



## OPINION

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# A review and outlook of Indonesia's forest governance



CA | Boim

**T**he year 2013 is here and when it comes to forest and land use governance, this year has replaced a period that was filled with seized opportunities, conquered challenges but also with shattered hopes and unrealized potentials.

In the yesteryear, Indonesia witnessed some interesting dynamics in forest and land use policies.

Firstly, these include the issuance of Kalimantan and Sumatra spatial planning (i.e. Presidential Regulation No. 3 and 13 of 2012). Based on these two policies, there is a clear mandate for the government to at least maintain, conserve, restore and sustainably manage 45 percent of remaining forests in Kalimantan and 40 percent in Sumatra.

These are ambitious targets, since the total forest cover loss for Sumatra and Kalimantan in 2000-2008 was 5.39 million hectares (representing 5.3 percent of the land area and 9.2 percent of the year 2000 forest cover in both islands) as revealed by researchers from South Dakota University and World Resources Institute in 2011.

In addition, according to a 2009 peer-reviewed scientific publication written by the two institutions which also collaborated with the Forestry Ministry and State University of New York, 40 percent of the lowland forests in both islands were cleared from 1990 to 2005.

Hence, to achieve its own targets in 2013 onward, the government would need all support it can get to see the desired changes on the ground, particularly from

district and provincial governments. With a decentralized government system in place, district and provincial governments hold relatively more power and authority to manage and control their natural resources.

The latest story from Aceh could provide a good example. The new provincial government, as reported by Fairfax Media, for instance, has confirmed that a draft spatial plan was finalized. With massive development on forest and land has been placed as priority, the plan may lead to total forest cover reduction from about 68 percent of the province's land mass to 45 percent.

Such situation could contradict and hamper a national policy milestone achieved in mid last year, which was the

completion of the first year of Indonesia's two-year moratorium on new permits for primary forest and peat-land clearing.

As many may have known, the first year of the moratorium was marked by continuous development and refinement of the moratorium-indicative map (MIM). In 2012 alone, the government has produced two latest versions of the MIM, version II and III.

Between these two maps (as well as with the first one), some discrepancies of forest figures, however, have occurred, as reported by the REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation plus) Task Force. Research institutions such as the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) showed that the area to be addressed in the latest version of MIM is much less (64.7 million hectares compare to the original 69.1 million). Although smaller, this area appears to have a higher degree of problems in terms of governance.

To respond to such criticism, the task force argued that such differences happened because different agencies involved in the MIM development, in which they have used different forest definitions and sources of maps.

Up to this point, these agencies were the Forestry Ministry, the Agriculture Ministry, the National Land Agency, the Geospatial Information Agency and the Presidential Office (UKP4). Since most key agencies have contributed – although the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry has yet to get officially involved – and many sectors and actors have tried to influence the process, it is understandable that synchronizing this one national map may require compromises, and hence may add or reduce relevant forest and land cover figures.

It is just the reality of life, i.e. negotiations and trade-offs on contentious issues would require 'giving' and 'taking'

among sectors and actors. There will be winners and losers. A crucial question to answer is whether this negotiation process will result in greater benefits for the wider Indonesian public, which are, among others, productive but sustainable economy and much healthier environment.

Although may be considered as sub-optimal, this one-map development (in which four different agencies have agreed to consolidate their maps/data on land use) has contributed to the increase in the level of transparency, including increasing the level of public access to forest and land use data, as the MIM is uploaded online.

The case of peat swamp forest burning in Kuala Tripa for palm oil in Aceh's Nagan Raya district reported by NGOs and media is an example of the importance of this map and the access given to the public to utilize the map. The wider public, NGOs and the media have reported this case and sent a letter to the Indonesian president. As a result, UKP4/the REDD+ Task Force and the Environment Ministry sent a fact-finding team, and the accused – a plantation company – is being prosecuted.

The willingness of different agencies to collaborate and share substantive data on forest and land use, albeit difficult, is encouraging.

Another example of collaborative works that can be further nurtured in 2013 is the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry and the Forestry Ministry (No. 7662 of 2011) aiming at accelerating the permit issuance of geothermal energy development in forest areas. The MoU aims at addressing approximately 60 percent of geothermal energy potentials and reserves currently located in forest areas, as reported in 2009 by a senior high-ranking at Bappenas (the National Development Planning Agency).

It is, therefore, urgent under this MoU to develop standards, benchmarks and

applied solutions that could and would balance geothermal energy development and forest protection.

A similar collaborative case that leads to appropriate solutions may be explored in areas which have conflicting interests between general energy/mining development and forest. Finding balanced solutions is a huge task, because based on a 2011 report by the Forestry Ministry, forest areas within mining concessions, which include for oil, gas and coal activities, cover approximately 2.03 million hectares.

Saying it as a huge task is perhaps an underestimate.

Indonesia's political and governance system is not homogenous. While some government agencies may be willing to collaborate, others such as the parliament and local governments need to feel the ownership of such 'ideal call' to get involved. Otherwise, they may come strongly against it.

The strong voice from some factions of the parliament calling for the end of moratorium suggests that this important body in the Indonesian governance system may feel sidelined and do not see any benefits provided the initiative.

Also, with the Constitutional Court recently has returned the authority to determine mining areas from the central government to local (mostly district) governments, for example, district governments appear to have more 'say' in forest and natural resources development.

The aforementioned less than ideal situation has undoubtedly brought about many challenges ahead, especially when it comes to sustainably managing and improving the country's forest, land and natural resources.

Yet, changes are possible. It is, therefore, now up to all components of the Indonesian governance system to turn this around and make positive progress. ■