

Waving the REDD+ banner the right way

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Indonesia announced three policy moves in September to buttress its wavering REDD+ initiative to reduce carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and enhance accountable forest governance.

First, on Sept. 13, Cabinet Secretary Dipo Alam made public a presidential decision (keputusan presiden), signed on Sept. 8, to extend to Dec. 31, 2012, the working of a task force to set up a REDD+ agency.

Then, on Sept. 16 REDD+ task force chief Kuntoro Mangkusubroto signed a memorandum of understanding with Central Kalimantan Governor Teras Narang, making the province the site of a REDD+ pilot project.

Finally, on Sept. 26 the government revealed a sector-by-sector plan covering 70 self-funded government programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As if to energize these three initiatives, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono made a solemn pledge: "For my part, I will continue my work and dedicate the last three years of my term as President to delivering enduring results that will sustain and enhance the environment and forests of Indonesia." The President made this pledge at the Forests Indonesia Conference at the Shangri-La Hotel, Jakarta, Sept. 27, organized by CIFOR, the Bogor-based Center for International Forestry Research.

Yudhoyono's second and final five-year term ends in October 2014.

The REDD+ task force, whose work should have ended on June 30, 2011, has six jobs: prepare the REDD+ agency; coordinate the drafting of a REDD+ national strategy; prepare the funding instruments; set up an MRV agency that independently measures, reports and verifies REDD+ activities; execute REDD+ activities in the first pilot province and monitor a two-year moratorium on the granting of licenses to convert primary forest and peat lands for business projects.

Meanwhile on Sept. 20, the President signed a presidential regulation (peraturan presiden) on a national action plan, announced on Sept. 26, to realize Indonesia's voluntary commitment to reducing unilaterally greenhouse gas emissions by 26 percent, as against a business-as-usual scenario, and 41 percent with international funding by 2020.

The action plan covers five sectors. They are in descending order of proportion: forestry and peatland, waste management, energy and transport, agriculture, and industry.

The REDD+ agency taskforce has a chair, a secretary and nine other members from relevant ministries and offices. It coordinates work with the ministries, agencies and local governments concerned.

It defines the strategy and policy development. It determines the priorities. Given the numerous sectors involved with interests at cross purposes, the taskforce leadership has the daunting duty of molding competing views into coherent and correct policy decisions.

One matter of concern is regulatory clarity. A REDD+ program would actively engage the private sector. Private firms that invest in the market for forest carbon credits will want clear rules.

PT Rimba Raya Conservation, for example, endured a downsizing of its project area in Seruyan district, Central Kalimantan province.

This joint venture (70 percent foreign and 30 percent Indonesian) planned to save peat lands and prevent carbon emissions, action at the heart of ecosystem restoration that helps to stabilize global warming.

However, the Forestry Ministry reduced the concession area from 90,000 to 46,000 hectares.

Agus Purnomo, secretary of the REDD+ task force, explained that parts of the forest concession in question were areas whose permits were issued by the district chief of Seruyan.

The forestry minister has written twice to the district chief stating the central government's intent to give priority to ecosystem restoration and asked for the district chief's support.

However, the district chief replied in both instances that permits had already been granted to a number of other firms not engaged in ecosystem restoration, thus the decrease in Rimba Raya's concession.

Alluding to Indonesia's local autonomy law, Agus said that the district chief's authority on land use was a reality that the central government and all concerned parties in REDD+ activities must face.

"Rimba Raya did not appear to have negotiated seriously with or convince the district chief, but instead demanded that the central government persuade if not compel the district chief [not to decrease Rimba Raya's concession]," Agus said in an email.

"We realize this condition is not ideal and has to be corrected," Agus added.

The eventual REDD+ agency that the task force is forming will issue various protocols. For the time being, the task force is proposing discussion on a number of related ministerial regulations that would facilitate REDD+ activities in the field, concluded Agus who is also the President's climate change adviser.

For Indonesia, the REDD+ scheme "is now becoming the banner for forestry-related issues", a view held by Agus Purnomo and Doddy S. Sukardi in a joint article in an undated edition of the Green Review, a thematic publication of Indonesia's National Council on Climate Change (DNPI).

With the national action plan and their descending regional plans in place, waving the REDD+ banner the right way in Central Kalimantan should make the province the anticipated pilot for the rest of the country.