

## Glasgow COP26, Wednesday 10th November:

The Commonwealth Secretariat Ministerial Meeting on Mangroves with the Secretary General.

The ministerial meeting was hosted by the Rotary International (RI) on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November at the Commonwealth Secretariat Pavilion. This was a private and invitation only event that was not livestreamed for the public. It built on earlier discussions on mangrove protection and restoration leading up to and including COP 26 with ministers and representatives from many countries and environment groups gathered to share critical lessons with RI proposing generous funding. Ministers were given the opportunity to speak openly and frankly to guarantee future action and funding offered by the International Rotary Club would be appropriate and effective. The meeting was instructive for CHEC's current UK PACT application which includes restoration of mangroves in Nigeria.

**The Commonwealth Secretary General Baroness Scotland reminded everyone** mangroves in 42 Commonwealth countries were crucial in nature's battle with climate change and rising oceans. She explained action was needed to reverse a loss of mangroves due to climate change. The Rotary International president Shekhar Mehta spoke of how he had seen first-hand in the 2004 tsunami the devastation to land and lives that would not have been so severe if mangroves had been protected. "The sea is washing away the coastline because mangroves have gone," said Mr Mehta. "We are losing our eco-system. Once mangroves die, our marine system and coastal communities will be lost."

The meeting was notable for its highly engaged and dynamic discussion. It was clear each minister was deeply concerned and on board with the aim to reach agreement on a plan of action. It was remarkable and reassuring to see the passion, clarity and knowledge of each minister when it came to their opportunity to speak. This was not ministers reading dryly from scripts or box ticking. On the contrary these ministers each understood not only why mangroves were vital to their country, they knew exactly how much had been lost, the impact on lives and livelihoods, and urgency to do something about it. It became clear as the discussion continued, the ministers had experience with which mangrove restoration projects worked and which didn't. They agreed the restoration of mangroves led by local communities was the best plan, and most importantly the projects had to include a livelihoods component. Each minister and representatives provided examples of how local communities needed encouragement and would appreciate the restoration of mangroves, and do the work if they knew their livelihood benefited directly. **Remarkably many of the ministers referred to beekeeping combined with the restoration of mangroves as a proposed restoration/livelihood action plan formula.**

Mr Mehta pledged that the Rotary International would support projects to restore mangroves and work with local coastal communities in eight countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kenya, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Seychelles and Tanzania. The final moments concluded with the ministers and representatives agreeing the work would begin immediately on the projects and agreed to continue meeting to continue their discussion regularly to review and guide the progress. Worth noting one of those invited to the ministerial meeting was Dr Thomas Worthington whose work is to globally map mangroves. He is based at the university of Cambridge department of zoology. He is very approachable and may possibly be of assistance if the proposed CHEC Nigeria project goes ahead with UK PACT funding. The evening reception provided an opportunity to meet a few of the ministers and those who attended the ministerial meeting and speak to the host Judith who had invited CHEC members to attend.

There was a lot to learn from UK Blue Ventures, <https://blueventures.org/> the NGO championed and present at the ministerial meeting for their expertise on community led fisheries programmes which is now piloting two projects on mangrove restoration and management funded by the UK government. They describe themselves as "We're working to restore the world's oceans and improve the livelihoods of traditional fishing communities." They have paid staff of 30+ and currently they do not work in Nigeria.

## **Background - Blue Ventures** - The Blue Forest community led mangrove restoration and management programme

Earlier in the week at the Commonwealth Secretariat Pavilion on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, UK's chief scientific advisor, at DEFRA, Professor Gideon Henderson had thanked **Blue Ventures** who organised the event explaining the long relationship between UK and Blue Ventures funding their programme across many sectors of the ocean. He referenced an earlier **Blue Finance Roundtable** with the Ocean risk and resilience action alliance on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November how private public and civil partnerships are working together. The Blue Finance Roundtable focused on increasing the resilience of developing countries coastal communities repeating the themes of adaption, protecting biodiversity, the fact that mangroves absorb more carbon than rainforests by area and supporting coastal community's livelihoods and support fisheries. He then returned to the current meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> of November hosted by Blue Ventures listing the examples of what contributes to the loss of 30 - 50% of mangroves. **Then Professor Gideon announced a commitment to action for Blue Carbon Habitats and investing £10 million to Blue Ventures specifically for their "Blue Forest" pilot programme" with community led mangroves in Madagascar and Indonesia with the hope to replicate this work on mangroves restoration and management in other parts of the world.**

### **Suggestions:**

As mentioned earlier currently Blue Ventures is not working in Nigeria but it might be worth CHEC Nigeria team to review the Blue Ventures model of community-led mangrove restoration and livelihoods, and synergy with the proposed CHEC Nigeria efforts so that if the Blue Ventures "Blue Forest" mangrove pilot programme is successful and replicated, CHEC Nigeria team will already have a head start and might be approached for a future partnership further down the line with even more funding. Likewise, it would be worth exploring the combined Beekeeping and mangrove restoration and livelihood projects endorsed by many of the Ministers given the fact CHEC has in-depth experience, lessons learned, exploring beekeeping training project for livelihoods and food security. Jane Samuels discussed the beekeeping component of combing livelihoods with mangroves with Judith Diment. It would be worth exploring if RI funding would be available in the future for this added component for the CHEC Nigeria project.

### **Important links**

Blue carbon meeting hosted by Blue Ventures focusing on mangroves Commonwealth Secretariat Pavilion on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November with the DEFRA chief scientist hosted by Blue Ventures on mangroves

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HclSowcHwCO> – at 34:50

Press release from the Rotary Club <https://www.rotary.org/en/ri-president-shekhar-mehta-urges-countries-at-cop26-to-protect-mangroves> explaining their funding programme for mangroves.

**Useful Contacts** from the 10<sup>th</sup> of November Commonwealth Secretariat Pavilion ministerial meeting for CHEC's UK PACT project on mangroves - Judith Diment, dean of the Rotary Representative Network, which comprises 32 unofficial ambassadors to the UN and other international organizations; Rotary International President Shekhar Mehta; Dr Thomas Worthington research assistant for Mapping Global Mangroves at Cambridge University; Blue Ventures field manager Will Stephens, Director of Field Programmes