

Executive Summary

External Evaluation of GRÓ International Centre for Capacity Development, Sustainability and Societal Change, 2018-2023.

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Reykjavík, Iceland
September 2024



\ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Subject Description

The evaluation analyses the **GRÓ International Centre for Capacity Development, Sustainability and Societal Change**, and the four capacity development training programmes that operate under the GRÓ. These are the Fisheries Training Programme (GRÓ FTP), the Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme (GRÓ GEST), the Geothermal Training Programme (GRÓ GTP), and the Land Restoration Training Programme (GRÓ LRT). The evaluation covers the period from January 2018 to December 2023. The development objective of the GRÓ Centre and the four training programmes is to strengthen individual, organizational, and institutional capacities in low- and middle-income countries so that supported partners deliver development results in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Iceland is the primary source of funding for the programmes as part of its international development cooperation policy and efforts. In addition to the core funding of the MFA, the individual programmes obtain external funding through counterpart contributions.

Evaluation Objectives and Methodology

The overall objective is to provide an **independent evaluation of the performance of the GRÓ Centre and of each of the four GRÓ programmes**. The goal is to provide the MFA, GRÓ Board of Directors, GRÓ Director, and the GRÓ programmes with an objective assessment of each programmes' past successes in meeting their respective objectives, assessing their strengths and weaknesses, and identifying any areas where change or reinforcement may be beneficial. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the results of the GRÓ efforts, and the suitability of the organizational changes from 2020 when the training programmes moved from the United Nations University (UNU) to operating under the GRÓ Centre, functioning under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a Category 2 Centre (C2C). The core questions answered in this evaluation are: How has the GRÓ Centre and four GRÓ programmes performed, jointly and individually, with regards to their results criteria and what results can be attributed to the programmes? What lessons can be drawn from previous interventions by the GRÓ programmes, which can be used as a framework of reference in future endeavours? Have the institutional changes in 2020 and associated shift from the auspices of UNU to UNESCO been suitable and generated expected results? The intent of the evaluation is to offer evidence-based findings on how well the programmes achieved their stated objectives, to generate learning, to offer forward-looking perspectives for future GRÓ engagements, and their management, and to set forth applied recommendations based on the evidence and findings.

The overall framework for conducting the evaluation is the **six Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) criteria for evaluation**, as well as the cross-cutting policy priorities of Icelandic international development cooperation policy. The evaluation combines a desk review (remote research, analysis, and reporting, including data-collection via 'remote' means) and intensive field-mission visits to meet programme partners and stakeholders in Iceland, El Salvador, Jamaica, and Uganda. The evaluation draws on a range of data sources and data collection methods, both quantitative and qualitative. Data sources include the MFA and GRÓ staff, programme and host institution representatives, GRÓ alumni and fellows, and GRÓ partner institutions worldwide. The main approaches utilized for data collection were documentation review and critical analysis, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), an online survey of GRÓ alumni, and in field observations. The evaluation utilized the following rating system to assess performance for the OECD-DAC criteria: (HS) Highly Satisfactory, (S) Satisfactory, (A) Adequate, (U) Unsatisfactory, and (HU) Highly Unsatisfactory (see rating system in Annex 2).

Major findings and conclusions

The evaluator judges that the overall performance of the GRÓ programmes is satisfactory (good). During 2018-2023, the GRÓ programmes have effectively delivered their intended capacity development

results, supporting young to mid-career professionals and partner organizations in 76 countries, capacitating them to promote local development outcomes pursuant to the SDGs. The direct results of the programmes establish a strong basis to promote behavioural change of the individuals trained and via them change at their home organizations to utilize and apply the new learning, skills, and tools obtained. This has resulted in a diverse range of initiatives by the alumni aimed at advancing local development change. Linked to the six OECD DAC criteria for evaluation, and the cross-cutting priorities of Icelandic policy, the evaluator judges the performance of the GRÓ programmes is satisfactory (good), as detailed below.

