Commonwealth
Secretariat Publication
Launch: Discussion Paper
on the Potential for Earth
Observation Technologies
to Improve Access to
Climate Finance

Meeting Summary

7 June 2021



The Commonwealth Secretariat Publication Launch

Discussion Paper on the Potential for Earth Observation Technologies to Improve Access to Climate Finance

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June 2021





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Background

Climate-vulnerable commonwealth member countries face challenges accessing climate finance to implement climate action. Some of the barriers in drawing down funding include constrained human resources, demanding application processes and a lack of data to support a robust investment case. Therefore, accurate, reliable and timely data is critical in justifying the type of climate action needed, when and why.

In light of this, the Commonwealth Secretariat is implementing the CommonSensing Project, an innovative project based on a partnership between Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and a consortium of international partners¹; to provide actionable satellite-based information services and data around disaster and climate risks to inform planning, climate action and increased access to climate finance. The Commonwealth Secretariat through its flagship programme, the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub (CCFAH) is spearheading the climate finance component of the CommonSensing Project. The Commonwealth National Climate Finance Advisers (CNFAs) for Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are providing technical assistance to the three countries in utilising the geospatial based CommonSensing platform for enhanced access to climate finance.

As part of the work under the CommonSensing Project, the Commonwealth has published a new Discussion Paper entitled, 'Earth observation technologies for improved access to climate finance: The role of data and information in designing bankable projects and decision making'. The paper showcases how earth observation technologies and data has a role to play in strengthening the evidence base and rational for climate investments.

It is against this background that the Commonwealth Secretariat hosted an event on Monday 7th June 2021, to launch this knowledge product under the aegis of the CommonSensing Project which it is implementing through the CCFAH.

The aims and objectives of the event were to:

- Launch the Discussion Paper to relevant Government representatives, peer organisations, and Commonwealth partners.
- Facilitate discussion on the innovative use of earth observation data as a tool to increase access to climate finance.
- Demonstrate how the CommonSensing Platform and DSS tools can be practically applied to add value to and strengthen Climate Finance Proposals.
- Stimulate conversation and best practice around increased use, replicability and scaling up the use of earth observation data for practical application around access to climate finance, within government institutions outside Pacific region.

The agenda for the meeting is provided in Annex I and the ensuing sections provide the main discussion points by sessions of the launch event.

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¹ The UK Space Agency, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR - UNOSAT), Catapult Satellite Applications, Devex, Met Office, Sensonomic, Spatial Days and the University of Portsmouth.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Dr Ruth Kattumuri, Senior Director, Economic, Youth & Sustainable Development, Commonwealth Secretariat, opened the meeting and welcomed all participants, recognising the response and presence of the major climate funds in the meeting - Adaptation Fund, Climate Investment Funds (CIFs), Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF) thus underscoring the importance of the topic. She emphasised the need for reliable and precise data when dealing with multi-impact scenarios such as a global health pandemic, natural disasters and the impacts of climate change.

Dr Kattumuri stated how timely it is that the CommonSensing Project, which follows a partnership-based approach between Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and a consortium of international partners, is providing actionable satellite-based information services and data around disaster and climate risks to inform planning and climate action including enhanced access to climate finance. She also noted that the Commonwealth National Climate Finance Advisers (CNCFAs) for Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are well placed to take forward the key findings of the Discussion Paper.

Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Commonwealth Secretary-General, in her opening remarks welcomed all participants to the meeting, recognising the presence of Commonwealth High Commissioners, the UNITAR Executive Director and all partners and Commonwealth family. The Secretary General reiterated that mobilising climate finance at scale is not just a pressing priority for small and other vulnerable countries but one of the collective goals for meeting the Paris Agreement as the global community heads to the United Nations Climate Conference (UNFCCC-COP26) this November in Glasgow.

The Secretary General stressed that however, there remains a significant challenge in accessing climate finance, thus the significance of developed countries continuing to honour their commitments and pledges to deliver the finances including assistance required to hasten the flows to intended beneficiaries to adequately deal with the immense task of climate change is crucial. The Secretary-General expounded that the barriers vulnerable developing countries face include a lack of data to underpin a robust investment case and therefore, accurate, reliable and timely data is critical in justifying the type of climate action needed, when and why.

