

Lifting climate action through COVID-19 recovery

Virtual CAIPSDCC High-level Dialogue
24 August 2020



POLICY BRIEF

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ABOUT THE GRIFFITH ASIA INSTITUTE

The Griffith Asia Institute (GAI) is an internationally recognised research centre in the Griffith Business School. We reflect Griffith University's longstanding commitment and future aspirations for the study of and engagement with nations of Asia and the Pacific.

At GAI, our vision is to be the informed voice leading Australia's strategic engagement in the Asia Pacific—cultivating the knowledge, capabilities and connections that will inform and enrich Australia's Asia-Pacific future.

We do this by: i) conducting and supporting excellent and relevant research on the politics, security, economies and development of the Asia-Pacific region; ii) facilitating high level dialogues and partnerships for policy impact in the region; iii) leading and informing public debate on Australia's place in the Asia Pacific; and iv) shaping the next generation of Asia-Pacific leaders through positive learning experiences in the region.

ABOUT THE DIALOGUE

CAIPSDCC organised a virtual dialogue on climate diplomacy on August 24, 2020, with the title: "Strengthening Cooperation and Lifting Ambition on Sustainable Development and Climate Change Beyond COVID-19". The High-level Dialogue was attended by several high-level public officials and practitioners, such as Mr Alue Dohong, the Vice Minister of Environment and Forestry Indonesia and Mr Jamie Ibister, the Australian Ambassador for the Environment.

Introduction

The devastating and unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the urgency for global cooperation to address complex social, economic and environmental challenges that underpin human and planetary wellbeing into the future.

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne observed in June 2020 that, "COVID-19 is a shared crisis – a reminder that many problems are best solved or, indeed, can only be solved through cooperation. At the heart of successful international cooperation is the concept that each country shares, rather than yields, a portion of its sovereign decision-making. And in return, each gets something from it that is greater than their contribution."¹

Cooperation is by no means assured. Ongoing border closures, travel restrictions and cities in lockdown have amplified the isolationist tendencies of some nations, while exposing the fragility of regional and global multilateral institutions. As governments shift between COVID-19 'response' and 'recovery' modes, new challenges and barriers to cooperation continue to emerge.

Yet, when viewed through a strategic lens, COVID-19 offers the opportunity to lift global collaborative ambitions in the face of crisis. The opportunity to deliver 'triple-dividend' outcomes—maximising investments in health and economic recovery to achieve climate friendly, sustainable growth on local, regional and global scales—has never been more compelling.

Australia and Indonesia—as neighbours and partners in the Asia-Pacific region—are well placed to support each other through the recovery and rebuilding phases ahead. Working together through both formal and informal dialogue, capacity building and research collaboration, the two nations are well placed to bring meaning and substance to the potential for 'building back better'. Cooperation between these two nations would be for the benefit of the communities and nations across the broader Asia-Pacific region.

These are the key themes to emerge from the virtual High-level Dialogue organised by the Collaborative Australia Indonesia Program on Sustainable Development and Climate Change (CAIPSDCC) on 24 August 2020. The dialogue—convened to address emerging concerns about the impact of COVID-19

on the challenges of climate change and sustainable development—focused on securing pathways for cooperation between Australia and Indonesia.

Bringing a select group of diplomatic, policy and academic leaders from both nations together, the dialogue posed the following questions:

- How will climate diplomacy progress in years ahead—particularly given the social and economic impacts of COVID-19?
- How might Australia and Indonesia work together to lift bilateral and regional ambitions on climate diplomacy, while also dealing with the immediate need to respond and recover from the impacts of COVID-19?

The dialogue offered a platform for open discussion between leaders, policy-makers and diplomats currently working within various domains of research, policy and practice, as well as those bringing the benefit of experience and reflection. Integrating these perspectives has enabled constructive and fresh thinking, with a focus on lifting the ambitions of both nations.

Not an end point in itself, this dialogue is one in a series (the *Witoelar Dialogues*²) aimed at strengthening Australia-Indonesia understanding, cooperation and partnership in addressing the shared challenges of climate change and sustainable development within a regional context, and now in the context of COVID-19 recovery. This paper sets out the background and context of discussion, while drawing out key issues, themes and recommendations.

“There is an opportunity to ‘build back better’ with recovery strategies that integrate low carbon development and sustainability.”

Agustaviano Sofjan
Director, Development, Economics
and Environment Affairs, KEMLU
CAIPSDCC High-level Dialogue
28 August 2020

Reframing the task: From challenge to opportunity

Indonesia and Australia both face similar and distinct challenges in addressing the interrelated challenges of climate and development action in the post-COVID-19 era. Both nations must attract and mobilise outside sources of capital investment to achieve stated emissions targets, while also enabling economic growth. And both face the significant political task of delivering alternative sources of jobs and income, including for marginalised and vulnerable populations.

