

New REDD+ chief faces game-changing challenges

Maybe yes, maybe no. That was the punch line of a bachelor in an old television commercial. The character was constantly asked about when he planned on getting married. Not wanting to disappoint, this sought-after man about town replied with non-committal promptness: May. Maybe yes, maybe no. Heru Prasetyo, the new head of the REDD+ Management Agency (RMA), used the line when he was asked at a REDD+ forum on Dec. 19 if the agency could be shut down under a new president. The forum marked the end of the preparation phase and the start of the implementation of Indonesia's much touted REDD+ scheme. REDD is reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, Indonesia's big act to address climate change. The plus sign signifies additional action in conservation, growing trees and decreasing poverty.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed the brand new agency into being on Aug. 31 2013. RMA is tasked with implementing the REDD+ national strategy. Human activities that yield unmanaged carbon emissions are a main contributor to global warming that in turn causes climate change. Heru's appointment was only announced on Dec. 20. Uncertainty is one challenge to contend with for the RMA executive-in-charge. However, Heru is no stranger to challenges. The hands-on management master worked in three very trying jobs in the past 10 years that put Indonesia in the global spotlight. After the tsunami of Dec. 26, 2004 that killed 126,000 people in Aceh in the northern part of Sumatra, Heru joined the rehabilitation and reconstruction agency (BRR) in Aceh and Nias. This was the ad hoc agency tasked with managing the province's recovery and reconstruction. In 2009, the BRR completed its mission, disbursing US\$6.7 billion in aid and won worldwide praise for being an astute corruption-free organization that delivered set targets.

Heru then entered the Presidential Working Unit for the Supervision and Management of Development (UKP4) formed in December 2009. One major task was to bring state-funded programs to speed by debottlenecking the bureaucracy. In 2010, the REDD+ Task Force was set up, with Heru also engaged. Able administrator Kuntoro Mangkusubroto headed the BRR, the Presidential Workings Unit and the REDD+ Task Force. Heru served as Kuntoro's right hand in the three assignments. At the BRR, Heru handled relations with donors and NGOs. At UKP4, Heru was deputy I for monitoring and oversight of climate change and sustainable development initiatives. He then helped Kuntoro in the REDD+ Task Force to prepare the groundwork for the RMA.

Francis Seymour, past director general of the Bogor-based Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), acknowledged Heru's managerial forte and international standing. "Pak Heru is a good manager who came into the 'Forestry World' late in his career with no baggage. He does not have loyalties to particular line ministries or advocacy groups and so can serve as an honest broker," said Seymour, now senior adviser to the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. Heru's track record in managerial competence should help him steer the course of the new REDD+ agency through a sea of challenges, both in certain and uncertain waters.

The agency should work across all sectors to coordinate all activities relating to land-use in line with the government's target to lower carbon emissions by 26 to 41 percent, said Dharsono Hartono, president director of PT Rimba Makmur Utama. Further, the agency's stakeholders committee, which functions to advise the agency, should involve The Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KADIN), as a private sector partner.

The Committee should be independent and apply good management and transparency principles, Dharsono urged. He has proposed a 200,000 hectare REDD+ conservation project in Central Kalimantan, a major carbon emitter. Final approval from the Forestry Ministry is still pending. Cut Risma Aini, a women's rights leader in Aceh, said one challenge of the agency was to ensure that REDD+ information reached the rural community level, particularly women's groups. For the stakeholders committee to function effectively, it must work down to the village government level.

Women's empowerment agencies at the provincial and district levels must understand climate projects, including REDD+. They should be involved in mapping the impact of climate projects on women's lives. Women's dependence on forests as an economic resource must be maintained, said Risma, executive chair of Aceh Women in Solidarity. Come October 2014 when Yudhoyono's second and final term ends, Heru's big test is to deploy his communication skills. He has to convince the new president on the unequivocal importance of the REDD+ initiative as a core program to manage the climate crisis.

Keeping the REDD+ agency is paramount. To close, it would change Indonesia from a lead actor to a bit player on the global climate stage. That is not the game-changer recognition Indonesia seeks.

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