



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

DETERMINING HOW ICELAND'S SCHOLARSHIP AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES CONTRIBUTE TO DEVELOPMENT

Key messages

For 40 years, Iceland's International Centre for Capacity Development, Sustainability and Societal Change (GRÓ) has offered training programmes to candidates from developing countries. The aim is to strengthen individual and institutional capacities to help advance the Sustainable Development Goals in areas where Iceland has expertise. Iceland has recently taken steps to improve the accountability and measure the impact of its scholarship and training programmes.

Keywords

[Environment and climate](#) | [Gender equality](#) | [Learning and knowledge management](#) | [Partnerships](#) | [Human resources](#)

Key partner

[Iceland](#)

Challenge

Scholarships and training for individuals from developing countries provided by Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries represent a small but stable volume of official development assistance (ODA) – around USD 1 billion or 1% of net bilateral ODA in 2020. However, recent evaluations of these programmes, such as those of the [Czech Republic](#), [Greece](#), and [New Zealand](#), have drawn mixed conclusions. They typically recommend better alignment between the programmes' objectives and development policies and priorities, a stronger alumni network and more post-graduate learning opportunities.

Iceland's capacity development programmes, run by the GRÓ International Centre for Capacity Development, Sustainability and Societal Change, are a trademark of its development co-operation; however, value for money is a growing concern. The total average annual cost was USD 4.3 million in 2020-21, or 9% of gross bilateral ODA. Against this backdrop, Iceland has been working to improve how it

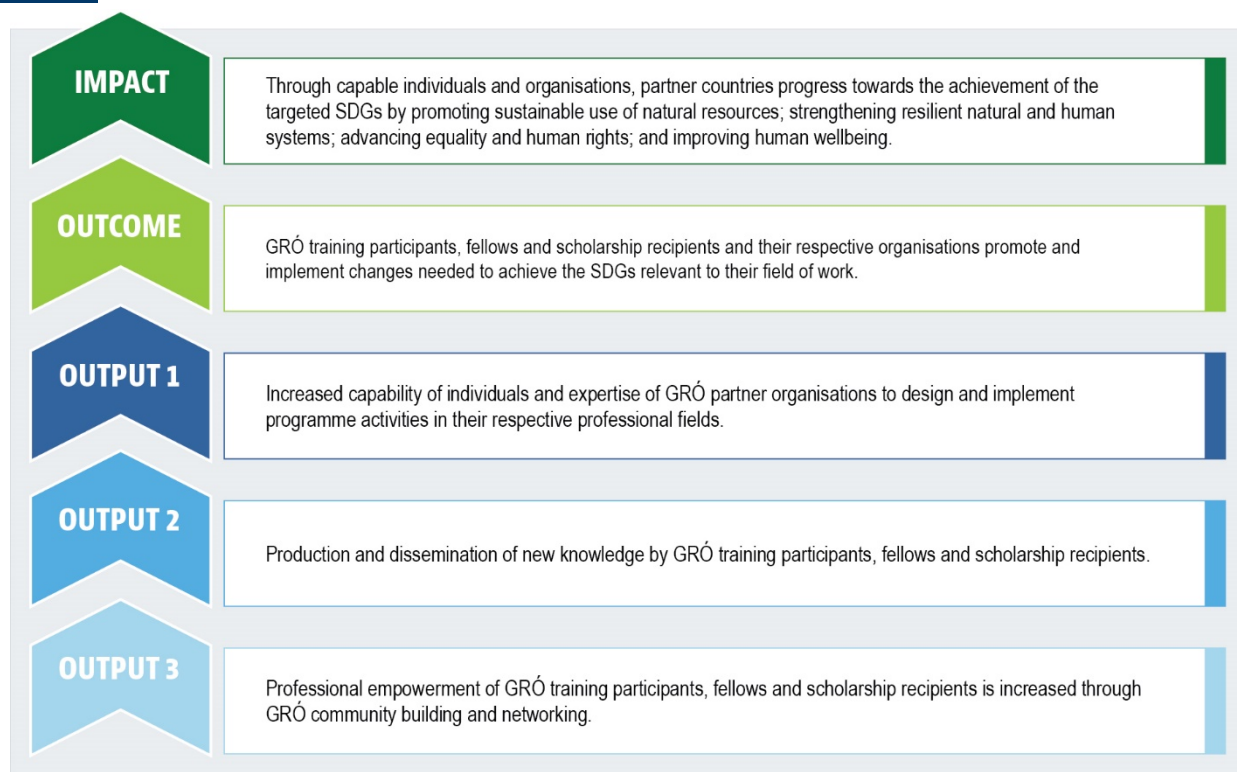
measures the impact of its scholarship and training programme, and to make it more strategic. The literature shows that assessing the socio-political, civic, economic, and diplomatic impacts of scholarships and training programmes is complex and requires looking beyond the individual's post-scholarship trajectory or agency for change to the conditions that allow social transformation to occur.

