



ISLAND REACH BIENNIAL REPORT 2022-2023



Welcome to this activity report for Island Reach, a biennial edition covering our work during 2022-23.

During our decades of making our living as farmers, we became acutely aware of – and were up against -- the crisis in our global and local food system: how it actually causes food insecurity, destroys our planet, and provides massive wealth to corporations. Since IR's early days working in Haiti and Costa Rica and throughout our years in Vanuatu, a lot of our work on human/environment interactions have revolved around food security, or more specifically, food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is defined by La Via Campesina, the global movement leader, as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems." Farmers, fishers, and pastoralists are at the center of agroecological food systems, instead of corporate profit.

In this report, you'll read about our 2+ year project with United Purpose Bangladesh, along with a few other IR activities and developments.

Thanks for reading!

Janis and Brooks



During 2022 and 2023, IR activities centered around our partnership with United Purpose Bangladesh to support an agroecology and enterprise initiative with rural women across Bangladesh.

Here's some background on the project.

Our current global agrifood system is responsible for a major portion of global greenhouse gas emissions and significant food insecurity. New and revised models and tools intended to feed the world's growing population are plentiful, virtually all drawing on some version of "sustainability". Agroecology is a holistic and integrated approach that applies ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agriculture and food systems. Going even further, agroecology is the one alternative that involves not only science and practices but also includes frameworks and visions of a growing global social movement. It is with respect to these social and political dimensions that have co-evolved with the food sovereignty movement that lead many to advocate for agroecology as a fundamentally transformative paradigm. Agroecological approaches are not Western-centric; rather they entail a process of knowledge co-creation, prioritizing and elevating traditional knowledge and ways of being.

Most people in Bangladesh are unfamiliar with agroecology and food sovereignty movements, yet many of their aspirations and drive for change echo core values, including freedom from market subjugation, control over seed and crop decisions, healthy foods, clean water, and meaningful livelihoods. While Bangladesh has made significant improvement in poverty reduction since Independence in 1971, the country still has 35 million living below the poverty line and one of the highest rates of malnutrition in Asia. Women and children



are most affected. Currently, 75% of the total land dedicated to agriculture is planted with rice. An agroecological view of this fact is that such food cultivation practices cannot ensure real environmental and social sustainability.

Supporting communities to identify obstacles as well as solutions that best suit them is key for successful allyship. Since 2016, United Purpose Bangladesh (UPB) has worked towards this goal with rural women farmers and crafters to help build social enterprise cooperatives characterized by collective governance. Over the past six years, the cooperative model has evolved towards a focus on supporting agroecological transitions for women and their communities. Providing capacity building and training is essential in the country given that reliance on commercial inputs has been historically emphasized and supported by the state. In helping launch a new association called Nari Jhuri, (Women's Basket), UPB is helping create networking opportunities for women both locally and regionally to strengthen knowledge, share practices, and design markets as part of mobilizing a women-led movement for agroecology. UPB's efforts to support Nari Jhuri members has included training and assistance for producing and using natural fertilizers, increasing crop diversity, creating seed banks, and more recently, reframing markets. This reframing includes efforts to create a distinctive identity for Nari Jhuri in local and regional markets based on agroecological principles and reclaiming food narratives.

This is where Island Reach has joined with UPB to explore mobilizing Nari Jhuri's vision to be a community and trading space "touchstone", driving creative mapping narratives towards actional and viable alternatives to the industrial food system.



Throughout this project, there were several aims in using alternative markets as an entry point. These included: 1) amplifying autonomy and disentangling the women of Nari Jhuri, along with their communities, from marginalization and subjugation to modes of productivity at the heart of agro-industrial model; 2) reducing dependency on large buyers and costly middlemen; and 3) bolstering their distinctive products and “brand identity” in contrast to imported or industrially-farmed foods. Additionally, markets are not only about what producers sell, but what Nari Jhuri women and other consumers can buy. In Bangladesh as in many parts of the world, small-scale farmers are often net food buyers. Farmers can become caught in a pattern of selling the more nutritious products they produce while purchasing cheaper, often imported 'fast-foods' to feed their families. Working towards a model where farmers can both sell and consume their own agroecologically produced foods is vital. With all this in mind, creating market options for agroecology requires noting that markets are but one mechanism for acquiring foods; all foods are not nor should be destined for markets. There are other ways of exchanging resources within communities and sustaining people's rights to eat and enjoy nourishing foods in a sovereign context.

