

CHAPTER 01:

Evolving Mission and Organizational Growth

Our Founding Story

Global Mangrove Trust (GMT) was born in 2018 at Singapore Management University as a collaboration between then post-doctoral researcher Dr. Ryan Merrill and Assistant Professor Dr. Simon Schillebeeckx. Together, the two academics were exploring digital innovations to solve sustainability challenges in Southeast Asia. During a research trip to the Thor Heyerdahl Climate Park in Myanmar, they observed the transformative potential of mangrove conservation to fight climate change, as well as the systemic barriers of scarce financing and limited transparency that hindered the scalability of blue carbon action.

The two academics established GMT to overcome these barriers, chartering the young NGO to serve as a trusted financial intermediary for community-driven mangrove restoration and conservation projects. With a team of university interns, GMT set out to plant one billion mangrove trees with a global community of forestry sponsors. GMT's initial scope evolved rapidly, as the team realized the deep importance of aligning ecological goals with community incentives across the global tropics. This insight became a foundational philosophy: fostering environmental stewardship requires empowering local communities to benefit from conservation. Moreover, given the continuous threat to existing forests, the plant 1B mangrove trees priority was replaced with 'conserve and restore all mangroves on earth'.



Key Turning Points in Mission and Strategy

01 From Financial Transparency to Ecosystem Orchestration

GMT's early experiments with blockchain-based financial tools offered valuable lessons about transparency but revealed broader systemic challenges—specifically, project origination and access to capital. In response, GMT shifted its approach - away from a primary focus on the development of novel tools novel instead of just developing tools and technology, towards the role of an ecosystem orchestrator, GMT reinvented positioned itself as a bridge between financiers, policymakers, reforestation NGOs, and local communities. This shift enabled the organization to address financing gaps more effectively while staying mission-focused.

02 Geographic Shifts and Resilience

Following Myanmar's political upheaval in 2021, GMT demonstrated operational resilience by strategically relocating its operations to Indonesia. This transition led to the development of the **Blue Carbon Corridor Project**, covering thousands of hectares of important yet endangered mangrove forests while integrating community needs and sustainable livelihoods.

03 Integrating Social and Environmental Goals

GMT recognized early on that conservation success depends on addressing socio-economic needs alongside ecological restoration. Programs focused on employment, gender inclusion, and local enterprise development became critical components of GMT's model, balancing environmental priorities with tangible community benefits.

Expanding Partnerships and Collaborations

Collaboration has been the backbone of GMT's success. Early partnerships with technology providers like Zilliqa and Kumi Analytics enabled GMT to integrate tools for monitoring and financial accountability. On the ground, partnerships with organizations like Worldview International Foundation and YAGASU ensured culturally grounded and participatory approaches to conservation.

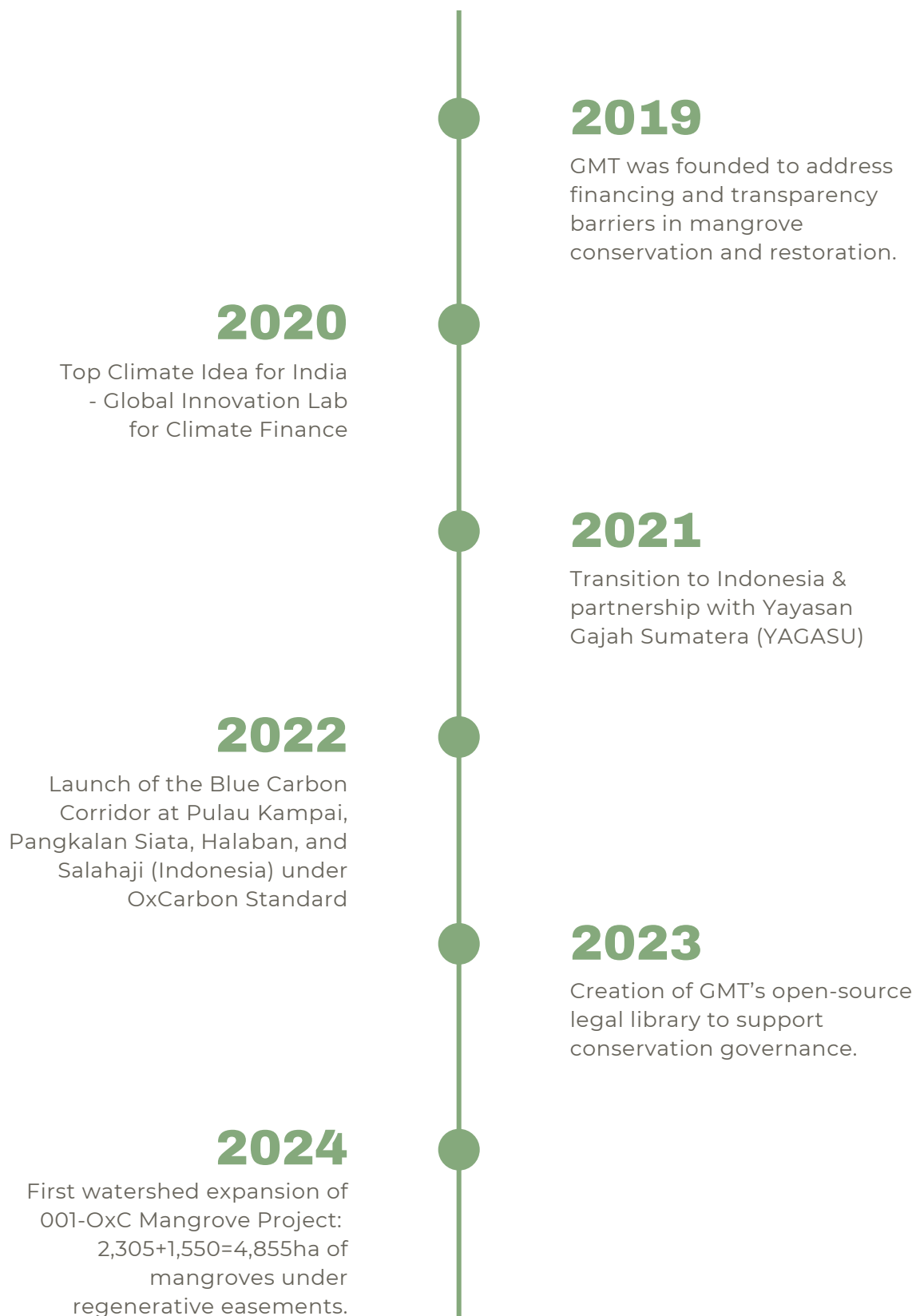
As GMT grew, strategic collaborations with UBS Climate Collective, Marex, and the Climate Policy Initiative bolstered its credibility and access to financing. These partnerships allowed GMT to better align stakeholders from global financiers to local leaders, showcasing the power of coordinated efforts in achieving conservation outcomes. Enthusiastic compliance with Singaporean rules for financial auditing, disclosures, and KYC further advanced the young organization's capabilities as a trusted coordinator of shared climate finance.