Approach

GRÓ is taking a range of approaches to maximise the impact of its training programmes:

- **Programmes are linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).** Iceland has four fellowship programmes in areas where it has particular expertise ([geothermal energy](#), [fisheries](#), [land restoration](#) and [gender](#)). GRÓ's support is specifically aimed at achieving progress on four SDGs – SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy; SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources; and SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.
- **Candidates are nominated by key partner organisations** with the potential and ambition to contribute to change in these areas, in collaboration with GRÓ programmes. The assumption is that these partner organisations have a mandate or strong position within their country to work on development issues related to the programme's focus.
- **A new theory of change provides a strong framework for achieving and measuring results.** GRÓ finalised a theory of change for its scholarship and training programmes in 2022 to illustrate how and why desired outputs and outcomes are expected to occur (see Figure 1). It establishes a result-based management system to measure results over time to hold the GRÓ Centre to account for its objectives and priorities. It also helps create an understanding of what GRÓ wants to achieve and how it can meet the capacity development needs of existing and potential partners. Future efforts to assess GRÓ's development impact will be based on the new theory of change. This will include an evaluation of GRÓ post-graduate scholarship programmes in 2023.

Figure 1 GRÓ's theory of change



Source: GRÓ

Results

The theory of change will enable Iceland to better assess the impact that GRÓ programmes have on development. This is in addition to the information on programme results GRÓ has been collecting in the course of its long history, which include:

- **Over 100 partner countries have benefitted from the GRÓ Programmes** since 1979, with almost 1 600 fellows trained, over 100 Master's and PhD students graduating and over 4 000 individuals participating in short courses in partner countries.
- **The SDGs are being advanced by GRÓ fellows in their home countries.** A [2017 evaluation](#) found many important macro-, meso- and micro-level results in partner countries. One in every five fellows had engaged with policy formulation upon returning home and approximately one in eight fellows had seen their research used in policy making. For example, Kenya has been a priority country of the GRÓ geothermal programme, training a total of 146 Kenyan fellows since 1982. Electricity generation capacity in Kenya has grown almost six-fold since 2010, to which GRO contributed.
- **New fisheries projects and programmes are being developed by GRÓ fellows**, often based on the project work they undertook in Iceland. For example, a high number of Caribbean fisheries programme fellows are in senior positions in regional fisheries. In many African partner countries fisheries programme fellows occupy high administrative positions and include many of the leading scientists around Lake Victoria.
- **Gender equality is benefitting.** The Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme (GEST) contributed to a 2017 constitutional amendment in Malawi that set the legal age for marriage at 18,

effectively outlawing child marriage. The process was led by a GEST fellow who worked on the issue of the high rate of child marriage in Malawi through his assignment at GEST.

Lessons learnt

- The theory of change safeguards elements proven to contribute to quality capacity strengthening and subsequent positive results in partner countries. These include:
- **A solution-focused, applied learning experience**, and creating space for fellows to conduct research, make learning relevant. Fellows often bring data from home to work with issues connected to their home countries.
- **Multi-directional learning** ensures that fellows not only learn from the instructors, but also that instructors learn from the fellows, and that fellows learn from one another.
- **A robust recruitment process is critical** in making sure the right candidates are selected. GRÓ aims to train key people within partner organisations – those who are well-positioned to apply and disseminate their new knowledge and skills after they return home. By training professionals from the same organisations and countries over many years, the intention is to build a critical mass within each organisation and country.
- **Forthcoming evaluations will be key** to test the underlying assumptions in the theory of change, promote learning across Iceland's development co-operation and ensure GRÓ is fit-for-purpose.

Further information

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OECD resources

OECD (2023), *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Iceland 2023*, OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a1552817-en>.

To learn more about Iceland's development co-operation see:

OECD, "Iceland", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/fd3d1d29-en>.

See more *In Practice* examples from Iceland here: <https://www.oecd.org/development-cooperation-learning/?tag-key+partner=iceland#search>.

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