



2018

Annual Report

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Introduction

Welcome to the Island Reach 2018 Annual Report, documenting our 5th year of activities in Vanuatu, and reflecting our ongoing commitment to the conservation and celebration of biocultural diversity! From the southern island of Tanna to the northernmost islands of Torres, Island Reach engagements with communities and local environmental stewards in 2018 spanned the archipelago of Vanuatu.

Island Reach is a unique, diverse assembly of local grassroots activists and international social scientists prioritizing indigenous self-determination. Thematically, IR focuses on climate change adaptation, conservation of biocultural diversity through food security, and supporting the rise of youth and women as leaders in community actions. To undertake these cross-cultural engagements, the IR approach is conversational, dialogic, and participatory. IR collaborates with local partners not by dictating what the struggle ought to be, or working towards pre-determined outcomes; rather we walk alongside, listening, sharing ideas, responding to their requests, and remaining alert to stepping back, all as a way to buttress and strengthen locally led actions and agency.

IR partners with individuals and communities that are tackling complex challenges, many brought on by climate change, population shifts, and extractive economies of scale. IR builds these partnerships with the understanding that local community activists are engaged in a complex process of “culture brokering.” What do we mean by this? Our partners are Ni-Vanuatu, indigenous to this region and woven into the social fabric of their village lives; at the same time, they are at the frontline of mediating between traditional local ecological knowledge and introduced scientific information and methodologies. This brokering between worldviews is tremendously fluid and challenging work which involves both re-vitalizing local traditions as well as sometimes putting to question customary practices and views. In consultation and negotiation with their families, tribes, and peers, they are part of shaping and determining which contemporary activities fairly express customary practices and values and what actions will help ensure a robust and resilient environment for future generations. In these ways, culture is understood as dynamic and “culture brokers” negotiate the shifting border zones.

For this reason, those of us from the Atlantic West must engage in a rather steady process of examining ourselves and the work we do, noticing blockages and receiving critiques in our support roles as “facilitators” or “force multipliers”. Here, Janis, Brooks, and Connor’s capacities, informed by backgrounds in human ecology, anthropology, psychology, public health, artisanal agriculture, & documentary storytelling, all come into play. Our task in supporting grassroots, community field work is always to join together critical reflection with action to do our utmost alongside our partners to confront the ever-present haze of power imbalances that inhabit most “development” work. Local translation and ownership of new ideas, welded into local knowledge and adaptive practice is an uneven, often tempestuous community process we approach as respectful, patient learners.

Read on for the details and check out exciting plans for increased international connectivity in 2019!

Visit our website at www.IslandReach.org.

Janis & Brooks

Janis Steele, PhD

Brooks W. Mitchell Ph.D.



Partnership with Vanua-tai Resource Monitors

IR continues our partnership with Wan Smolbag's **Vanua-tai Resource Monitors Network**, in order to bolster the work of monitors in communities across the archipelago. IR helps facilitate the challenging work of these "culture brokers" through helping build local capacity, providing opportunities for peer-to-peer exchange, and helping ensure that lessons learned are shared as widely as possible.

Vanua-tai Annual General Meeting

In May, IR team sponsored 6 monitors from Mota Lava, Southwest Bay, and SE Malekula (one man and one woman from each site) to participate in the Vanua-tai Annual General meeting in Port Vila. These men and women presented reports on their work, shared ideas, learned new skills, and planned next steps. A few notable actions from their reports are included here:

- Mota Lava monitor, Sophie Frank, reported on the creation of a women's conservation association with an executive committee that has launched the first women-run conservation area for food security.
- Mota Lava monitor Woleg Joe reported on his coral gardens, turtle monitoring, and the island monitors hosting a Torba regional meeting with monitors from Ureparapara and Mota islands and with Vanua'tai coordinator Donald James.
- Chief Alphonse Yemen from Vanua Lava spoke of his work unifying turtle conservation with ecotourism plans.
- Southwest Bay's Chief Raubong reported on the advancement of the Senewen environmental network, including establishing permanent marine protected areas and coral gardens supported by six communities.
- This was the first AGM for new monitor, Eleni Silas, who had participated in IR's coral gardening workshop in 2017. She had the opportunity to meet with fellow female monitors for peer-to-peer networking on women's actions and challenges.
- Nanamor-Lehur network chairman Joseph Soksok from Lamap area presented on the launching of the network in July 2017, advancing conservation fees, dugong conservation, and registration of the conservation area with the Province. Joseph also reported on the peer-to-peer exchange IR facilitated between SE Malekula, Mota Lava, and Southwest Bay that occurred in September of 2017 addressing coral and organic gardening, and natural resource management. Their environment association is working with the area Council of Chiefs to ensure the sharing of benefits from conservation with communities and the Council.
- IR presented on advances in coral gardening and screened the Women's network film to the entire group of over eighty monitors. Discussions afterwards broke into male and female groups and proved challenging, emotional, and productive.



Monitors from Torba, including IR regional coordinator Alphonse Yemen, reporting on island activities. Note all the pink stickers indicating where IR has helped facilitate activities.

For the first time, the AGM meeting consisted of roughly half women, a result of IR's collaborations with communities to increase women's participation in natural resource management.



Women participating in record numbers at the AGM

Catalyzing women's leadership in conservation and natural resource management

2018 saw our continued work under a grant from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and the IUCN for a project titled, *Promoting gender equity for conservation initiatives through catalyzing a women's environmental network across CEPF priority sites*.

In April, Janis and Ronneth travelled to Tanna to lead a workshop for eight women representatives from Tanna, Futuna, and Aneitium islands. Titled, *TAFEA women and the environment: Biodiversity, Resource Management, and Women's Leadership*, this four-day workshop covered discussions about biodiversity and roles, goals, and challenges for women as leaders and decision makers in natural resource management.

Chairlady of the Tanna Ususi environment network, Joceylne Usua, discussing leadership skills



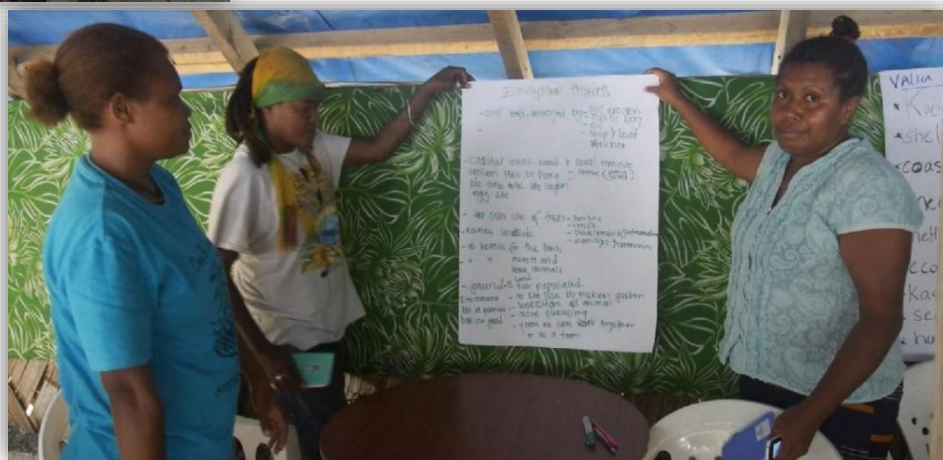
Field trip to Port Resolution to learn about local conservation actions



Participants and family members at the workshop



An arm-in-arm exercise in negotiating individual and collective interests



Anita Namuri, Valentine Leye, and Pauline Kawas sharing their concerns about ecosystem threats

The CEPF grant supported the completion of a [17 minute video](#) about the growing participation of women in the Vanua-tai network. This included not only interviews with women environmental champions but also with government officials. Aside from being screened at the Vanua-tai AGM, this video has been shared widely internationally, including being featured in the CEPF quarterly newsletter, by WEDO (Women's Environment & Development Org) and on the Global Greengrants Fund blog, where the story of the women Vanua-tai was the most popular posting for the year!

With the support of IR, women Vanua-tai have been increasingly active across the country. Here are a few examples:

- In the northern province of Torba on the island of Mota Lava, Sophie Frank has formed a local women's network and they have established the first ever women run conservation area, focused on sea grass and a local clam important for food security.
- In southern Tafea province on the island of Aneitium, monitors Anita Namuri and Valentine Leye have been helping establish a tree nursery to address reforestation.