Relevance

The GRÓ programmes are **highly relevant to and fully aligned with Iceland's international development cooperation policies and strategic goals**, as well as fully aligned with Iceland's national development vision and strategies. The programmes provide capacity development training in fields of recognized Icelandic expertise, with a strong focus of programme support on lower- and middle-income countries. The principal region targeted by the programme support is Sub-Saharan Africa, a priority focus region for Icelandic policy. The GRÓ programmes are a flagship product of Icelandic international development cooperation support. In 2023, MFA's total contribution to the GRÓ Centre and programmes represented approximately 6.7% of Iceland's total international development cooperation budget. The programmes closely align with international development policy frameworks and strategies. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its associated SDGs are the key frame of reference for the programmes.

The **GRÓ programmes are closely aligned with partner countries', regions' and target groups' needs**. For each programme, the primary target group of beneficiaries is young to mid-career postgraduate professionals from partner institutions and organisations in low- and middle-income countries. The programmes interact with the target group via different interventions, such as the fellowship training in Iceland, scholarships for alumni for postgraduate study, short courses in partner countries, or online learning content. The programmes receive requests for support from different organizations, many of long-term partnership, across different regions and targeted countries. Each programme remains fully demand driven. Each programme has established partnerships with core organizations in key partner countries for the development and delivery of short courses in the countries and for other capacity building supports. The partner organizations co-fund the short courses, further ensuring they are relevant to local needs.

The evaluator recognizes the **significant progress achieved since 2022 in the development of a standard framework to define the collective GRÓ programme intervention theory of change (ToC)** including the definition of the intended results of the programmes (outputs, outcomes, and impact). The programmes offer a coherent mix of interventions, with good potential for realization of synergies across the different outputs. However, the GRÓ Results Framework is still a work in progress in terms of definition of baseline data, or targets for and the specific means to measure the GRÓ programme longer-term impact.

Coherence

The **GRÓ programmes complement the wider development efforts of Iceland undertaken at the international level and in partner countries**. In Iceland's partner countries for bilateral development cooperation support (Malawi, Sierra Leone, and Uganda), the work of the GRÓ programmes is strongly complementary to Iceland's other development efforts. The programmes also complement Iceland's effort at regional and country specific level in East and West Africa, and in the Latin America and Caribbean region. However, there is only partial direct evidence of coordination of effort or of synergy created between the different efforts supported by the MFA with those of the GRÓ programmes. Iceland's international development cooperation policy notes that the cumulative effect of the programmes is to be increased, and the effort better integrated into other fields of Icelandic development cooperation. The GRÓ programmes complement the wider development efforts of the programmes' key partner organizations in the partner countries. The majority of these are public sector

and public service oriented institutions that freely enter into their collaboration with the GRÓ programmes. The GRÓ programmes also complement the wider development efforts of other donors in partner countries to promote capacity building, skills development, and socio-economic development. There is no evidence of duplication or overlap of the GRÓ programmes with other development efforts.

Effectiveness

The GRÓ programmes have **effectively delivered the intended capacity development results**, supporting young to mid-career professionals and partner organizations in 76 countries. During 2018-2023, the programmes supported 534 individuals via in-depth training and research (fellowship and scholars), 1699 individuals via short training courses, and reached 39,161 learners via online learning content. The fellows and scholars produced 537 new knowledge (research) products. In the context of GRÓ programme efforts to empower the alumni via community building and networking actions, the programmes supported 239 GRÓ alumni to attend leading international conferences in their field of expertise. GRÓ alumni were also involved by the programmes in the organization of and/or engaged in the delivery of 35 of 48 (73%) of the short courses supported by the programmes during 2018-2023.