Thus, in recognition of this challenge, the Secretary General stated that the Commonwealth Secretariat is implementing the CommonSensing Project and launching the Discussion Paper which is an outcome of this project. The paper showcases how earth observation technologies and data have a role to play in strengthening the evidence base and rationale for climate investments. She highlighted that the ongoing revision and anticipated implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement was highlighted as a great opportunity to maximise the use of data and evidence provided through such technologies to increase ambition and scale up existing initiatives to spur the world on to a trajectory of achieving global climate targets.

The Secretary General emphasised the spirit of cooperation and partnership as especially important in the midst of the current global issues and commended member states and the wider Commonwealth family in this regard, encouraging them to continue cooperating and supporting one another to connect, innovate and transform to deliver a common and sustainable future. In this light, she gave assurance of the Commonwealth Secretariat's commitment in utilising its successful delivery platforms such as the CCFAH, which has

already supported member states to mobilise USD 42.71 million of climate finance, to assist the most at-risk Commonwealth nations together with partnerships such as the IPP CommonSensing Project to build resilience and strive towards their climate priorities.

The Secretary General concluded her remarks by calling upon all partners and stakeholders to continue the conversation initiated at the event and join the Commonwealth Secretariat in establishing best practice around increased use, replicability and scaling up the use of earth observation data for practical application around access to climate finance, within government institutions across the Commonwealth.

Mr Nikhil Seth, Assistant UN Secretary General and Executive Director, UNITAR, commenced his remarks by stressing the importance of collaboration and partnership to tackle global issues and how through such models of operations more can be done in this field. He stated that unlocking finance and technology cooperation has been a longstanding issue throughout international negotiations, particularly for small and vulnerable countries, hence the themes presented in the discussion paper were very relevant as there is an urgent need to provide justification for climate funding and EO data enables this to be done through objective, evidence based information. The access to such and the approval of project pipelines may often be the only way vulnerable countries will meet their nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

The Executive Director of UNITAR noted that amongst the lessons that had been learned by CommonSensing Consortium members is that EO is well suited to analysis of climate impacts and all pillars of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He recognised the CommonSensing Project provides a set of information products developed closely with governments of Fiji, S.I and Vanuatu so decision makers and technical staff have access to state-of-the-art data products with emphasis was placed on leveraging this technology to build resilience.

Mr. Seth acknowledged the work done by CCFAH as key in documenting a repertoire of good practice and setting the gold standard for leveraging EO data for accessing climate finance. In conclusion, the Executive Director further called for this area of work being undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretariat and consortium partners in developing bankable climate finance project proposals for small and other vulnerable states to be made available to all countries.

H.E, Mr. Jitoko Tikolevu, High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Fiji High Commission begun his intervention by thanking and acknowledging the Commonwealth Secretariat and CommonSensing project for the support to Fiji and Pacific Islands. He stated that the intensifying impacts of climate change pose an urgent and grave threat to Fiji's development ambitions; however, despite these vulnerabilities, Fiji is a critical voice in global climate discussions, providing climate leadership. In the run up to UNFCCC-COP26 Fiji is working with the UK presidency on the Adaptation Action Coalition and the Task Force on Access to Climate Finance. His Excellency stressed that accessing climate finance is a significant undertaking for countries such as Fiji with limited capacity hence obtaining the required information and data is difficult.

Thus, assistance from programmes such as CCFAH and CommonSensing contribute towards addressing these challenges. The CNCFA embedded in the Ministry of Economy, is working on the CommonSensing platform, using satellite remote sensing technology and Earth Observation data to feed into climate finance proposals and make them more evidence based. Additionally, the CNCFA is also working alongside the Climate Change and

International Cooperation Division, to establish a Project Development Unit (PDU) for enhanced access to and effective use of climate finance under the broader ambit of SDGs, there by contributing towards institutionalising the CommonSensing initiative.

