2020

Annual Report

Introduction

Welcome to the Island Reach 2020 Annual Report. COVID 19 changed the world this past year, with wide ranging impacts that are still not fully understood. Now, midway through 2021, the reach and rates of vaccinations continue to be problematic and the Delta variant is especially virulent, with many countries, like Fiji, seeing a rapid rise in cases. This crisis is far from over.

With regards to the IR mission, the pandemic has exposed a critical fact: as humans diminish biodiversity by cutting down forests and destroying habitats, building more infrastructure, and heating up the planet, we are increasing the risk of pandemics. Scientists and experts across disciplines — ecologists, biologists, virologists, economists, and many others — are working together studying the nexus between biodiversity loss and public health and are calling for a wide-ranging course of action to benefit biodiversity and reduce health risks. (Learn more from the **Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)** https://ipbes.net/pandemics).

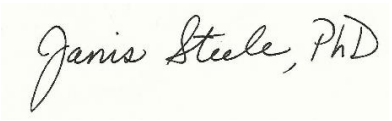
Precursor to this pandemic report, the 2019 IPBES report presented findings that nature on indigenous peoples' lands is degrading less quickly than in other areas. The authors and other conservation experts concluded that the world should not only draw lessons from those and other local communities' environmental stewardship but scientists, policy makers, and allies of all kinds need to support and partner with them in order to stem the tide of biodiversity loss.

Throughout the pandemic, there have been calls to "build back better", addressing injustices that have been exposed during the pandemic, and many are urging that rather than getting back to "normal", we must urgently take this opportunity to shift our paradigms in how we address both environmental degradation and the climate emergency. The frontlines are now everywhere.

For us at Island Reach, the pandemic altered our year dramatically and kept us sheltered in place for much of the time. While our movement was brought to a standstill, we were nevertheless able to achieve important developments in the growth of our small organization. Moreover, the year was an opportunity for reflection, research, and creative strategic planning. We are pleased to share our news with you.

Thanks for your interest.

Janis & Brooks



Immuto (Change)

The start of 2020 saw us immersed in final edits of the documentary film, Immuto (Change) (44 min) with an official launch taking place with a live watch party on Earth Day, April 21.

Immuto (Change) is an unscripted video-for-impact produced to help stimulate processes of intellectual, emotional, and ethical decolonization and Third Space engagements. The film is a collection of stories as told by members of indigenous and local communities and other activists from Vanuatu and different regions of the world. They are voicing their concerns and describing efforts to adapt to changes, conserve territories, reform laws, and keep carbon in the ground. Each participant in the video comes forward as an agent of change: more than isolated actors, they reach out to viewers to assert the need for recognition and reciprocity, prevailing upon us -- in the words of one – to "find a way to walk side by side so that together we can find a way to benefit the whole world. "

Over the course of the year, we submitted the film to 39 film festivals, earning 6 awards and 15 official selections. As of this report, there are 4 remaining decisions to be made in 2021.

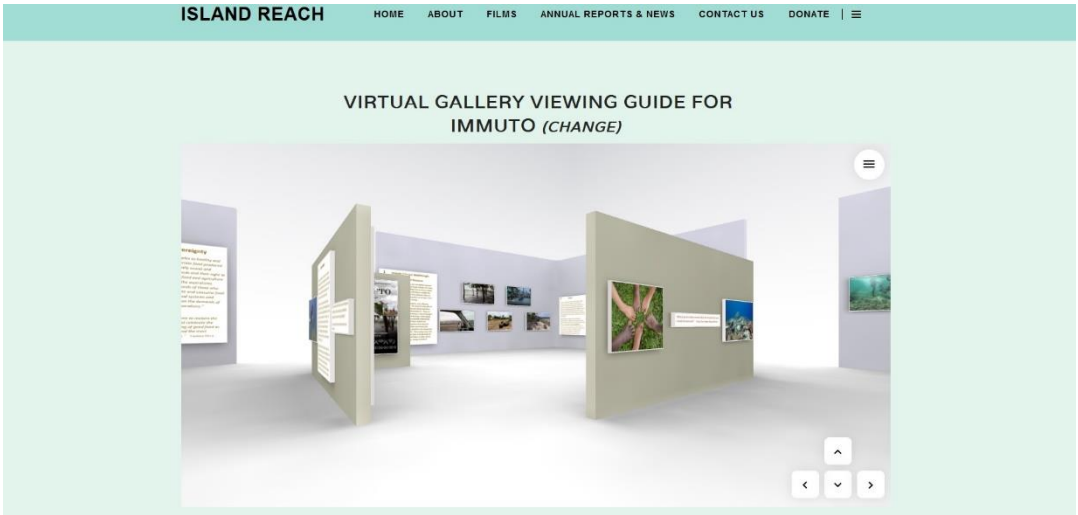
The film was prominently featured with Films-For-Action and Engage Media, two globally curated film library websites & training centers presenting documentaries for activism and change.