During 2018-2023, the **direct beneficiaries of the GRÓ programmes support predominantly originated from least developed countries (LDCs) or lower middle-income countries (LMICs)**. Other beneficiaries were from upper-middle income countries (UMICs) as classified on the OECD DAC list of ODA recipient countries. Of the 471 individuals enrolled on the fellowship programmes in Iceland, 37% were from LDCs, 46% from LMICs and 16% from UMICs. Of the 64 individuals supported on scholarships for masters or doctoral studies, 44% were from LDCs, 47% from LMICs, and 9% from UMICs. Via 48 short courses delivered in or for partner countries, the programmes trained 1699 individuals. Thirty-eight courses were in partner countries, six were online courses tailored to specific countries or regional audiences, and four were study visits for partner country experts to Iceland. Of the 38 courses delivered in the partner countries, 22 were in LDC partner countries (58%), and 14 were in LMICs (37%). Overall, the programmes exceeded GRÓ Centre's target that minimally 80% of the direct beneficiaries are from LDCs or LMICs. The gender distribution of the direct beneficiaries was 55% females on the fellowship programmes and 50% females on the postgraduate scholarship programmes. However, linked to the short courses in partner countries significant further effort is required across all programmes to promote the inclusion of female participants. During 2018-2023, only 36% of participants on short courses were female.

Feedback of the direct beneficiaries and core partner organizations **attests to the relevance and quality of the training provided**. Feedback from the fellows to the programmes on the training in Iceland indicates a high level of satisfaction with the relevance of the training and research opportunities offered, and the value and benefits of their new knowledge and understanding, and skills to their profession. Survey feedback from the beneficiaries of the short courses also indicates a high level of satisfaction with the courses and the relevance and usefulness of the training course to their job and/or profession.

Linked to the **GRÓ programme outcome indicators**, among the 2018-2023 GRÓ alumni cohort responding to the evaluator's online survey, **73% report that they have substantially or extremely advanced in their professional career** while 17% report moderate career advancements thanks to the programme participation. Alumni feedback indicates that **90% of the 2018-2023 fellows have used the training to advance their contribution in their field/area of work**, 79% have shared their knowledge with colleagues, supervisors, and other experts in their field, and that 83% think that their organizations' management assesses the training benefits to be valuable. Overall, the evaluation finds that the GRÓ programmes effectively delivered the intended results, contributing to the capacity of the alumni, trainees, and partner organizations to promote and implement changes needed to progress the SDGs.

While the programmes have effectively delivered the capacity development results, the extent of **outputs delivery achieved 2018-2023 is not yet in line with targets set as GRÓ's strategic priorities, 2022-2027**. The programmes will require additional financial resources if the targets are to be fulfilled, notably linked to the expansion of short courses in partner countries, and grants for scholarships.

Efficiency

The operational efficiency at the level of the GRÓ programmes is good. Delivery of the intended programme results, in terms of quantity and quality, is in a timely manner. The majority of the different programme intervention's function based on clearly defined processes and timelines. Programme monitoring, reporting, and steering mechanisms are generally good, although with room for improvement linked to collecting and reporting standard statistical data on beneficiaries' feedback on the training provided. Adoption of the GRÓ Results Framework significantly strengthens programme monitoring, oversight and steering systems, via its inclusion of common key performance indicators against which each programme should collect and report data. Linked to the institutional changes in 2020, with the formal operation of the GRÓ Centre as umbrella agency of the programmes, functioning under the auspices of UNESCO as a C2C, the evaluator judges that operational efficiency of the set-up is adequate. The GRÓ Centre lacks detailed internal rules of procedure as to how it works in partnership with the programmes and their host institutions. This is a significant constraint to promoting an efficient (and effective) operational partnership of the GRÓ Centre and the GRÓ programmes. Linked to GRÓ Centre's development of collaboration with UNESCO, GRÓ LRT has established an effective partnership with UNESCO headquarters and UNESCO's Man and Biosphere (MAB) programme. GRÓ Centre has also promoted effective collaboration working with UNESCO regional and country offices, and national commissions for UNESCO in partner countries, most notably with UNESCO partners in Africa. While still a work in progress, longer-term collaboration with UNESCO partners has potential to empower GRÓ alumni as local change agents.

The **GRÓ programme financial and human resources are efficiently deployed and cost effective in terms of the interventions and the results delivered**. The unit costs per intervention are plausible and commensurate with the respective outputs and outcomes and provide value for money. Linked to the fellowship programme in Iceland, the average cost per fellow across the four programmes has marginally fallen in real terms, post-inflation, compared to the average costs reported for the 2012-2016 period.