To conclude His Excellency reiterated The Fijian government's endorsement of the work of CCFAH as an effective platform to enhance climate action in member countries and commitment to full and continued support, as reflected in acceptance of Fiji to participate as a member of the CCFAH steering committee.

H.E Mr. Moses Kouni Mose, Solomon Islands Ambassador, to the Kingdom of Belgium and the European Union, in his opening remarks, thanked all present and offered deep appreciation for inclusion of Solomon Islands in the CommonSensing Project. The Ambassador noted that a big challenge for small states and Least Developing Countries (LDCs) is limited capacity on the ground to prepare concept notes and bankable proposals to access finance for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The CommonSensing Project is therefore assisting Solomon Islands build capacity in accessing real time technical data on impact of climate change to aid in decision making and development of bankable proposals. The platform complements existing assessment tools such as the Integrated Vulnerability Assessment Tool used by the Climate Change Division in the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology.

Ambassador Mose therefore thanked the UKSA International Partnership Project (IPP) for funding provided to enable implementation of the CommonSensing project, further calling for and recommending project extension to ensure sustainability maintenance of platform and capacity building support. In closing, the Ambassador additionally recommended continued stakeholder engagement and awareness raising on the use of the CommonSensing tool to add value to sectoral adaptation planning and collaboration to avoid duplication in any potential scaling up activities.

Mr. Mike Waiwai, Director, Department Climate Change, Vanuatu, opened by acknowledging and thanking all for the opportunity to speak. Mr Waiwai pointed out that Vanuatu's vulnerability to impacts of climate change remains a constant frontline battle to build resilience. Thus, Vanuatu has specific need for increased access to climate finance as there are a myriad of adaptation actions that need to be implemented but there is limited climate finance support. The importance of data to support access to funding was therefore evident and could not be stressed enough.

Mr Waiwai thanked the Commonwealth Secretariat and CommonSensing Partners for support through the placement of the Commonwealth National Climate Finance Adviser for Vanuatu in the Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation which fulfilled the closing of a huge gap. He mentioned that the Adviser is supporting the development of Vanuatu's enhanced NDC, human and institutional capacity development, together with sourcing, baseline data to inform concept and proposal development. He outlined how the support provided through CCFAH and the CommonSensing project were aligned to Vanuatu's national priorities and SDG plans; and that going forward Vanuatu has began putting into practice themes of the Discussion Paper, by working on using data to inform initiatives to access climate finance and implement Disaster Risk Management (DRM). In conclusion, Mr Waiwai affirmed Vanuatu's call for continued support through CCFAH and the CommonSensing Project to ensure much needed institutional support to increase finance required to build resilience of Vanuatu's communities.

Presentation of Discussion Paper

Ms Sharon Ngetich, Climate Change Officer, Commonwealth Secretariat presented an overview of the Discussion Paper entitled 'Earth observation technologies for improved access to climate finance: The role of data and information in designing bankable projects and decision making', commencing with a brief introduction as to why the Commonwealth Secretariat published the paper. Ms. Ngetich stated that the Discussion Paper was initiated in recognition of the issues countries face in accessing climate finance especially small and climate vulnerable Commonwealth Member states. Thus, the Discussion paper proposes the use of earth observation (EO) data, information and applications as a means to enhance the development of robust climate finance proposals and enable better access to climate finance streams. She pointed out that there was significant scope to improve access to and use of EO data in accessing climate finance beyond its traditional use mainly in the insurance sector for parametric insurance products.

Ms. Ngetich cited lack of adequate data and information as a challenge in development of project concept notes and proposals submitted to the major funds where strong justification and evidenced rationale is required for approving project proposals. Hence, she outlined that this is where EO data and information has a strong role to play, at various stages throughout the project cycle to enhance the evidence based of a climate finance proposal.