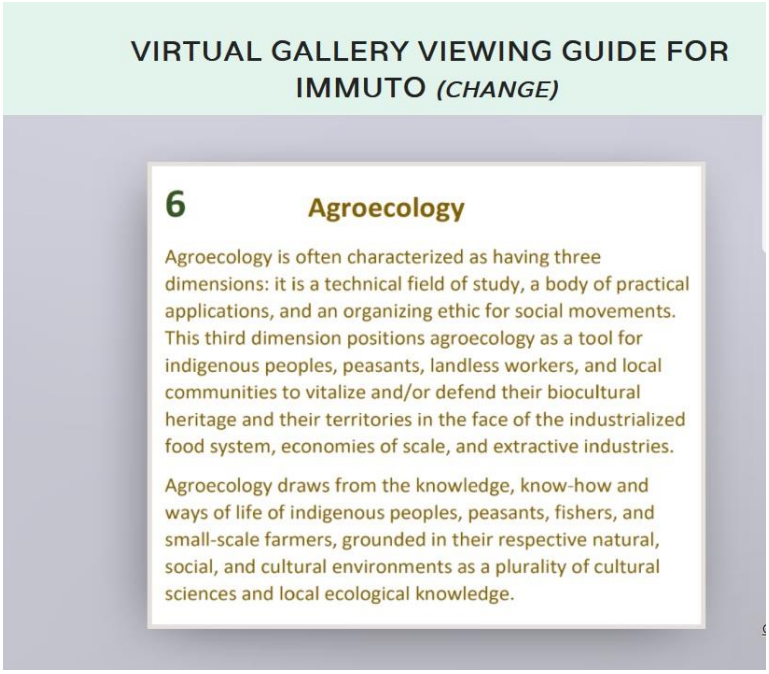
Immuto Presentations

In addition to the Earth Day watch party, Janis and Brooks led community, conference, festival, and academic screenings and discussions of Immuto including at the online conference of the World Social Forum on Transformative Economies, at a town community hall, and at the University of Massachusetts

Virtual Gallery

To supplement Immuto's educational and activist messaging, IR designed and created a 3-D virtual viewing guide to accompany the film. This unique feature allows viewers to undertake a self-guided tour exploring the film's themes in greater depth.





One panel introduces visitors to agroecology, an approach that focuses on linking food sovereignty and stewardship of biodiversity.

Others introduce the role of culture brokers, themes of decolonization, a consideration of "super wicked problems", and featured quotes from the film's speakers.

The educational package of film and virtual gallery viewing guide were listed Online with two academic resource/libraries, Merlot and Online Educational Resources.