Sustainability

The prospects for sustainability of the GRÓ programme results and benefits are good. The direct beneficiaries of the training obtained the immediate benefits of the programmes via enhanced knowledge and skills, and exchanges on knowledge understanding in their field of expertise and professional work. The fellows and short course participants return to their home organization/institution prepared to share and apply their new knowledge and skills. The vast majority of GRÓ alumni have successfully utilized their new knowledge, understanding, and skills to advance their contribution in their technical field of work in their country. **Partner organizations for the GRÓ demonstrate a good level of ownership of the benefits they obtain from the partnership with the programmes**. The long-term partnership approach of the programmes, and the fact that the programmes are demand driven are key design factors that promote the prospects for sustainability of the benefits.

The **key factors hindering the sustainability** of the programme results relate to the challenges that the alumni report linked to directly utilizing and applying their knowledge, due to **insufficient resources or medium-term financial framework of their institution to promote significant reform initiatives**. The lack of a medium-term financial framework for GRÓ hinders the programmes' capacity to plan capacity development initiatives with core partner organizations over the time needed to build sustainability.

Impact

The prospects for longer-term development effects (impact) of the GRÓ programmes are good. The evidence strongly suggests that the GRÓ programmes, chiefly via the GRÓ alumni, but also in partnership with long-term institutions/organizations in the partner countries, have delivered concrete changes within the countries to achieve development change and real impact. Alumni respondents to the survey report many important micro-, meso-, and macro-level results they have contributed to post-fellowship,

with **73% of the 2018-2023 alumni reporting their contribution to advancing the SDGs** in terms of projects and initiatives. The percentage of alumni reporting contributing to advancing the SDGs is highest among those who live in African countries (83%). GRÓ alumni also hold high-level positions in their country, as well as senior roles in international or regional organizations, allowing them to make impactful contributions at that level. Almost half of the alumni respondents indicated that they offered advice at the level of local communities (48%) with 22% reporting contributions to changes at the regional or district level. Moreover, 31% reported contributing to changes in policies or processes at the national level, and 9% contributing to the development or the application of international policy frameworks. Most frequently, the alumni indicate their actions contributing to SDG 5 Gender Equality (42%), SDG 13 Climate Action (37%), SDG 2 Zero Hunger (30%), SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy (28%), SDG 4 Quality Education (24%), SDG 1 No Poverty (23%), SDG 14 Life below Water (20%), and SDG 15 Life on Land (17%).

Linked to the GRÓ programme performance indicators for impact, which are not yet clearly defined by the GRÓ, the evaluator judges that the highest level at which the programme impact can plausibly be measured is at the level of the SDGs, not the SDG targets or indicators. As outlined above, the achievements of the 2018-2023 cohort are impressive as to progress delivered in terms of project and initiatives linked to the SDGs.

Cross-cutting priorities of Icelandic international development cooperation policy

The **GRÓ programmes have positively contributed to advancing the cross-cutting priorities of Icelandic policy** (i.e. gender equality, human rights, and climate change and the environment). The contribution of the programmes is most strongly evident in regard to their consideration of issues, within their field of expertise, linked to promoting gender equality, and the challenges of climate change. Programmes addressed the issues within the design and implementation of their actions. Alumni have contributed, in advancing the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems and gender equality.

Lessons learned

The evaluation presents **10 key lessons learned** drawn from the evaluation findings.

