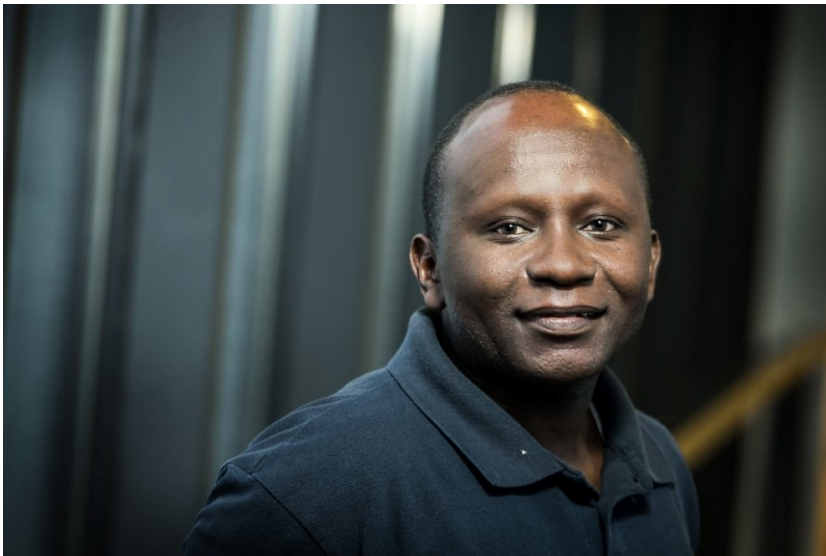
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GRÓ • GEST



## March 8 Fund Recipient



The **March 8 Fund 2024** project grant was awarded to **Peter Katuramu**, a GRÓ GEST 2018 alumnus, for his project “Making Every Voice of Women and Girls with Disabilities Heard in Sexual Reproductive Health Services.” Implemented in Wakiso District, **Uganda**, the six-month initiative empowers 50 women and girls with disabilities and 50 stakeholders, including healthcare providers and local leaders, to promote inclusive access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. Key activities include training sessions, advocacy workshops, and establishing a safe, accessible space at a local hospital.

The project is a collaborative effort between Uganda Disabled Women’s Association (UDWA) and the Wakiso District Department of Community Based Services, and builds upon UDWA’s ongoing work in disability rights and SRH, leveraging their experience to create a sustainable impact in the community.

Peter Katuramu’s leadership and commitment to gender and disability inclusion exemplify the transformative potential of GRÓ GEST alumni. His project reflects the March 8 Fund’s mission to empower marginalized communities and champion gender equality globally.

# Short Courses in Partner Countries

GRÓ GEST proudly contributed to the successful launch of the **Men Engage Africa Training Institute (MATI) 2024**.

This initiative is aimed at advancing gender equality in Africa through innovative leadership development. It was a collaboration between MenEngage Africa Alliance, Sonke Gender Justice, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and GRÓ GEST.

This year's MATI, which was supported by GRÓ GEST's expertise in curriculum design and capacity-building, involved 23 young gender equality professionals and involved both an online and onsite training component. The online component ran throughout the month of July, and this was followed by a five day long in-person short course in Nairobi, Kenya.

The online component utilised GRÓ GEST's MOOCs on masculinities and conflict, which provided a critical resource for fostering the next generation of gender equality leaders. GRÓ GEST continues to play a pivotal role in empowering professionals to address global gender challenges, demonstrating its commitment to advancing equality through international partnerships and transformative education.



In July and August, GRÓ GEST with Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources - LUANAR - held two five-day training courses on **Gender and Climate Change** in Malawi, promoting gender-responsive climate action and building sustainable plans for climate adaptation.

The courses were held in **Mzimba** in July and in **Chikwawa** in August for a total of 63 participants, including district stakeholders and civil society representatives, who developed actionable plans for sustainable climate adaptation and mitigation. This initiative built on previous GRÓ GEST trainings and emphasized integrating gender perspectives into climate policies to address local challenges. Two former GRÓ GEST fellows are part of the team leading the implementation.

In collaboration with **Pangea Educational Development**, the GRÓ GEST programme delivered a 10-month hybrid teacher training course on **Teaching Gender to Youth Training in Uganda in Collaboration with Pangea Educational Development** across six primary schools in Imvepi Refugee Settlement in Uganda, benefiting 85 teacher-participants.

