

**Dicky Simorangkir, Forest program director, The Nature Conservancy Indonesia Program**

Indonesia has been a leader in making commitments and enacting policies to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+).

While other countries have been criticized for their weak emission reduction targets and delayed action on fighting climate change, Indonesia is demonstrating true leadership. Last year, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono committed to reduce emissions by 26 percent using Indonesian resources, and the Republic began an ambitious national planning process with REDD+ as a key component.

Indonesia is now at a critical junction in developing a strategy to translate this commitment into action.

Undoubtedly, the partnership with Norway to develop and implement a national REDD+ readiness strategy will play an important role in determining how scarce resources — money, technical capacity, and the attention of key decision makers — are invested, and defining how REDD+ is implemented in Indonesia.

One of the challenges with REDD+ is that it must be pursued simultaneously at all levels. Indonesia is well positioned to demonstrate how to align action on REDD+ at national, sub-national and local levels.

As a result, the decision by the Indonesia-Norway partnership to develop a national strategy in parallel with investing in priority provinces is a smart one and supports Indonesia's pathway to low carbon economic growth while also informing global thinking about REDD+ implementation.

By investing in priority provinces, different approaches to link local, district and provincial activities to a national REDD+ program can be piloted. It is important that the areas selected for pilots represent Indonesia's diversity in terms of forest environments and economic opportunities.

Careful selection of two or three provinces and five to eight priority districts would provide a basis to tackle the complexities of REDD+ while keeping the process manageable.

The priority provinces and districts will develop implementation approaches to be replicated elsewhere and scaled up to national levels, and in the short-term will provide the best opportunities to meet the objectives of the national REDD+ program.

The high-stakes nature of this decision means that the criteria and process used to select priority provinces and districts must be well-thought out.

Of the many characteristics that could be used to define priority provinces or districts, six are absolutely essential to any selection criteria. First, there must be strong political mobilization at province, district, and site levels and true cooperation across scales.

Second, stakeholders must want to work with the central government to refine key aspects of the national program, including the approach to implementing the moratorium on conversion on forests and peatlands.

Third, there must be a high level of emissions to be reduced. Fourth, cost-effective and achievable strategies to reduce emissions must exist for the near term. Fifth, there must be well-developed and realistic ideas to promote economic development while simultaneously reducing emissions.

Finally, there must be substantial amounts of remaining forest cover with high social and ecological value that provide a range of co-benefits to society.

Using these six selection criteria will result in a portfolio of provinces and districts with the biological and economic diversity to enable testing of a range of strategies, and that will yield lessons applicable throughout Indonesia's forests.

The process of selecting priority provinces is also crucial. A good process can encourage innovation and bottom-up problem solving, and can increase engagement by sub-national and local actors while building cooperation among national actors in the emerging institutional framework for REDD.

A bad process could do the reverse on each count. Selection criteria for priority provinces need to be finalized and publicized, including how each will be weighed.

A handful of leading provinces should be given a defined period of time to develop concise program proposals.

A review committee should be formed to review proposals, rank them, publish short evaluation reports on each, and submit the top three candidates to final decision-makers.

Any additional time required by this process would be well worth it. The selection process would be transparent and provide decision-makers with the best information, perhaps avoiding a very costly bad decision.

Good ideas generated in the proposal process would be shared, facilitating replication and innovation by other provinces and better preparing them for future funding opportunities.

Furthermore, there has to be a defensible explanation for why some provinces were not selected. This type of process could serve the needs of the Norway partnership while also supporting the broader needs of the national strategy where additional investments in priority districts and secondary provinces are desirable.

It is true that provinces that already have substantial REDD+ efforts underway would be at a great advantage in this process. And this is a good thing.

Selected provinces will need to start fast and begin to generate lessons applicable to other provinces. Additional funding will require demonstrated success at implementing REDD+.

As part of the national strategy, there should be a platform for disseminating lessons learned, replicating successful approaches to REDD+ and increasing financial resources.

Systematically expanding the number of geographies engaged and the level of investment over time would steadily bring Indonesia to full-scale implementation of a national REDD+ program.

A robust process for selecting priority provinces based on the six criteria presented here is fundamental to achieving this long-term vision for a national REDD+ program.