1. The branding value of the GRÓ programmes rests on the Iceland name, and the high reputation built by the capacity development programmes in their areas of expertise over the long-term.
2. The high quality of the fellowship programme in Iceland is the foundation for the programme's success, but it is logically limited in terms of quantitative outputs deliverable in Iceland itself.
3. The careful targeting of the GRÓ programme support for short courses in specific countries or regions, delivered over several years, is a viable way to concentrate the focus of effort, and ensure that a critical mass of capacitated individuals is trained, as complement to the fellowship alumni.
4. GRÓ programme long-term partnerships with key partner organizations in focus countries has resulted in the development of local training offer (of short, medium, or longer-term duration), and of partners' organizational capacity to deliver training programmes. The medium-term goal is that the partner organizations take over the full operation and ultimately funding of courses.
5. The success of the programmes in building local partnerships for the development and delivery of short courses is replicable in other focus countries or regions, for which it is crucial that programmes identify reliable local partners and have a medium-term planning perspective.
6. As a flagship product of Icelandic international development cooperation support, the long-term funding commitment of the Government of Iceland, provided via the MFA, is fundamental to the continuation of the programmes and successful expansion of training offered in partner countries.
7. An evidence-base of success stories and longer-term contribution of the alumni is required to ensure that key stakeholders in Iceland (including the MFA) are aware of the programme successes, and that GRÓ Centre can better fulfil its basic advocacy role for the GRÓ programmes.
8. The adoption of the GRÓ Results Framework significantly strengthens programme monitoring via its inclusion of common indicators against which each programme should collect and report data.

9. GRÓ should collect data on impacts at the micro-, meso- and macro-level via systematic formal tracer surveys of GRÓ alumni over the medium- and the longer-term period of their career.
10. Good opportunities exist to establish formal GRÓ alumni country chapters in leading countries for the programmes and in the promotion of links between the alumni and development partners.

Recommendations

The evaluation presents **15 recommendations at GRÓ programme level**, summarized below. Two are addressed to the MFA as lead actor, ten to the GRÓ Centre as lead actor, and three to the programmes as lead actor. In addition, specific recommendations are presented, addressed to each GRÓ programme. These are based on the specific evaluation of each programme, but may have certain, wider applicability.

Recommendation 1: GRÓ Centre operational processes and rules for overall governance of GRÓ in cooperation with the GRÓ programmes and host institutions formalized via internal rules of procedure.

Principal actor(s): GRÓ Centre (lead actor), GRÓ programmes (direct partners)

Recommendation 2: The detailed job description of the GRÓ Centre Director General formally specified.

Principal actor(s): MFA (lead actor), GRÓ Centre, and GRÓ programmes (partners to support MFA)

Recommendation 3: Reflecting that the GRÓ programmes are capacity development and training programmes, delivered in the context of Icelandic international development cooperation, the appointment of the next Director General of the GRÓ Centre should be based on a clear definition of the post applied for, and should be an open advertisement rather than just from MFA staff. The Director General should have a solid understanding of how capacity development interventions function and contribute to results achievement, as well as a solid understanding of Icelandic and international development cooperation policy and contexts.

Principal actor(s): MFA (lead actor)

Recommendation 4: A framework for periodic structured dialogue between the GRÓ Centre and the MFA Directorate for International Development Cooperation, and the Directorate for International Affairs and Policy, established, aimed at identifying areas for closer coordination and integration of efforts.

Principal actor(s): GRÓ Centre (lead actor), MFA (direct partner)

Recommendation 5: A framework established for structured dialogue between the GRÓ Centre and the programmes and the Embassy of Iceland in partner countries for Iceland's bilateral cooperation support, aimed at identifying potential areas for collaboration or expansion of GRÓ programme efforts.

Principal actor(s): GRÓ Centre (lead actor), GRÓ programmes, MFA Embassies of Iceland (direct partners)

Recommendation 6: GRÓ Centre service agreements, for the period starting year 2026, to be negotiated and finalized within year 2025, for which a duration period of up to six-years should be considered (or as determined by the intended duration period for the renewal of GRÓ Centre as a C2C).

Principal actor(s): GRÓ Centre (lead actor), GRÓ programmes and host institutions (direct partners)

Recommendation 7: GRÓ programmes to prepare medium-term plans as to the extent of their anticipated delivery of programme outputs for the period up to 2030 (or as determined by the duration of the next service agreement). This should include annual minimum and maximum targets for delivery by the programmes of all key intervention outputs defined in the GRÓ programme Results Framework. There is a specific need to increase the collective delivery of the key interventions (such as short courses).