She reiterated how EO data can aid to demonstrate climate rationale in a proposed intervention, significantly strengthening this essential component of 'bankability' by calculating baselines and reference conditions, and measuring the direction and rate of change for key project variables. She stated EO data is also beneficial for decision making as it provides accurate actionable information and can monitor change over time, hence is invaluable in disaster risk preparedness and response, and how this was evidenced in the recent Tropical Cyclone Harold that hit the Pacific in 2020. Ms. Ngetich's presentation concluded by noting that EO technology and related applications are most effective when applied alongside other interventions and there is a great need to leverage use this technology through capacity building interventions. Consequently, initiatives such as CCFAH aim to look holistically at the climate finance challenge, providing human and institutional capacity building and successful project development utilising evidence and data.

Importance of Data and Evidence for Strengthened Bankable Climate Finance Projects and Proposals

In the first of two discussion panels, four major climate funds, namely the GEF, Independent Evaluation Unit of the GCF, CIFs and Adaptation Fund gave their perspectives on the significance of data and evidence in development of successful climate finance applications.

Mr. Tshewang Dorji, Climate Change Specialist, Programs Unit, GEF provided an overview of the Climate Rationale for Adaptation Projects submitted to GEF LDCF/SCCF funds. He summarised the basic elements of climate change adaptation project design where evidence and data are most critical in development of a successful proposal as namely:

- Climate hazards: presentation of 2 to 3 scenarios considering both trends and variability or hazards (including consideration of exposure).
- Climate impacts: evidencing types and scale of impacts from the stated hazards (including consideration of sensitivity).

- Project interventions: addressing how intervention will impact on the target population, considering cost-benefits and financial/physical sustainability (including considerations of adaptive capacity)
- · Results, monitoring and evaluation.

Mr. Archi Rastogi, Evaluation Specialist, IEU-GCF, focused his intervention on the outcome of the Independent Evaluation of the Relevance and Effectiveness of GCF Investments in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). He reiterated that SIDS have limited access to historical and baseline data, especially for less populated islands and regions and for slow onset events, which creates a limitation in preparing project proposals and this is compounded by capacity constraints. Thus, he reported that amongst the recommendations arising from the IEU SIDS Evaluation carried out in 2020 was that the GCF address concerns about data inaccessibility becoming a temporary delay or complete barrier for GCF projects. The issue of conducting evaluations in the face of data scarcity amidst the challenges and opportunities of the Covid-19 pandemic was also highlighted.

Dr. Xianfu Lu, Senior Strategy and Outreach Specialist, CIFs, centred her intervention on data and evidence as fundamentals for effective climate action. she gave a brief introduction to the CIFs and how through its unique business model it had supported the development of 74 investment plans, approved over 300 projects in 72 countries across four programme areas. Dr. Lu underscored the critical role of data and evidence in the CIFs project cycle, noting it's importance in project initiation (diagnosing issues and identifying needs & priorities), project design (informing the design of investment), project implementation (delivering low-carbon and climate resilience solutions) and monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Saliha Dobardzic Senior Climate Change Specialist, Adaptation Fund, expounded on the importance of data and evidence in the proposals the Adaptation Fund finances. All projects supported by the Adaptation Fund require a solid innovative design and strong evidence basis for action. Spatial information is crucial to projects with a significant amount of information underpinning proposals derived from remotely sensed data earth observation systems, this is especially true for projects in data sparse regions. The Fund's projects aim to increase resilience of the target communities by decreasing their vulnerabilities or moderate the hazard or reduce exposure all of which require sound data that can help accurately assess the risks from climate change. Futhermore, data is required in order present project requirements such as a comprehensive picture of the change in climatic conditions, specific about the target area and its characteristics and a detailed description about intervention and its desired effect. The availability and quality of data was also emphasised for project design as it informs level of sophistication of intervention.

Practical Application of Earth Observation and Geospatial Data Solutions in Climate Finance Proposals and Projects

In the second panel discussion, panellists focused on demonstrating the practical application of various tools, data and information in the development of climate finance applications.

