

Introduction

JAMES E. RANDALL, *University of Prince Edward Island, Canada*

Last year, the theme of the *Annual Report on Global Islands* was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on island development. Unfortunately, the pandemic continues to affect the social and economic development of island nations and territories. However, rather than publishing a ‘2.0’ version of last year’s COVID-19 themed report, we have opted to explore the progress by island governments in addressing the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as issues related to carbon neutrality, trade, and tourism. This does not suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic will be ignored; it would be naïve to think that it does not continue to affect almost every aspect of island development prospects. However, examining the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals on islands does allow us to look more closely at how jurisdictions may be building resilience so that they are better prepared for future extreme events.

An important part of the Islands initiative started by Hainan’s Foreign Affairs Office is the annual 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Islands Economic Cooperation Forum, which is itself a part of the Boao Forum for Asia. This year, the 2021 Forum was held on April 15th and focused on the theme of promoting the building of ocean communities with a shared future. As in past years, the Forum invited senior-level government officials, scholars, non-governmental representatives, and senior executives from the private sector to participate. To protect the public health of attendees and the local Hainan population, this year’s Forum once again adopted a hybrid format, with presentations made face-to-face and by video. The session was introduced and moderated by the Ambassador of Malta to China, Mr. John Aquilina. Mr. Aquilina welcomed those attending and stated that the session would include a video, several keynote speeches, short presentations by panelists, and announcements on new initiatives.

The video celebrated the accomplishments of this Forum over the past five years. In addition to these annual meetings, which serve as a regular benchmark for progress, successes include workshops, conferences, and publications. Two of the keynotes were delivered in person, one by the Governor of Hainan Province, Mr. Feng Fei, and a second by a representative of Mr. Wu Jianghai, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for China. Two keynotes were also shown by video technology; one by Mr. Tearii Te Moana Alpha, who at the time of the Forum was the Vice President of French Polynesia and Minister of Agriculture, the Blue Economy and Domain, and the second by Ms. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Board Member of the Boao Forum for Asia and a former President of the

Philippines. In Mr. Wu's remarks, he commended the organizers for twenty years of hosting the Boao Forum and congratulated them on the fifth anniversary of the Islands Economic Cooperation Forum. He indicated that mutual trust and respect has brought about the creation and growth of the free trade port on Hainan and recognition that Hainan serves as the pivot for the Maritime Silk Roads (MSR) initiative.

Hainan's **Governor Feng Fei** reminded those attending the Forum what all islanders know: that the ocean does not separate us — it connects us. He expounded on the success of the free trade port where, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of new companies has doubled in the past year. He proposed four new initiatives to guide Hainan's future in the MSR initiative: 1) expand the free trade port; 2) expand industrial partnerships within Hainan and, as part of the global value chains, with other global partners; 3) protect the ocean environments; and 4) build international collaboration in establishing Hainan as a global hub in island studies research.

The virtual appearance by Mr. Alpha as a keynote speaker is a testament to the importance the organizers feel about including the voices from subnational island jurisdictions such as French Polynesia. Island states are critical partners in the MSR initiative but so too are semi-autonomous islands. **Vice President Alpha** reminded those present that many islanders, and especially those in the Pacific, prefer to think of their countries as “large ocean states” rather than the more conventional term of “small island states.” This preference in terminology is in part symbolic, but also reflects the sheer magnitude of the marine areas for which many of these jurisdictions have responsibility — in many cases larger than that of continents. In French Polynesia, this is reflected in a popular saying that “the Earth is blue.” The greatest challenge facing French Polynesia, together with their metropole France, is to reconcile two imperatives: to safeguard the physical environment and to develop the economy. He reminded us that protecting the environment does not necessarily mean forgoing economic opportunities. To illustrate his point, he noted that French Polynesia has taken on new initiatives, including expanding the concept of ‘blue health’ (i.e., deriving public health advances from marine resources) and creating a hub for international fisheries in the South Central Pacific. In her statement, **former President Gloria Arroyo** stressed the role that the Philippines has played in peacefully settling governance disputes in the South China Sea and in fisheries. She reminded everyone that, although humans may establish national marine boundaries, fish do not recognize these boundaries. Therefore, we must put in place processes that mobilize our expertise and promote cooperation across borders.