Principal actor(s): GRÓ programmes (lead actor), host institution (direct partner)

Recommendation 8: GRÓ Centre, in cooperation with GRÓ programmes, to provide the MFA with an outline of the broad financial perspective and framework required by GRÓ Centre and programmes to deliver the ambition of the Strategic Priorities up to 2030. MFA is encouraged to provide the GRÓ Centre with an indicative broad financial framework up to 2030 within which it can anticipate to operate.

Principal actor(s): GRÓ Centre (lead actor), GRÓ programmes (direct partners), MFA (decision-maker)

Recommendation 9: GRÓ programmes to ensure the collection and reporting of standard statistical data on the direct beneficiaries' feedback on the training provided (it is notably weaker for short courses).

Principal actor(s): GRÓ programmes (lead actor), short course training partner(s) (direct partner)

Recommendation 10: GRÓ Centre, in cooperation with GRÓ programmes, to introduce systematic formal tracer surveys of GRÓ alumni over the medium- and the longer-term period of their career (e.g. information on their position, publications, application of their skills via reforms or project initiatives, key achievements in delivering change). The survey three-years after graduation only captures outcome level results. Longer-term tracer surveys are required to capture long-term development effects and impact.

Principal actor(s): GRÓ Centre (lead actor), GRÓ programmes (direct partners)

Recommendation 11: In addition to formal tracer surveys of GRÓ alumni, GRÓ Centre and programmes should also work together to undertake specific impact assessments of the programmes in a sample of leading partner countries or regions for the GRÓ, such as Malawi, Uganda, Kenya, Mongolia, Tanzania, or LAC. These would be valuable case studies to capture longer-term development effects and impact.

Principal actor(s): GRÓ Centre (lead actor), GRÓ programmes (direct partners)

Recommendation 12: GRÓ Centre, in cooperation with GRÓ programmes, to prepare a formal GRÓ communication strategy for Development Education Awareness Raising efforts in Iceland.

Principal actor(s): GRÓ Centre (lead actor), GRÓ programmes (direct partners), Icelandic National Commission for UNESCO (partner)

Recommendation 13: GRÓ Centre to finalize the draft GRÓ alumni strategy, and identify key countries or regions in which to roll out effort supporting the formal establishment of local GRÓ alumni chapters over the medium-term. Beyond Uganda, where alumni are in process of formally establishing a country chapter, other countries for potential establishment of GRÓ chapters include Kenya, Malawi, or Ethiopia.

Principal actor(s): GRÓ Centre (lead actor), GRÓ programmes (direct partners)

Recommendation 14: GRÓ Centre to prepare a medium-term strategy and key priorities for the GRÓ Centre and GRÓ programmes linked to the development of GRÓ's partnership with UNESCO partners.

Principal actor(s): GRÓ Centre (lead actor), GRÓ programmes (direct partners), Icelandic National Commission for UNESCO, and UNESCO headquarter (partners)

Recommendation 15: GRÓ programmes should actively encourage partner organizations to nominate female candidates for all training activities. There is a notable under-representation on short courses.

Principal actor(s): GRÓ programmes (lead actor), GRÓ Centre (partner)

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING GRÓ FTP

1. FTP demonstrates relevance, coherence, and effectiveness in achieving its objectives. While the design of the programme is presented throughout the various webpages of FTP's website, it is recommended to prepare a design **document of the programme presenting the problem(s) it solves, the objectives it pursues, the mix of its interventions, the implementation strategy, and the monitoring and evaluation of results** in a single document. Additionally, **developing a ToC** would help in documenting the programme's impact pathway. This would allow for clarity to stakeholders and enhanced public acceptance of the programme.
2. Given the overarching goal of GRÓ and the cross-cutting areas of human rights, gender equality, and the environment approach of Iceland's International Development Cooperation, it is recommended to **explicitly mainstream the SDGs, in particular SDG 14**, as the programme's targeted sustainable goal as well as the cross-cutting areas in the research by fellows and scholars. This approach would improve the relevance and effectiveness of the programme.
3. Some qualifying fellows have received support for a graduate degree. Given the potential for far-reaching impact of these graduates in their home countries and institutions, it is recommended to **expand the scholarship programme at the Ph.D. level** to enhance FTP's effectiveness. Expanding

the number of scholars would also increase the prospects of long-term impacts and sustainability of the programme as scholars would most likely be employed by academic and research institutions whose mandate is the creation and dissemination of knowledge.