Mr. Richard Oates, Director of Spatial Days Ltd, Solution Architect and Technical Manager for the IPP CommonSensing Project, provided a brief overview of the CommonSensing Platform which has been developed to provide geospatial and climate data and decision-support tools for Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. The Platform provides relevant data such as climate models, elevation zones, slope classes and Analysis Ready Data (ARD). Data can be explored and utilised using various tools such as ESRI Enterprise Portal for Fiji, Open-Source Data Cube and other Applications. He reiterated how CommonSensing data and tools could be applied to various stages in a climate finance funding proposal and subsequent project implementation and monitoring.

Ms. Katherine Cooke, Commonwealth National Climate Finance Adviser to Fiji provided an overview of the CCFAH and distinguishing features including the Hub and Spokes model. Ms Cooke who is embedded in the Ministry of Economy, Fiji, provides technical assistance specifically using satellite remote sensing technology and EO data to feed into climate finance proposals thus making them more evidence based and robust. She highlighted that one of the initiatives that was underway to move practical application forward was the development of a Climate Finance Write-Shop training which will include the practical use of the CommonSensing platform. She said the training will utilise Utilise the CommonSensing platform to assess and add value to live proposals and concepts identified in the GCF country programme.

Ms. Cooke described her role in leading on the development of architecture and structure for the establishment of Project Development Unit in the Climate Change and International Cooperation Division of the Ministry of Economy. She stated the main goal of the PDU will be to mobilise and increase access to domestic and international finance, by acting as a coordination function to effectively utilise sector-specific data to develop robust, evidence based climate finance proposals. The CommonSensing platform will be anchored within the PDU to utilise satellite remote sensing technology and EO to provide meet some of these data requirements.

Ms. Lebaiatelaite Gaunavinaka, In-country Representative for UNITAR-UNOSAT in Fiji was able to practically demonstrate how EO tools and applications were supporting decision making during Tropical Cyclones Harold and Yasa respectively, where UNITAR-UNOSAT triggered rapid mapping and damage assessments. She presented on how she had also conducted user trainings on the CommonSensing platform and open data EO and Geo-spatial Information Technologies.

Interactive Discussion - Key Points

The following key points were discussed by the panellists during the interactive discussion /question and answer session:

- Availability of enabling funds under GEF to improve EO systems in countries to then support them in utilising derived data and evidence for climate finance proposals. It was reported that GEF does provide project grants as determined by country priorities. Particular support on this would not be part of enabling activities therefore a country would demonstrate this need (an EO focused project) as part of the wider context of adaptation. The GCF also has a project preparation facility that supports the development of project proposals that will later be considered by the GCF. Similarly, the CIFs have a sizeable project preparation fund to assist countries in the development of regional investment projects once the overall investment plan is in place.
- How other regional initiatives can leverage opportunities to create stronger synergies to support developing countries in using space science to complement risk mapping and modelling to build climate resilience in local communities.
 It was noted that GEF Challenge Programme for Adaptation Innovation has funded regional projects that utilise space technologies to build climate resilience in communities, for instance a recent drone project in Columbia therefore, regional initiatives may submit applications following a call for proposals.
- Additional data sets aside from geo-spatial data that are highly required and possibility of support from funds to collate data sets that are required for climate finance proposals.
 - There are various data sets available that would add value to climate finance proposals for instance the Climate change knowledge portal of the World Bank and the ND-GAIN (Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative) Index datasets. The CommonSensing Platform has incorporated various data sets in one place such as World Bank, PacGeo, UNEA, JAXA etc. The Commonwealth National Climate Finance Advisers in the partner countries would explore available data sets further.
- Feasibility of utilising extrapolated data and indicators going forward to resolve prominent problem of lack of data amongst SIDs countries.
 - The IEU-GCF outlined that in their recent SIDS evaluation, it was especially challenging to obtain data on SIDS in reviewed literature thus leaving the onus for production of data and feasibility studies passed on to countries. Consequently the IEU recommended to the GCF the option of utilising extrapolated data from other sources e.g Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports to address this data challenge. It was pointed out that this has not been tested or put into practice as a way forward but that the recommendation has been made.