While sharing the aspiration to ‘build back better’, it is worth noting that there are striking differences in Indonesia and Australia’s geographic realities, development needs and economic goals. Understanding how national priorities sit within the domestic context of each nation is a critical first step in identifying opportunities for potential cooperation.

The following sections touch on key issues and priorities shaping the Indonesian and Australian contexts. It incorporates key points made by dialogue speakers. Further updates on key developments since the dialogue have also been included.

Indonesian context—a snapshot

Indonesia’s National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020–2024 commits to climate action through the Low Carbon Development Indonesia (LCDI) development policy. Implemented in 2019, LCDI is an explicit process for identifying policy action to reduce national greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, while maintaining economic growth, alleviating poverty, and preserving and improving the country’s natural resources. Coordinated by the nation’s development agency BAPPENAS, the low carbon growth path is seen as a paradigm shift in Indonesia’s transition towards a ‘green economy’. It is supported by a national commitment to increase renewable energy capacity, and is increasingly attractive to international investment.³ If successful, its impact will be significant, with forecast reductions in Indonesia’s overall GHG emissions of 43% by 2030 (exceeding Indonesia’s internationally assisted National Determined Contribution (NDC) aim of 41% below baseline).⁴

And yet, the immediate pressures brought to bear on the lives and livelihoods of Indonesians by COVID-19 threaten to undermine progress towards Indonesia’s long-term vision for a low carbon economy. With more than 800,000 cases and close to 25,000 deaths recorded as at January 2021,⁵ the government is

now focused on supporting a health system under strain, while advancing urgent vaccine distribution across the country. Immediate relief measures are estimated to cost USD24.6 million, in addition to the impact of an ongoing economic contraction and rising unemployment.⁶

As a result of COVID-19, a further USD247.2 billion will be required to keep the nation's NDC targets on track. While international assistance has long been recognised as a fundamental pillar of the nation's climate aspirations, there is now significantly more pressure for Indonesia to mobilise public, private and philanthropic capital through utilising national, international and multilateral mechanisms, (including the Green Climate Fund).

“We must seize the momentum of the COVID-19 pandemic to consolidate and to further accelerate and transform Indonesia's development plans.”

President Joko Widodo
2020

Indonesia's newly established Environment Fund Management Agency (Badan Pengelolaan Dana Lingkungan Hidup or BPD LH) will play a key role as the “financing hub for environmental programmes in Indonesia”, investing and distributing climate funds including those received from international sources across the nation.⁷ For example in June 2020, following an in-depth verification processes, BPD LH received USD56 million from Norway. This was the first instalment of a promised USD1 billion and marked the end phase of a decade long cooperative effort towards reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, known as the REDD+ mechanism.⁸

In addition to capital mobilisation, the Indonesian government has prioritised two key initiatives: i) setting a ‘carbon economic value’ (with regulations in the final stages of development) to encourage carbon sequestration and mainstream low carbon emissions pathways across a range of sectors; and ii) identifying monetary and non-monetary incentives to encourage alternative sustainable livelihoods particularly in farming and indigenous communities where forest restoration poses an immediate threat to livelihoods.

Australian context—a snapshot

With an estimated 28,650 coronavirus cases and a total of 909 deaths recorded at the time of writing,⁹ Australia is seen to have managed the initial impact of COVID-19 relatively well. A combination of coordinated lockdowns, contact tracing and public compliance are credited for the outcome. Yet the economic cost remains high with the nation now confirmed to be in an economic recession. Mounting pressure on the government to address climate change sits alongside the imperative to boost economic recovery from COVID-19, in line with increasing recognition across business and industry of the responsibility to ‘build back better’.

Australia's relatively weak commitment to lower emissions (targeting a 26–28% reduction on 2005 levels by 2030) is now tied to the government's recently launched Technology Investment Roadmap. Australia's Ambassador for the Environment, Jamie Isbister, noted to the dialogue that the Roadmap offers a pathway for driving down Australia's carbon emissions through investments in renewables, as well as in new Hydrogen technology to ensure more efficient energy production across the economy.

While early announcements on the Roadmap signalled a positive shift in rethinking Australia's energy mix, critics suggested its success is likely to be undermined by a number of problems, including: i) continued absence of a government commitment to net zero emissions by 2050; ii) failure to implement associated structural change (including an emissions trading scheme, clean energy targets and a national energy guarantee); iii) a focus on ‘clean hydrogen’ rather than specifically renewable hydrogen alongside substantial investment in gas and renewed embrace of carbon capture and storage (CCS), thus favouring legacy fossil fuel technologies most likely to have an upward impact on emissions; and iv) the labelling of wind and solar technologies as ‘mature’ and therefore less targeted for investment support.¹⁰ In short, the Roadmap could fall short of cutting a clear path for Australia's transition towards lower emissions and a green recovery.