4. **In-country/regional short courses and workshops** have proven useful to address pressing issues in partner countries related to the fisheries sector. It is recommended to **replicate those courses at the country level**, according to needs, to continue enhancing local capacities at a decreasing cost, since those courses have already been prepared.
5. As research and knowledge creation is an important element of FTP, the dissemination of knowledge adds sustainability to the programme benefits. It is therefore recommended to **publish all research papers by fellows** and all theses by scholars on the website of FTP.
6. Given the potential the GEST Programme has to offer, it is suggested to **strengthen synergies with the GEST Programme**, as gender equality is an important issue in the fisheries sector, especially in partner countries where both programmes direct their efforts. There has been research done by four GEST fellows from Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Ghana on gender in fisheries that seems promising for the fisheries sectors in those countries. In that regard, the FTP and GEST Programmes could enhance their synergies by encouraging research on gender issues related to the fisheries sector where important gender gaps are observed in terms of women's participation.
7. It is recommended to set up a **communication strategy with Icelandic stakeholders** on the accomplishments of FTP, which would enhance public acceptance of the programme and reduce risks or threats to the existence of the programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING GRÓ GEST

1. Further effort is needed by the GEST programme in order for it to consistently **meet the GRÓ Centre target of 25 fellows annually enrolled on the programme** in Iceland. The demand for the fellowship programme is very strong, and the programme has the capacity to train minimally 25 per year. While recognizing that 25 fellows annually is considered an ideal number in terms of programme manageability, learning outcomes, and pastoral care, this is an indicative number. The evaluator assesses that the GEST programme has the capacity to train slightly more than 25 fellows annually.
2. GEST programme fellows have produced a sizeable body of diverse new knowledge products via their final assignment production of a research or project paper. The vast majority of these are available on the GEST programme website. They represent a valuable source for the purpose of knowledge sharing and learning. Currently these are accessible via the GEST programme website on the basis of the country of focus of the research or project paper. It is not possible to **search the collection of papers on the basis of their theme(s)**, which limits the potential for researchers to utilize the knowledge products for comparative research across a range of countries. It is recommended that GEST programme consider the introduction also of a thematic search function.
3. To date, the GEST programme has **not provided meaningful support to its alumni to attend international conferences**. This is primarily due to limited financing for such actions. In this, the GEST programme stands out in comparison to the other GRÓ programmes (237 of their alumni attended leading international conferences in their field during the period 2018-2023). The most significant international conference for the GEST programme is the annual meeting of global partners, including civil society, at the UN CSW. It is recommended that the GEST programme provide support to its alumni to attend the event. This would significantly complement the valuable support to alumni empowerment provided via the GEST Alumni Fund. As practical, a fixed number of alumni that are supported annually should be agreed with GRÓ Centre, rather than constantly fluctuating.
4. The GEST programme also has a significant under-representation compared to other programmes in terms of the number of grants for postgraduate scholarships. This is not due to a lack of demand, but the lack of available funding. Expanding the number of scholars should be a priority.