Our collaboration used a relational approach to help mobilize agroecological transformations at localized scales. Emerging from theories about narrative framing and transformative agency, we have worked with Nari Jhuri members on a variety of agricultural and market practices and strategies, using a Value Web processual tool that was developed as part of our collaboration as well as a range of participatory processes like role play and community walks so that the women can chart locally determined pathways forward.

This project unfolded with close online collaboration with UPB staff and with 2 IR visits to Bangladesh. Outcomes of this collaboration included the preparation

of a community guidebook and a facilitator's guidebook with beautiful artwork by a UPB partner, Sumoyee Das, numerous workshops around the county and the distribution of a toolkit for local facilitators and Nari Jhuri groups, and a expo in Jamalpur.



FA workshop in Dhaka with UPB staff



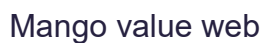
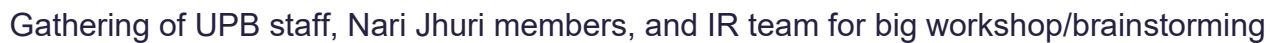
A role play workshop in the Chittagong Hill Tracts



Value Web workshop



Nari Jhuri distribution truck





Nari Jhuri Expo



Signage



Some of the beautiful artwork for the guides , by Sunmoyee Das

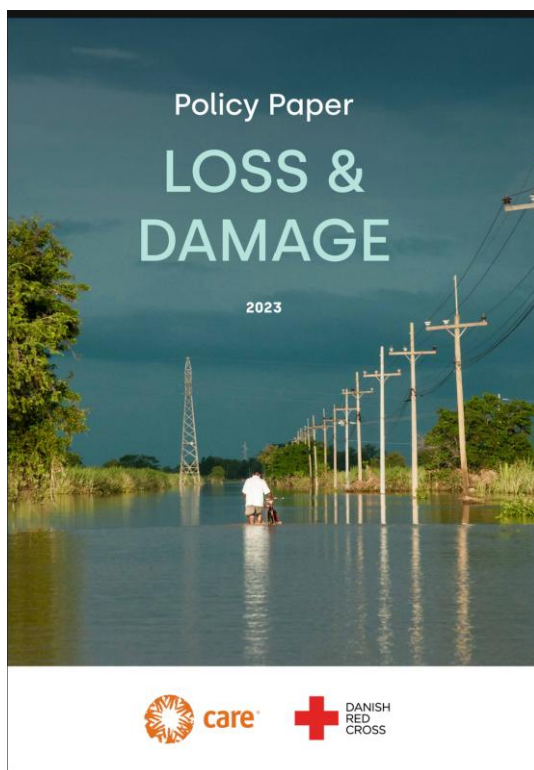
CONSULTATION AND SHARING OF ISLAND REACH RESOURCES

In 2023, we were requested to consult on a Policy paper being prepared by the Danish Red Cross and Care Denmark on Loss and Damage due to the climate emergency.

The policy paper aimed

“to deepen the understanding of economic and non-economic loss and damage, the way it is experienced by people and communities, and the approaches adopted by the international and local community to respond to climate induced disasters. The paper is structured around 10 climate disasters that have occurred across the global south and affected people and planet both socially and economically.”

Our consultation involved interviews with co-author Dr. Sindra Sharma and our documentary video about sea level rise in Vanuatu constituted one of the case studies.



<https://www.preventionweb.net/publication/documents-and-publications/policy-paper-loss-damage>



Small Grants:

In 2023, IR made a small unrestricted grant to the nonprofit organization, Sista, in Vanuatu. Sista is a women's rights organization led by a team of young Ni-Vanuatu women. Their work includes advocacy campaigns, supporting women in leadership, strengthening women's groups, and creating spaces for women and girls to connect, learn, and be heard.