After these keynotes, the moderator asked the panelists, two of whom made their presentations by video, to come to the front of the room and give short statements on one or more of the topics of island governance, the marine economy, marine environmental protection, and/or ocean cooperation between China and ASEAN nations. **Mr. Djauhari Oratmangun**, the Ambassador of Indonesia to China, noted that Indonesia

is an archipelagic nation, with at least 6,000 inhabited islands. He reminded us that Indonesia established the Archipelagic and Island States Forum in 2017 to address climate change and marine issues in light of SDG 14 (*conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development*). He pointed to one specific example where China and Indonesia have cooperated in bringing together the Belt and Road Initiative with Indonesia’s Global Maritime Fulcrum initiative to expand the digital economy. **Dr. Palitha T. B. Kohona**, the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to China, reminded all present that we are surrounded by the sea and it has conditioned us for centuries. Sri Lanka was long considered an entrepôt or trading centre throughout the Indian Ocean region and beyond, a role that Hainan is striving to establish for itself now as a hub in the MSR initiative.

As the UNESCO Chair in Island Studies and Sustainability, Prince Edward Island’s **Dr. James Randall** reminded us of the difference between government and governance, where the latter term encompasses a much larger group of stakeholders. He noted that it may be easy to make laws but, if you really want them to be effective, you need to have all parties participating right from the planning stage. He ended his video presentation by calling for action in four areas: more and better data on which to base our policies and strategies (especially for semi-autonomous islands); create and strengthen mechanisms for islanders’ voices to be heard, in addition to involving leaders of island states; reach out to leaders of both island states and SNIJs; and “island proof” your legislation to ensure that islands are not marginalized in national policy discussions. The President of the Pacific–China Friendship Association, **Mr. Hiria Ottino**, also spoke to the issue of island governance by video. Given the highly dispersed and diverse islands in the Pacific, the greatest challenge facing them is governance, and in particular whether to centralize or disperse the delivery of public services. Either choice has its advantages and disadvantages. He told the Forum that island nations need to be open economically, but to also be cautious that this openness does not significantly damage local employment opportunities. This theme of economic and trade openness is taken up later in this Report in the chapter by Carmichael and Jia.

Finally, the Deputy Director-General of the Island Research Center at China’s Ministry of Natural Resources, **Mr. Feng Aiping**, reminded us of the importance of cooperation in protecting island coastal ecosystems. Island communities and their physical environments are more resilient and creative when local communities guide the process in their own backyards. Up to 2018, using the ecological red line policy, China’s central and local governments have invested more than 10 billion yuan to restore the ecologies of 3,000 coastal islands.

The 2021 Islands Economic Cooperation Forum ended with two exciting announcements. The first announcement, made by video by Dr. Randall, was that Hainan was about to establish its own Island Research Centre. Based on consultations with international experts, this new think tank would be both local and global in scope, would

focus on issues that are critical to the development of Hainan and that have international relevance, and would have both Chinese and international partners. One of the advantages held by Hainan in this initiative is the foundational role played by these Forums which, from the start, have emphasized the importance of bringing together island scholars, government departments, non-governmental organizations, and executives of private sector corporations in resolving sustainable island development issues. The second announcement, made by Mr. Wang Sheng, the Director-General of the Foreign Affairs Office of Hainan Province, was the release of the *2020 Annual Report on Global Islands*. As noted above, this volume provided new peer-reviewed research from Chinese and international experts on island development during the COVID-19 public health crisis.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

As with previous editions of the Annual Reports, this Report is divided into three sections: a) an initial background that summarizes the 2021 Islands Economic Cooperation Forum and provides an overview of the chapters in this volume, and a chapter which updates and interprets the development statistics of the island states and subnational islands that are part of this research; b) several chapters that address aspects of island development, in this case pertaining to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals; and c) chapters that focus on environmental protection, trade, and tourism.

Two years into the COVID-19 pandemic is an opportune time to discuss the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Not only should we take stock of progress towards achieving these 17 goals as we approach the 2030 deadline, but the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted many jurisdictions to reassess their progress in meeting their development goals. In some cases, progress has stalled or worsened, making islands even more vulnerable to crises. In other cases, island governments have become more proactive, investing in policies and actions that will bring them closer to meeting the SDGs while also making them more resilient to the next public health crisis, economic dislocation, or the existential threat posed by global warming.

Chapter 1 (Randall and Su) carries on the tradition of compiling and interpreting the most recent development statistics for a set of 48 island states and 13 island territories. As with previous editions of the Annual Report, this narrative goes beyond describing the patterns in the tables. It introduces the most recent peer-reviewed literature on the topic and, where applicable, focuses on explaining islands that appear to be anomalous when analyzing some of the characteristics. It also takes a longer time frame, often showing how islands have changed over the past five to ten years. An indicator of the usefulness of these statistics is that several of the contributors to this volume have used the statistical profiles from previous editions of the Annual Reports to argue their positions.