Ecocide Project Advisors

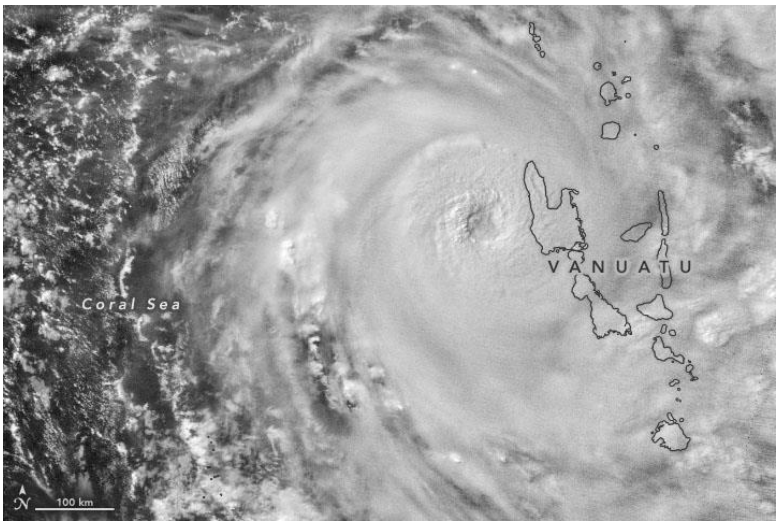
From January to May, IR directors Janis and Brooks, working in partnership with Shirleen Chin (featured in Immuto) of Stop Ecocide International, served as project advisors with the **Worcester Polytechnic Institute, New Zealand Project Center,** advising an undergraduate student-led project on assessing New Zealanders' attitudes and understandings about an international ecocide law.

Coral Gardening Capacity Building

In February, just ahead of COVID, IR's John Ronneth traveled to Fiji to work with IR Advisor, Dr. Austin Bowden-Kerby and his organization, **Corals for Conservation**, to gain more skills in coral gardening techniques. Joined by IR's ex-intern Risu Kalotiti, Ronneth and participants from islands around the Pacific enhanced their knowledge about effective management and reef stewardship.

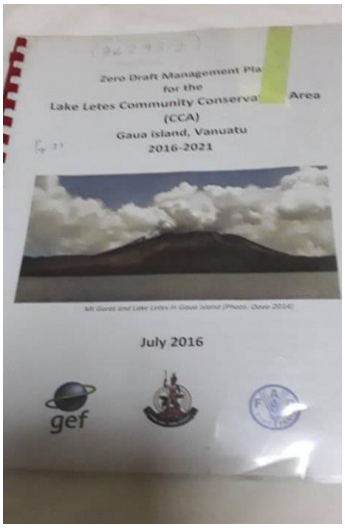
CYCLONE HAROLD

Cyclone Harold hit Vanuatu and neighboring Pacific countries in April of 2020. It was a category 5 storm which caused extensive damage in the area, particularly in the northern/central islands. Following Cyclone Pam in 2015, IR was on the scene to deliver resources to remote areas. This year, due to COVID, we provided support to local partners and allies with the assistance of Butterfly Trust who were on the ground.



Increasing cyclone intensity is considered to be a climate change impact.

IR provided small support to the Lake Letas Community Conservation Area Network of Gaua Island for the printing and publication of their management plan.



As a point of interest, Unakap conservation area saw the return for the second year in a row of a turtle nesting site which Ronneth carefully stewarded with members of his community. Here you can see the tracks of the nesting female

Other Activities

Website & Mission Updates

A major undertaking for the year was the revamping of the IR website. With COVID changing our schedule, we took the opportunity for deep reflection on the IR mission and activities, more clearly positioning ourselves as allies and partners in projects to bolster community leadership and support biocultural diversity.

Partnerships and alliances for conservation, development, adaptation, and activism bring to the foreground challenges of intersecting local and Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems. To engage, we lean heavily on post-colonial, Indigenous, psychoanalytic, and human ecology thoughts and practice alongside creative participatory methods to animate a dynamic, intermediary space for getting work done, often called "Third space" or, in some cases, "Ethical space".

This hybrid relational space is often one of colliding worldviews with complex histories, personal experience, and powerful contingencies enfolded, contested, and directly impacting the concrete project at hand—for better or worse. IR seeks to illuminate such challenging yet creative spaces, sites of difference, negotiation and convergence, to help communities respond with resilience to advancing climate disruption, biocultural decline, and denaturing economies of scale.