- In the central province of Shefa, on Moso island, Leisavi Joel led a program for local youth on conservation and the importance of monitoring.



Global Environment Facility Grant

2018 involved ongoing projects related to the grant IR received from the UN Small Grants Programme/ Global Environment Facility, to support projects in Malekula and Mota Lava, titled, *Local, regional, and national networking to build capacity and inspire actions for climate change adaptation in the communities of Southwest bay and SE Malekula, and Mota Lava*. Most activities below fit within this project.

The Community Coral Conservation Resource, a Learning Aid

This year, IR developed the Community Coral Conservation Resource toolkit (CCCR), a learning aid for all members of a community who may not have access to a computer or projector and/or who are interested in a more hands-on, participatory activity. Informed by field experience, associational learning, and game theory, the CCCR is composed of 24 laminate cards: some with key take-away points developed with community assistance, written in Bislama, and some with photos. The CCCR's interplay between local custom practice and science is designed to have numerous adaptive uses; it can be used as a sorting game, workshop aid, or to assist with management plans. Visual learning and discussion dominate as users adapt the cards to their local circumstances and concerns. After initial trialing with communities in Vanua Lava & Mota Lava, modifications were made at the suggestion of communities and 11 CCCR kits have been developed and are deployed among monitors in Mota Lava, SE and SW Malekula, Torba, Nguna, Pele, and NE Efate exploring efficacy and for further refinement.



Nguna Pele Partnership

Island Reach's MOU with the Nguna-Pele Marine and Land Protected Area continues to involve collaborations on local actions as well as radiating out lessons learned from this long-established hub to remote communities elsewhere in Vanuatu. This year, IR followed up on the coral gardening workshop held in 2017. Actions included out-planting of coral from the nursery ropes on Nguna to the reef and enhancing the design of the Worasiviu site to include nursery ropes. Under guidance from coral restoration expert Dr. Austin Bowden-Kerby, coral gardeners are increasingly focused on identifying and propagating corals that demonstrate resilience to climate change and other pressures.

During these actions, the IR team had the opportunity to assist an international documentary project on climate change adaptation taking place in the Nguna Pele area. The crew requested technical and field assistance, including HD underwater and drone filming assistance. Collaborating with National Geographic Explorer and producer, Alize Carrere, N-P Secretary Willie Kenneth, Chairman Tatu Whately, and Peter Whitelaw of Sailaway Cruises, we negotiated a work-for- footage swap that has provided us with some excellent 4K footage on coral gardening to be included in our upcoming video production on ridge to reef conservation in Vanuatu.

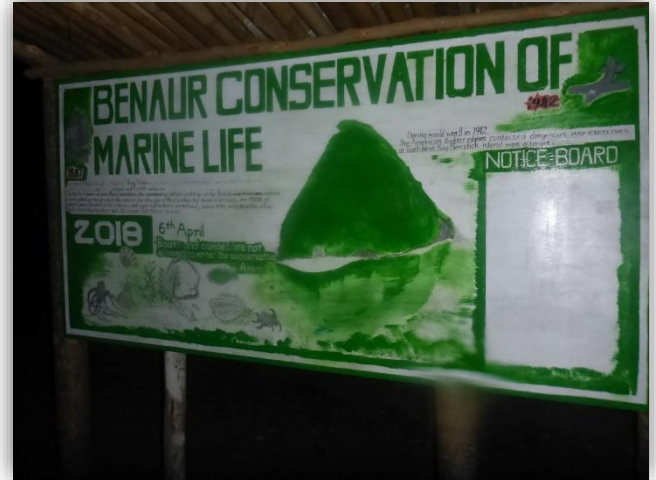


*John Ronneth securing ropes
to the reef*

Seven months of growth

Senewen Environment Association collaboration, Southwest Bay, Malekula

IR's expeditions to Southwest Bay in February and July involved ongoing work related to the communities' creation of the new seven-village MPA network and the Senewen environment association and committee. Discussion topics during our exchanges involved local stakeholders exploring ways of increasing benefits from conservation actions and how to ensure these are widely shared, as well as taking the steps towards creating formal management plans. Below are four of the remarkable sign boards created by local artists with financial support from the 2017 Waitt Grant.