In Chapter 2, Mohan provides us with an overview of the progress islands have made in addressing the SDGs, especially during the most recent two years. Focusing on island states and subnational islands that are part of earlier Annual Reports, the author uses indicators of SDG progress developed by Sachs and colleagues (2020, 2021) and compares these to the SDG reports produced by island governments, and especially their Voluntary National Reviews. In so doing, Mohan measures their actual progress against their rhetoric. Overall, islands have made more substantial progress on the SDGs related to education (SDG 4), clean energy (SDG 7), and climate action (SDG 13), and less progress on eliminating poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), and improving health (SDG 3). Given that all of these places are islands, most disconcerting is that the greatest challenges are related to SDG 14 (*life below water*) and SDG 15 (*life on land*). It should come as no surprise that islands within the developed world have made more substantial progress at meeting the SDGs than those in the developing world. Based on several case studies, Mohan concludes that there is great potential for islands to make progress in the areas of green energy, the blue economy, and digital transformation.

Chapters 3 and 4 reflect on specific SDGs in relation to island development. The chapter by Moncada and Randall (Chapter 3) addresses what some research suggests is a critical component to achieving the SDGs: the relationship between island residents' perceptions regarding how well their governments have addressed the SDGs versus the actual actions taken. The chapter also explores the influence of other factors in this relationship, including wealth, population size, and political independence. One finding is that there is a much closer association between perceptions and government actions in small island states than in SNIJs. Wang Sheng (Chapter 4) focuses on two SDGs that are indispensable to the security and development of islands: SDG 13 (*climate change*) and SDG 14 (*life below water*). Using examples from China, and as a way for jurisdictions to achieve carbon neutrality, the chapter encourages a blue carbon sustainable development focus for island and mainland governments. This includes the development of carbon sinks in industrial sectors such as the fisheries, and injecting a blue carbon focus on financing and marketing.

Chapter 5 (Sindico) continues the theme of examining carbon neutrality, starting with the context of small islands and then using the lessons learnt to apply successful policies elsewhere. Sindico outlines how influential islands have already been in shaping the global climate change debate, including at the 2021 COP26 meetings in Glasgow, Scotland. The chapter lays out the rationale for this attention, including the perils that many islands face with rising sea levels and more intense weather events, as well as challenges facing islands in implementing and monitoring the success of island net zero pathways. The author uses the example of the Scottish archipelagos to illustrate those successes and challenges.

In Chapter 6, Carmichael and Jia question the accuracy of the neoliberal contention that trade liberalization, in the form of trade agreements that reduce tariff barriers,

automatically leads to economic growth for all participating countries. Using a forty-year data set (1970–2010) from thirteen Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific, they conclude that being a party to global trade agreements such as membership in the World Trade Organization did not necessarily lead to economic development for those islands. Participating in regional trade agreements, however, was much more likely to benefit SIDS economically.

Islands have been challenged with developing creative ways to protect the environment while not losing the economic benefits associated with international tourism. It is apparent that regulation alone may not achieve the desired goals. In Chapter 7, Graci shows that there are many examples where islands have effectively used non-regulatory tools to preserve vulnerable ecosystems, despite the pressures of tourism. The chapter concludes that one of the keys to success is to ensure that local communities are active participants in developing, implementing, and enforcing the strategies. This results in approaches that fit local contexts and are overseen by local stakeholders.

Finally, in Chapter 8, Zhen argues that the environmental planning established in Hainan, and especially around the Hainan Free Trade Port, has made Hainan an exemplar for other islands dealing with the issue of preserving fragile ecosystems while still engaging in development. The author uses the examples of the endangered Hainan gibbon, coral reefs on the south shore of the island, and ecotourism in Hainan's Bawangling National Forest Park to illustrate the argument.

REFERENCES

- Carmichael, C., & Jia, G. (2022). Economic growth through trade liberalization for Small Island Developing States in the Pacific: Regionalism versus globalization. In J. E. Randall (Ed.), *Annual report on global islands 2021* (pp. 153-169). Island Studies Press.
- Graci, S. (2022). Exploring the use of environmental instruments as a method to promote sustainable tourism in islands. In J. E. Randall (Ed.), *Annual report on global islands 2021* (pp. 171-198). Island Studies Press.
- Mohan, P. (2022). Islands and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A holistic perspective. In J. E. Randall (Ed.), *Annual report on global islands 2021* (pp. 61-83). Island Studies Press.
- Sachs, J., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., & Woelm, F. (2021). *Sustainable development report 2021: The decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., & Lafortune, G. (2020). *Speaking truth to power about the Sustainable Development Goals* [Working paper]. United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).
- Sindico, F. (2022). Islands, climate change, and net zero. In J. E. Randall (Ed.), *Annual report on global islands 2021* (pp. 125-152). Island Studies Press.