

Meeting these objectives will not be easy. Our land-based natural resources are critically important for our growth, but they also account for high greenhouse gas emissions. Governance and law enforcement pose other challenges, exacerbated further by the evolving devolution of power to the provinces and districts. But these multiple objectives can and must be met.

Success will require the joint effort and contribution of government, civil society, businesses and local communities at all levels.

Building an effective system for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) is particularly complex, as it involves a fundamentally different approach to spatial planning and how we make decisions on land use.

NGOs and civil society organizations have an important role to play in ensuring that REDD+ efforts are subject to high transparency and good governance.

We welcome civil society vigilance, in particular to the key question of how REDD+ funds and benefits will flow to those communities who live closest to our forests and who have stewardship over them.

Ensuring sustainable livelihoods and job opportunities for the rural poor is critical to the long-term success of REDD+ in Indonesia.

However, the report launched by Greenpeace on Nov. 23 on industry expansion and REDD+ is not a helpful contribution to the debate. Vigilance has turned into scaremongering and selective argumentation aimed at generating catchy headlines with little concern with the realities on the ground.

In the report, Greenpeace focused its criticism on a claim that Indonesia is planning 63 million hectares of new development, including deforesting 37 million hectares of currently forested land.

It apparently arrived at this number by adding up the number of announcements about the future land requirements from different sectors such as palm oil, timber estates and mining.

Greenpeace analysis relied on these announcements — some were official, some trial balloons — rather than looking at what has been approved in the spatial planning process and the official and effective policies.

Greenpeace also claimed that funds promised for REDD+ — such as the US\$1 billion REDD+ partnership between Indonesia and Norway — would subsidize this new development and provide ample opportunities for corruption.

Details on how this might allegedly happen were scarce in the report, but Greenpeace seemed to worry that REDD+ money might be used to fund expansion of commercial plantations on the argument that plantations sequester carbon.

As “evidence” of the likelihood of corruption, they bring up the decades-old ghost of the Soeharto-era Reforestation Fund.

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The National Council on Climate Change would like to offer the following clarifications:

First, the bulk of REDD+ funds will only be dispersed in return for verifiable emissions reductions — that is the basis of the Indonesia-Norway REDD+ partnership and the basis of the emerging global consensus on REDD+ funding.

Second, Greenpeace’s claim that the government plans to develop 63 million hectares of land is simply wrong. It does not reflect the reality of the government’s land-use planning efforts and the incoming moratorium policy on new conversion of natural forests and peat lands.

Third, the Indonesian government does not view plantations as a viable option for emission reduction, especially as large-scale carbon sinks. Given the short time-horizon of acacia and palm oil plantings, they cannot be said to provide the carbon sequestration or biodiversity benefits of naturally conserved forests.

This is especially the case when one looks at how plantations on peatlands can degrade carbon-rich soils.

It is true that different industry players and government officials have from time to time spoken about the carbon-sequestration potential of plantation forests.

A deeper consensus is now emerging, driven by the work of civil society, of the Climate Change National Council (DNPI), the National Development Planning Board (Bappenas), the Environment Ministry and others, to understand in greater detail the carbon budgets of different land uses and land use changes.

Plantations may have short-term carbon benefits as part of a long-term strategy to revive severely degraded grasslands and of course it is an important industry. But REDD+ is not and has never been a conspiracy to subsidize large-scale, monoculture plantations.

It is important to clearly rebut these points in order to sort out the misleading claims from the very real public concerns and issues that continue to need attention and input.

The government has much work ahead of it to put Indonesia on a high-growth, climate-compatible development trajectory.

It needs to bring more clarity and transparency to spatial planning. We need to have better, commonly-agreed and publically-accessible databases on land use, forests and soils, including claims by traditional communities.

We need better systems of sorting out land tenure and land rights so we can move forward with confidence that different groups will have their interests well-represented in a legal process. The government is addressing these issues as quickly as possible. The two-year suspension on new concessions to begin next year will give us further breathing room to do so.

Civil society is a key player, especially as a partner in making change on the ground. But attention-grabbing, alarmist statements based on a highly selective cut-and-paste of government statements is not helpful to the process and the broader goal of addressing the climate change challenge.

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