5. GEST programme systems for gathering feedback from the direct beneficiaries of the fellowship are commendably strong. The system for gathering **standard statistical data from direct beneficiaries** of short courses in partner countries is not yet as commendably strong. While the reports prepared linked to the delivery of the short courses provide feedback from the beneficiaries on the course, this is sometimes in narrative format as to lessons learned, rather than standard statistical data also.
6. The short courses delivered in partner countries have proven very successful. It is recommended that **GEST programme seek to scale-up its two core short courses in the key partner countries** for its short course offer, namely Malawi and Uganda. Both are partner countries for Icelandic bilateral development cooperation support. The country strategy papers of the MFA for both countries have medium-term indicative financial frameworks. Thereby, it may be possible to develop a medium-term plan for roll out of courses delivered across a different range of districts within the countries. The ultimate goal is for the partner organizations to take over full leadership for course delivery.
7. Beyond delivering short courses in Malawi and Uganda, it is recommended that the GEST programme **replicate the courses in other key focus partner countries**. This is dependent on the demand of partner organizations, and the development of a solid partnership for collaboration. The programme has started the process to identify potential partners, and is encouraged to continue.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING GRÓ GTP

1. The focus of the programme's activities and the distribution of fellows is on countries with significant geothermal development potential, rather than those with bilateral cooperation agreements with Iceland. As a result, the coherence of the GTP with other development efforts by Iceland in partner countries or regions is limited. In future initiatives, **GTP should establish synergies with other development interventions funded by the GOI** to enhance the coherence and impact of Iceland's development efforts. However, attention should be paid to avoid that offering geothermal training in countries that have no viable resources or plans to develop geothermal resources.
2. The GTP's offering for online training has been limited. This is a missed opportunity to expand the pool of experts in the geothermal field at a relatively low cost. **GTP should consider investing greater efforts to improve the online offer**. This additional activity would probably require additional financial resources.
3. The evaluative case study on the 5-month diploma in El Salvador has shown that this specific training **intervention is very cost-effective for enlarging the pool of geothermal experts** in the region. However, the recent graduation of El Salvador from LMIC to an UMIC poses a challenge for aligning future GRÓ-funded activities with the objective of focusing on LMICs. GTP and LaGeo should pay special attention to ensure that a larger portion of trainees are from LMICs. In addition, the general nature of the offered curriculum in the 5-month diploma limits specialisations needed for work in the geothermal sector. If offering many different specialisation fields (as done for the 6-month training in Iceland) is not an option due to costs and logistical considerations, a possible alternative for GTP and LaGeo could be to offer two broad specialisation areas: one for the earth sciences (including geothermal geology, geochemistry, and geophysics) and another for plant development and drilling.
4. The GTP has tracked part of the alumni in an informal way, but it has **not used a formal tracing method to keep track of the career advancement** of alumni. This is a missed opportunity to properly assess the impact of the training programme once fellow return to their countries. However, with the limited number of available staff it will be hard for GTP to properly implement a regular survey. GRÓ should consider the implementation of a tracer survey for all supported training programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING GRÓ LRT

1. In order to achieve the desired programme outcomes at the level of individual partner institutions within reasonable time, it is recommended to **consider reducing the number of partners supported in parallel**. An attempt to define the desired 'critical mass' of trained individuals for each partner might allow for a more staggered approach, i.e. accomplishing capacity-building targets with

one partner and then focusing on the next one. Such approach should not go against the successfully applied principle of each annual cohort ideally constituting a heterogeneous mix of individuals from different countries and institutions.

2. In order to achieve the desired programme outcomes at the level of individual partner institutions within reasonable time, it is recommended to **increase quantitative output through alternative activities such as in-country short courses or in-country postgraduate courses** in collaboration with partner universities. While these cannot be expected to have the same quality as the 6-month LRT Programme, they can contribute towards optimizing the programme's overall trade-off between quality and quantity.
3. Maintaining the programme's institutional memory is critical for both programme quality partnerships. Given the strong reliance on long-serving staff members, lecturers and programme partners in this regard, it is recommended to i) **introduce measures to conserve institutional memory** independently from individuals; and ii) enhance measures which ensure **handover of knowledge and institutional memory** between outgoing and incoming programme staff (e.g. through extended learning and handover periods).
4. To be able to better quantify programme impacts at all levels, it is recommended to **introduce/strengthen measures to systematically** document relevant outputs and achievements **at the individual alumni level and/or the partner institution level**. This would be labour-intensive and might require additional human resources at GRÓ LRT level.