Panels and webinars

As 2020 went online, we were able to take advantage of a number of virtual gatherings. Janis was part of a panel discussion based in India with the **All Living Things Film Festival**, talking about Immuto and climate action. We attended 3 presentations organized by the Canadian organization, **Conservation Through Reconciliation Partnership**: Governance & Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas; Nature and Carbon, Opportunities and Challenges for Indigenous Leadership; and Traditional Ecological Knowledge. We also had the opportunity to attend the **GYBN (Global Youth Biodiversity Network)** & **ICCA (Territories of Life) Consortium's** *Traditional Knowledge* webinar, and in December, Janis tuned in to the **Pacific Climate Action Network's** *Talanoa* gathering*, Still Fighting For Our Survival*. This last event led to engagement with participants for the chapter Janis is writing on Pacific women's climate leadership (see below).

Advisory Board Updates

With the intent to grow our advisory and executive boards, we took on two new team members as advisors in 2020, Ingrid Shockey and Noy Holland.

Ingrid Shockey, PhD is an environmental sociologist whose work concerns natural literacy and the interplay of human-wilderness relationships. These domains include topics in biodiversity loss, climate change perceptions, and our sense of place and identity with respect to the landscape. Her work has focused most recently on mountain ecologies and economies in the western Himalaya. She is an associate teaching Professor in Interdisciplinary and Global Studies at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts.

Noy Holland is a writer and a Professor in the Master of Fine Arts Program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Noy is passionate about exploring polyphony and imagination in responding to the climate crisis. She considers, how we might "as poets, scientists, fishermen, farmers -- put our shoulders to the same wheel." An accomplished writer, Noy is the recipient of the 2018 Katherine Anne Porter Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her short story “Tally” was included in Best American Short Stories. She has published several books and collections of short fiction and novellas. Currently, Noy is working on an autobiographical book connecting to the climate emergency.

Looking Ahead

Organizational Growth

IR emerged partly out of our farming livelihoods, with a focus on issues such as engaging communities in supporting sustainable agriculture and artisanal harvesting, social enterprise, climate change resilience, and conservation of both biological and cultural diversity.

In 2020, carrying deep inspiration from the farm, we decided to dedicate ourselves full-time to Island Reach, responding with passion and urgency to the global challenges of our time.

Our decision to let go of forest farming is filled with poignancy about moving on from our much loved land and home – built with our own hands – where we have created this unique lifestyle and robust farming enterprise. Yet, as our three sons each emphasize, we know that although we all leave *this particular place*, our love for wild places and the people who co-exist with them will remain core for each of us as we go forward. To all of us in the family, at our different life stages, Island Reach is clearly understood to be a dynamic outgrowth, a labor of love, of what we have pursued here on the farm.

Accordingly, in 2021, we’ll be focused on everything it takes to make IR flourish, including growing our executive board, and pursuing new endeavors.

New Projects

In the latter part of 2020, IR was approached by the Ark Foundation in the UK about contributing to a book scheduled for publication ahead of COP 26, to be held in Glascow, Scotland in November 2021 (bumped from 2020 due to COVID).

Janis is currently authoring this piece, focused on women's leadership in climate action in the Pacific region. The publication date is October 2021.

While COVID rates decline in the US, globally the situation has far from turned a corner. Vanuatu has remained COVID free, with closed borders, yet elsewhere in Melanesia, countries, including Fiji, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, have seen outbreaks. Economically, the situation is very difficult due to the loss of tourism. We look forward to when we might be able to return to the region.

A significant new endeavor is in development now, working with a nonprofit organization in Bangladesh to support the development of agroecological markets for women entrepreneurs to enhance climate adaption and resilience. Janis and Brooks will be working as technical advisors alongside United Purpose Bangladesh staff and local Women's Business Centres, to build a grass-roots adaptive agroecological enterprise module that can be used across different types of products and modifiable for different regional and international contexts. Stay tuned in 2021 for this exciting project implementation!

Thanks for reading!

"Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other."

Paulo Freire, Brazilian Educator and Philosopher