Following on the coral gardening workshop in 2017, additional coral gardens were installed and further planning for maintenance and replanting are underway. The Chairman of the Senewen network has also been taking lessons learned from a peer-to-peer exchange the prior year with Woleg Joe of Mota Lava and has helped construct several kitchen organic gardens in surrounding communities and at the local school.

Nanamour-Lehur Environment Association collaboration, Dravail, Malekula

In July, the Nanamour-Lehur chairman, Joseph Soksok, discussed with IR members ways of addressing benefit sharing and the need for outreach work to other communities. A meeting of the Council of Chiefs was convened to discuss community conservation goals and the conservation area of Nanamour-Lehur environment association committee. Using their own resources, the association purchased a computer and projector for outreach work.

In October, IR funded the Chairman of the Nanamour-Lehur environment network to attend a peer-to-peer exchange and training with IR coordinator John Ronneth in Nguna. Joseph came to Nguna for a week to build his capacity in marine management, learn how to employ the CCCR, and increase his community outreach and organizational skills, including computer skills such as how to create a powerpoint.

Upon return to the Lamap area, IR funded an information/conservation tour for Joseph Soksok and committee members of the Nanamour-Lehur association. They travelled around the Lamap region, as well as to neighboring islands of Avok and the Maskelynes by boat, leading community presentations and discussions about conservation initiatives. Positive feedback from this tour included communities noting the benefits and the importance of having local stakeholders lead awareness presentations and programs rather than outside NGOs.

Traveling by boat and road to lead discussions





Community presentations by Nanamuor-Lehur committee



Torba Province

In Vanua Lava, the team worked with Lalnetak villages and NE Vanua Lava monitors trialing the CCCR and installing a low-cost coral garden, replacing former use of steel rods with mangrove wood as a first-time pilot project. IR brought Mota Lava Monitor Woleg Joe to the area to participate in actions and for peer-to-peer networking with the intention of supporting an active and well-connected Torba team.



Building a coral nursery frame with local woods



Vanua Lava youth building the coral garden



Ennethy and Lafu making lunch, Quanlap, Vanua Lava

In Mota Lava, IR staff traveled with local regional coordinator Alphonse Yemen to meet with local monitor Woleg Joe who convened a gathering of 7 Environment Chiefs and the Paramount Chief to discuss conservation and food security. The CCCR learning aid was used to catalyze discussions and a kit was introduced through a workshop and donated for community leaders to investigate and share.

IR continues to support food security projects in collaboration with the Mota Lava Agriculture Extension Officer and IR field associate, Daniel Neneth, including providing seeds and implements to support the growth of organic gardening on the island. Daniel's brilliant "Three Garden" methods can be seen in the IR video ["Organic Gardening in Vanuatu"](#).

Torres Islands

In September, IR coordinator John Ronneth, and IR regional field coordinator for Torba Province, Alphonse Yemen, travelled to the remote Torres islands to meet with communities and members of the Torres Environment Network (TEN), guide workshops, and learn more about the local ecosystem issues. Visits were made to the islands of Toga, Loh, Metoma, and Hiu. Additional meetings were held with local Chiefs, the Principal of the central school, and with the Torres Area Councillor. Communities in Torba Province are remote and it is rare that they receive contact from activist groups like IR; communications services often break down; and travel is very expensive to the group as well as between the islands, making it difficult for local residents to meet and collaborate. Workshops with environmental monitors included exercises with the CCCR, two copies of which were left with environmental leaders in the region, as well as reef assessments with participants and a presentation on coral gardening. A compact equipment kit for garden installation (ropes, ties, clippers) was left with a leader of TEN. There was agreement that monitors need to begin with sharing the information they learned from this visit with community members and discuss potential projects. IR conducted additional site visits including to the mangrove replanting project on Loh and the Coconut crab conservation area on Metoma. The DEPC (Vanuatu Dept. of Environmental Protection and Conservation) has strong interest in the crab conservation project but has been unable to send anyone to make a visit, so IR has provided a report to the DEPC. In addition, local environmental leaders in the region are requesting more workshops and assistance. To this end, Donald James has requested IR's collaboration in holding a general meeting in Torres in 2019.