Building a Global Team and Organizational Culture

GMT's decision to remain a small organization has been critical to its adaptability. Led by core principles of humility and respect, the team works seamlessly across geographies and disciplines. GMT's team of seven officers span 4 continents, speak a dozen languages, and identify as 42% female. GMT's diverse and agile culture has helped the team overcome challenges, remain innovative, and prioritize service and impact over internal growth.



Significant Milestones in GMT's Mission



Challenges and Lessons Learned

GMT's journey has highlighted the complexity of integrating global ambitions with local realities. Fragmented regulatory environments, limited resources, and competing priorities have all tested GMT's business model and theory of change. However, the team's commitment to listening, adapting, and prioritizing community incentives has proven key to overcoming these barriers.

Staying True to Core Values

In addition to being a mission-driven organization, GMT adheres to a well-fined set of core values. These serve as a guidebook for decision making across tasks, and have proven remarkably resilient through time.



GMT's Core Values

Humility

Humility means acknowledging that everyone has something to teach and something to learn. It recognizes that might does not make right, and the greatest insights often emerge from the least expected places.

Equality

Equality means balance between inputs and outcomes, striving to eliminate favoritism on a systemic level to provide everyone an equal opportunity for success. It involves maintaining fairness in systems that manage risks and extremes, ensuring that outcomes are just and balanced.

Respect

Respect involves self-awareness and self-control, both in how we communicate and act. It extends to managing one's own affairs and engaging with the affairs of others with consideration and thoughtfulness.

Justice

Justice recognizes the existence of injustice—that the most vulnerable often bear undue burdens—and commits to efforts that favor outcomes benefiting the weakest and most disadvantaged members of society.

Kindness

Kindness encompasses empathy and a commitment to recognize and respond to the emotional states of others. It means being generous, extending beyond what is required, and offering heartfelt support or a sincere apology when necessary.

Exploration

Exploration focuses on the continuous search for new solutions and technologies that can improve our ability to work with communities engaged in mangrove conservation and restoration.

GMT's values inform everyday decisions around which the GMT team works. These decisions shape how we deploy slack resources, recruit and retain key staff, and structure our outreach and engagement to stakeholders in the forests and around the world.



"GMT's evolution reflects our commitment to both impact and adaptability. By staying true to our core values while expanding partnerships and integrating social and environmental goals, we are building a stronger, more inclusive foundation for global mangrove conservation."

- Celeste Tan,
GMT Project Analyst



"Every turning in GMT's journey has reinforced a simple truth: real impact comes from staying true to our values, while embracing change. As we advance, we remain grounded in humility, respect, and justice—ensuring growth is not only about regenerating ecosystems scale, but about ever deepening our commitment to the communities we serve."

- Dr. Ryan Merrill,
GMT Executive Secretary