

Indonesia's post-2020 climate plan raises questions

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The new climate plan has no base year. Adaptation, not just mitigation also gets sizeable space. These are two distinctions of Indonesia's climate plan after 2020. It is markedly different from the plans of some other countries.

The plan has been given the ungainly name of Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC). In essence an INDC states the amount of carbon emissions a country plans to reduce from 2020 to 2030 and beyond to manage average global temperatures. This is mitigation. Adaptation relates to how people cope with the impacts of climate change.

All countries are to submit their INDCs for the UN Conference on Climate Change, the 21st Conference of Parties, in Paris, slated for Nov. 30 — Dec. 11. The INDCs are the bricks of a new climate agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol. The Paris outcome is to be a global, legally binding accord to curb greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. It takes effect in 2020. All nations, developed and developing, are obliged to comply. The Kyoto Protocol was mandatory for developed nations only.

Accompanied by two former environment ministers, Environment and Forestry Minister Siti Nurbaya announced Indonesia's INDC on Aug. 31 after presenting it to President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo. Indonesia has committed to reduce GHG emissions by 29 percent by 2030 compared to business-as-usual projected emissions. The broad strokes of mitigation activities, as stated in the INDC, are improved land use and spatial planning, energy conservation, promotion of clean and renewable energy resources and improved waste management.

It is a final draft. For transparency, the 15-page document in English has been uploaded on the Environment and Forestry Ministry's website for public input. The review closes Sept. 20 when the government submits the INDC to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bonn.

Up to Aug. 18 the UNFCCC received 29 INDCs out of an expected 190. More than half the submitted INDCs state a base year in determining the percentage figure in carbon cuts in the target year.

Switzerland, the first nation to submit its INDC on Feb.27, intends to reduce GHG emissions by an ambitious 50 percent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, the base year. Singapore, the first ASEAN member to file in its INDC July 3, aims for a 36 percent cut from 2005 levels by 2030.

Indonesia uses a business-as-usual scenario as the baseline. "The Indonesia baseline uses the business-as-usual scenario of emission projections starting in 2010, based on historical trajectory [2000-2010], projected increases in the energy sector, and the absence of mitigation actions," the INDC document states. To the uninitiated, this line is unfathomable.

A base year gives a specific figure of the carbon emissions recorded in that year. It is straightforward and understandable for the non-expert. In the business-as-usual scenario, it is unclear what the figure with which the figure of the targeted year is to be compared with is.

To vindicate the valid use of the business-as-usual scenario, the government should explain in the INDC what mitigation it has achieved and how it was done in the six years since 2009. This was when then president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono declared Indonesia would voluntarily reduce emissions by 26 percent by 2020 using that scenario.

Interestingly 10 of the 29 INDCs submitted so far use business-as-usual scenarios. They range from Mexico, Andorra, Ethiopia, to South Korea, mostly emerging economies. Four nations that were not obliged to cut emissions under the Kyoto Protocol used a base year: China, Dominican Republic, Marshall Islands and Singapore.

Another question mark on Indonesia's INDC regards the government's energy policy. The document does not explain about the Jokowi government's plan to build 35,000 megawatts of power plants. Indonesia's delegates in Paris will be given the task of explaining why the nation will have 20,000 megawatts of coal-fired plants, but only 2,000 megawatts generated from clean and renewable sources.

Coal is a gross carbon emitter and a recognized health hazard for people living near coal-fired plants. Due to this, coal usage globally is on the decline. The US has closed and is scheduled to retire 82,500 megawatts of coal-fired energy. In exchange, it plans to operate 46,000 megawatts of renewable energy from solar, wind and geothermal technology. China that has weathered heavy air pollution from coal burning cut its coal imports by 40 percent in the first quarter of 2015, according to Greenpeace in an August 2015 report.

As a health hazard, coal-fired power plants release mercury, lead, arsenic and other toxic pollutants that go deep into people's lungs. Air pollution, with coal burning as a big contributor, leads to lung cancer and heart disease. Air pollution causes six million deaths a year worldwide.

In Indonesia, existing coal-fired power plants cause 6,500 premature deaths a year, as stated by the same robust report based on Harvard-compiled medical research data, *The Human Cost of Coal's Power: How Coal-Fired Power Plants Threaten the Health of Indonesians*. ikj

Indonesia's INDC gets credit for putting a strong case for adaptation, helping communities to cope with climate impacts. It notes that climate change "will increase the risk of hydro-meteorological disasters which make up 80 percent of disaster occurrences in Indonesia." These are floods, landslides, sea-level rise, water shortages during drought. In dealing with such calamities, social resilience action from developing early warning systems and public awareness campaigns to community participation in local planning come to the fore.

To facilitate clarity, transparency and understanding as INDCs are called to provide, Indonesia's INDC should use a base year as its baseline and an easily comprehensible business- as-usual scenario. Second, the INDC should clarify why the government is pursuing an energy agenda that has more than half of that new energy coming from coal-fired plants.

Jokowi should realize two of the consequences of this coal-driven energy policy. One, the 29 percent carbon reduction target will be difficult to reach if at all. Two, the cost of human health would mark a stain on what Indonesia's INDC envisions: Achieving archipelagic climate resilience for 2020 and beyond.

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