Peer to Peer Exchange between Malekula and Mota Lava

In November, IR coordinator and Southwest Bay Chief Raubong travelled to Mota Lava for a sharing of lessons learned and peer-to-peer exchange across these distant islands. Present at the welcoming ceremony for the actions were Chiefs from Mota Lava, Vanua Lava and Mota, including the chairman of the council of chiefs. Reports were gathered from local monitors including Sophie Frank from east Mota

Lava who collaborated with a new female monitor on Mota to deliver an awareness to her community about resource management and climate change. A management plan workshop using Participatory Learning Action tools was held at Queremagbe village regarding their conservation area and they have requested IR assistance with writing a new management plan. Reef assessments were made in three villages and the condition of the coral garden installed in August was assessed and improved. With several conservation areas, people reported enforcement of fishing restrictions remains a severe challenge. Chief Raubong shared his experience, including compliance strategies, as part of the Senewen Environmental Network of Southwest Bay in regards to the establishment of a region wide network of marine protected areas overseen by local representatives to the association. Chief Raubong also received training in the CCCR and received a kit to return with to Southwest Bay and his active coral gardens.



Joe Woleg of Nerinuman, Mota Lava with Chief Raubong of SW Bay Malekula

Videos Produced

[Women Vanua-tai Resource Monitors of Vanuatu](#)

[Creating a marine protected area in Southwest Bay, Malekula](#)

[Coral Planting in Southwest Bay, Malekula](#)

[Traditional Knowledge and community marine conservation: Tanna, Vanuatu](#)

You can find these and many more IR videos at [Island Reach Youtube Channel](#)

Finances & Structure

In 2018 Island Reach operated under the fiscal sponsorship of The Ocean Foundation and maintained our registered charitable organization in Vanuatu. IR's 2018 expenses were approximately \$110,000 with approximately \$36,000 being grant sources. The next largest financial contributors to IR have been farm income from *Berkshire Sweet Gold Maple Farm* and *June Robbins with Robbin's Nest*. For other financial and material sponsors, see the [supporters](#) page at the website. Grant resources in 2019 are likely to be smaller as IR has been busy building an independent not-for-profit in the US.

Our strategic message demonstrated in this report is simple: Modest funds and material resources can go a remarkably long way with robust partnerships at the grassroots level. This report captures some of the complex work of communities tackling the thorny issues of volunteerism, passion, and collectivity towards the goal of resilient communities and durable ecological practices over time. These are the true core resources which we at Island Reach explore and celebrate regardless of distance and in honor of the differences we each contribute to the cause.

Looking forward

After eight years of RV Llyr's brilliant contributions to the mission, she is no longer part of IR activities. This is allowing us to expand our expeditionary strategy, that is, a journey where the learning along the way helps determine the way. In 2019, IR will continue our partnerships and collaborations across Vanuatu's burgeoning activists. We see opportunity to reach out internationally to share stories from Vanuatu with likeminded grassroots projects. There are connections to be made both personally and through documentary film as we seek to strengthen community conservation grassroots models as vital

means for addressing the daunting challenges of our times. With global scientific consensus warning that there is only a dozen or so years to act before changes and losses reach calamitous magnitude, there is no doubt we need changes in international policies. Ultimately the success of large scale policies depends upon the robust support of local communities. We will therefore advocate engagement of global concerns at the grassroots community level of adaptation and activism. Here we find the stories that are relatable, sturdy activists and leaders with their feet on the ground, who can engage the imagination and mobilize us all forward, defining and insisting on our mutual Sustainability.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead
Anthropologist

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
Educator and philosopher

I dream of a world guided by a lens of stories rooted in the revelations of science and framed with an indigenous worldview—stories in which matter and spirit are both given voice.....For all of us, becoming indigenous to a place means living as if your child’s future mattered, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended upon it.

Robin Wall Kimmerer,
Mother, scientist, author, and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation (from *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*)