The training, led by Pangea's Director of Programmes and GEST alumna from 2020, Brenda Apeta, and including Ibrahim Kadara'24 in the implementation team, focused on equipping teachers with new knowledge and tools to integrate gender-responsive strategies into their pedagogy.



## MOOC Launch Online Stream

In 2024, the GRÓ GEST Programme continued to make strides in its online education offerings, which continued to attract a broad and diverse audience from around the globe. A total of 3,182 learners enrolled in the courses, demonstrating the strong demand for accessible, high-quality learning opportunities on critical topics such as intersectionality, violence, development, and masculinity. The diversity of the participants was a notable highlight of the year, with women comprising the majority at 73.49%, while men made up 20.78% and individuals identifying outside of this binary accounted for 5.69%. This demographic distribution underscores the programme's ability to engage underrepresented groups and foster inclusive online learning environments. The courses also saw strong engagement with verified enrollments, a key measure of learner commitment. By the end of the year, 218 participants had chosen to pursue a verified certificate, demonstrating their dedication to deepening their knowledge and enhancing their qualifications. Among these, 123 learners successfully passed their courses, receiving a verified certificate from edX, reflecting the programme's effectiveness in delivering rigorous and impactful educational content.

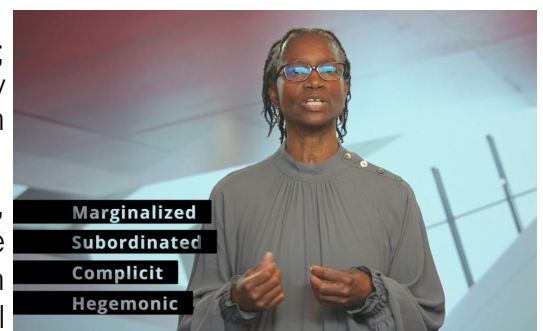


## New MOOC on the edX Platform

On 26 February 2024, GRÓ GEST launched its fourth massive open online course, this time on **Men, Boys and Masculinities**. Since 2019, GRÓ GEST has developed Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on the edX® platform. The goal of GRÓ GEST's Free Online Courses in International Gender Studies is to provide aspiring development workers, young gender equality professionals, and policymakers around the world with a knowledge base they can use to change the world for the better.

This fourth instalment in the GRÓ GEST series went off to a flying start; on its first day, 355 people from 82 different countries enrolled. By December 2024, the course has attracted over 1,100 participants from more than 120 countries.

Internationally renowned experts Prof. Jeff Hearn, Prof. Ann Phoenix, Prof. Kopano Ratele, and Prof. Tamara Shefer author and teach the course under the supervision of project manager Dr Thomas Brorsen Smidt, who oversees GRÓ GEST's online programme in International Gender Studies.





## Alumni Seminar in New Delhi 2024

In November, 17 alumni from India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal gathered for a networking event at the Icelandic Embassy in New Delhi, sharing their projects on gender equality and discussing the future of the South Asian alumni network. Presentations highlighted alumni projects on gender equality, including women's stories, menstrual health, media initiatives, and engaging men in gender-based violence prevention. The meeting reinforced GRÓ GEST's mission of fostering professional and social change through shared experiences and connections. Dr Irma Erlingsdóttir and Dr Giti Chandra chaired the meeting.

## GEST Network Expansion

Alumni initiatives like the *Worth Asking* podcast, and a Sri Lanka meet-up, showcased GRÓ GEST and its alumni's commitment to fostering a global gender justice network. Two GRÓ GEST alumni, Akhil Neelam and Aditi Rindani, launched the podcast *Worth Asking: Gender, Politics, and South Asia* to spotlight women leaders in South Asia's political sphere. Developed through the Centre for Gender and Politics, the podcast explores gender, leadership, and inclusion, inspired by their time in the GRÓ GEST programme. The first-ever GRÓ GEST alumni meet-up in Colombo, Sri Lanka, organized entirely by Sri Lankan alumni, brought together alumni from several cohorts to reconnect, share experiences, and explore future collaboration opportunities.



Dr Irma Erlingsdóttir, GRÓ GEST Director, and Dr Giti Chandra, Research Specialist, represented GEST at the **RINGS** (The International Research Association of Institutions of Advanced Gender Studies) conference held in New Delhi, India in October. The conference was on **Mapping Technologies, Making Worlds: Facing and Interfacing Challenges**, and Erlingsdóttir and Chandra both presented papers on gender and technology.