Main Outcomes

The following key outcomes including way forward were noted:

- EO has a strong role to play in strengthening the climate rational and justification for climate finance proposals by providing accurate and timely data and evidence to substantiate climate action.
- EO technology and related applications are most effective when applied alongside other interventions hence the need to leverage increased use of this technology through capacity building interventions such as those provided under the CommonSensing Project and CCFAH.
- The Commonwealth Member States Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu
 acknowledged the support from CCFAH and its delivery of the CommonSensing
 Project along with partners, as adding value and supporting them in meeting their
 national climate priorities. The three countries are fully committed to achieving
 their climate targets and call for the continued support through these initiatives.
- The Commonwealth Secretariat will progress work in this space, through CCFAH
 and the Commonwealth Climate Finance Advisers on the ground along with partner
 organisations including the climate finance institutions to establish best practice
 around increased use, replicability and scaling up of the use of earth observation
 data for practical application around access to climate finance across the
 Commonwealth.

ANNEX I: Agenda

Timing (GMT + 1)	Topic and Speakers		
08:30 - 8:35	 Welcome and Introductory Remarks Dr. Ruth Kattumuri, Senior Director, Economic Youth and Sustainable Development Directorate, Commonwealth Secretariat 		
	Session 1 - Context Setting		
08:35 - 8:50	 Opening Remarks: The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary General of the Commonwealth Mr. Nikhil Seth, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, Executive Director, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) H.E, Mr. Jitoko Tikolevu, High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Fiji High Commission H.E Mr. Moses Kouni Mose, Solomon Islands Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium and the European Union, Vanuatu 		
	Mr. Mike Waiwai, Director, Department Climate Change, Vanuatu		
	Session 2 - Discussion Paper Presentation		
08:50 - 09:00	 Presentation of Discussion Paper Ms. Sharon Ng'etich, Climate Change Officer, Commonwealth Secretariat 		
	Session 3 - Panel Discussion Open Plenary and Q&A Moderated by: Mr. Unnikrishnan Nair, Head of Climate Change, Commonwealth Secretariat		
09:00 - 09:20	 Discussants: Panel 1 Importance of Data and Evidence for Strengthened Bankable Climate Finance Projects and Proposals Mr. Tshewang Dorji, Climate Change Specialist, Programs Unit, Global Environment Facility (GEF) Mr. Archi Rastogi, Evaluation Specialist, Evaluation Unit (IEU) of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Dr. Xianfu Lu, Senior Strategy and Outreach Specialist, Climate Investment Funds (CIF) Ms. Saliha Dobardzic, Senior Climate Change Specialist, Adaptation Fund 		
09:20 - 09:45	Moderated Open Plenary and Q&A		
09:45 -10:00	 <u>Discussants: Panel 2</u> Practical Application of Earth Observation and Geospatial Data Solutions in Climate Finance Proposals and Projects Mr. Richard Oates, Technical Architect, Satellite Applications Catapult Ms. Katherine Cooke, Commonwealth National Climate Finance Adviser to Fiji Ms. Lebaiatelaite Gaunavinaka, In-country Representative for UNITAR-UNOSAT 		
10:00 - 10:20	Moderated Open Plenary and Q&A		
10:20 - 10:25	Session 4 - Short Film on CommonSensing		
10:25 - 10:30	Closing Remarks and Way Forward Mr. Einar Bjørgo, Director, Division for Satellite Analysis and Applied Research, UNITAR Dr Ruth Kattumuri, Senior Director, Economic, Youth & Sustainable Development Directorate, Commonwealth Secretariat		
Event Moderator	: Ms. Uzoamaka Nwamarah, Adviser Climate Change, Commonwealth Secretariat		

ANNEX II: Event Photo Collage



The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary General of the Commonwealth



Mr. Nikhil Seth, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, Executive Director, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)



H.E Mr. Moses Kouni Mose, Solomon Islands Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium and the European Union, Vanuatu



H.E, Mr. Jitoko Tikolevu, High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Fiji High Commission



Dr. Ruth Kattumuri, Senior Director, Economic Youth and Sustainable Development Directorate, Commonwealth Secretariat



Mr. Mike Waiwai, Director, Department Climate Change, Vanuatu

ANNEX III: Participant List

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