In September, GRÓ GEST director Dr Irma Erlingsdóttir participated in the **Nordic Meeting of National Commissions and Permanent Delegations for UNESCO** at Hótel Örk in Hveragerði, where she gave a presentation on the GEST programme.



# Erasmus+ Collaborations



GRÓ GEST took part in the *30 Years of European Collaboration Festival* on 8 May in Reykjavik. Since 2016, the programme has been actively involved in the Erasmus+ exchange scheme, hosting 48 fellows from 14 partner universities through Erasmus+ student exchange grants, as well as engaging in numerous staff exchanges with partner institutions.

Additionally, GEST spearheaded the production of two MOOCs, primarily funded by an Erasmus project grant, in collaboration with university partners both within and beyond Europe. At the festival, GRÓ GEST was honoured with an award certificate recognising its contribution as an Erasmus+ project of excellence.

GRÓ GEST Academic Programme Manager, Dr Thomas Brorsen Smidt, visited the **University of Pristina** in November to solidify the ongoing **ERASMUS+** funded collaboration with this key partner in Kosovo, a unique post-conflict society.

At the university's **Annual School of Comparative Gender and Sexuality Studies**, Dr Smidt was invited to present on the challenges of inclusion within queer communities, a topic highly relevant to Kosovo's efforts to build inclusive societies post-conflict. He also met with Kosovar GRÓ GEST alumni to discuss their impactful work and future plans, reaffirming GRÓ GEST's commitment to empowering young gender scholars to drive transformative change.



*Dr Thomas Brorsen Smidt, GRÓ GEST Academic Programme Manager, presenting at Annual School of Comparative Gender and Sexuality Studies*

# GRÓ GEST External Evaluation



*The GRÓ GEST Team, from left: Védís Sigrúnardóttir Ólafsdóttir, Guðrún Eysteinsdóttir, Irma Erlingsdóttir, Anna Guðrún Aradóttir, Giti Chandra and Thomas Brorsen Smidt.*

In 2024, **GRÓ GEST** was evaluated as part of the comprehensive external review of the GRÓ, conducted by **GOPA Consultants**. This evaluation covered the period from 2018 to 2023 and assessed the programme's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact in alignment with Icelandic international development cooperation policies and the **Sustainable Development Goals**.

The evaluation highlighted that GRÓ GEST's alignment with **Iceland's strategic goals**, combined with its focus on gender equality and the challenges of climate change, underscored its relevance and impact. A standout achievement was GRÓ GEST's suite of **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)**, which received recognition for their global reach, having engaged thousands of learners worldwide and significantly expanding the programme's capacity to disseminate knowledge on critical gender and development topics.

The evaluation also noted that GRÓ GEST effectively delivered intended results, with alumni actively applying their knowledge and contributing to transformative initiatives in their home countries. Feedback from **fellows** and **partner organizations** reflected a high degree of satisfaction with the programme's quality and its alignment with their needs.

Overall, the evaluation concluded that GRÓ GEST has been a **key player** in promoting sustainable development and fostering global partnerships, maintaining its reputation as a **flagship initiative of Icelandic development cooperation**. The findings affirmed the programme's success and provided valuable insights for its future direction.



The call for nominations for the GEST postgraduate diploma programme 2026 will open January 2025. The deadline for nominations through the open call is 8 March 2025. All nominations need to be submitted via the GRÓ GEST website.

## GRÓ GEST Welcomes the 2025 Cohort

After a lengthy selection process during March-July 2024, as the GEST selection panel reviewed nearly 200 nominations from almost 50 countries, 26 candidates from 16 countries have been *selected* to attend the 2025 GEST academic programme. The candidates were required to submit a comprehensive application, including a short proposal for a final assignment, and shortlisted candidates were also interviewed by members of the selection panel. All the selected candidates fulfilled GEST's prerequisites and requirements, and demonstrated a strong dedication to advancing gender equality in their home communities and/or their professional fields.

The selected group of candidates for the 2025 GEST programme represents local NGOs and CSOs, federal and local governments, universities, and research institutions. Furthermore, the cohort consists of individuals of different genders and abilities. The diverse group of fellows, from different countries, regions, and professions, enables transnational knowledge sharing and learning within the classroom.

Twenty one fellows will each receive a full GRÓ scholarship to attend the programme while five fellows, who are enrolled in post-graduate programmes at GEST's partner universities, will receive joint Erasmus+ and GRÓ scholarships.