“Engaging more constructively to lift global climate ambition and governance will protect Australia's longer-term trade and economic interests ...”

Climate and Recovery Initiative
2020

At the same time, momentum is building amongst Australian industry, business and policy leaders to ensure a climate-led economic recovery that builds on alignment and between economic stimulus and climate related goals. The recently launched Climate and Recovery Initiative (CRI) brings leaders from across the public, private and policy sectors together to map a bipartisan blueprint for positive climate-friendly economic recovery policy and is evidence of this emerging momentum. In launching the Initiative, Tim Reed the President of the Business Council of Australia, made the point that “Australia’s recovery must include addressing the risk and impact of climate change, that means big opportunities for investment in clean energy and decarbonising technology.”¹¹

Though focused largely towards domestic recovery, the initiative advocates for elevating climate and net zero emission in Australia’s trade and diplomatic agenda. The 2020 CRI discussion paper notes that, “[e]ngaging more constructively to lift global climate ambition and governance will protect Australia’s longer-term trade and economic interests given the major potential in renewables and energy-intensive exports and industries.” Importantly too it will “deliver on Australia’s pledge” to preserve and strengthen the multilateral system.¹²

“COVID-19 will require us to strengthen our partnerships across the region.”

Foreign Minister Marise Payne
Partnerships Through Recovery
2020

Australia’s approach to supporting economic recovery outside its national borders, especially initiatives targeted towards South East Asia and the Pacific, tend to align more closely to the ‘build back better’ approach. In May 2020 Australia’s Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women Marise Payne, alongside Alex Hawke, the Minister for International Development and the Pacific, launched the government’s Partnerships through Recovery Policy. It sets out the guiding principles for Australia’s development approach and includes a new AUD140 million ‘private sector mobilisation fund’ to encourage private sector investment in low emissions and climate-resilient solutions for the Pacific and Southeast Asia.

These signals point to Australia’s renewed focus on contributing to the health security and economic stability of near neighbours in the aftermath of COVID-19. What is not clear however is whether and how these investments will be monitored and evaluated over the long term.¹³

Pathways towards cooperation

The global scale, pace and reach of COVID-19 underscores the interconnected and interdependent nature of today’s world. The pandemic has also cast light on the impending impacts of climate change, and offers a narrow strategic window for leadership. Indeed, the opportunity presented by COVID-19 to lift ambition on climate action through climate friendly economic recovery strategies should not be missed.

Australia and Indonesia have a shared history of engagement in global climate diplomacy. The potential exists for greater diplomatic cooperation between the two to maintain support for the Paris Agreement, including to resolve outstanding issues relating to carbon markets, mechanisms for loss and damage and a common timeframe for NDCs. As states move from the negotiation phase towards the implementation of Paris Agreement commitments, Australia and Indonesia should work together to encourage each other and other nations in delivering on their NDCs and taking global climate action forward.

At the same time, climate diplomacy must be reframed to meet the demands of the current environment and consider a broad suite of climate and development objectives. These include the elimination of poverty and the fulfilment of basic development needs, alongside an emphasis on a healthy ecosystem and climate.

Reviewing the national priorities of both Australia and Indonesia highlights the potential for greater cooperation, especially within the context of the Australia-Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (I-A CEPA), as well as the broader Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). These significant agreements create opportunities for developing useful intersections between research, industry and community, particularly on the themes identified above that may contribute to improved outcomes for lives and livelihoods in both Indonesia and Australia.

Importantly though while national governments are well placed to initiate such cooperation, they cannot deliver on it alone. Growing Australia-Indonesia cooperation demands a multisector-multistakeholder approach involving government representation from all tiers (including provincial and local), business and industry, academia and community organisations.

The precedent for constructive bilateral cooperation exists with broad partnerships on disaster management and environmental governance offering a model to take forward (see Box 1). However, it is unlikely that the full potential for cooperation will be fully realised unless both nations invest time, effort and human capital in understanding each other’s national contexts and domestic priorities.

INDONESIA-AUSTRALIA PARTNERSHIP IN ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE¹⁴

Partnership in action

The AUD10 million Environmental Governance program aims to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in Indonesia by addressing the drivers of forest and land fires through better land management practices. It is part of Australia's AUD16 million Land Care package aimed at helping countries in the South East Asia region meet their emission targets. The program consists of four activities implemented over a four-year period (2017-2020):

Indonesia sustainable landscape management

Delivered through the World Bank's Multi-Donor Trust Fund, this comprehensive approach addresses land and forest fires through improved integration and coordination of landscape management across multi-sector stakeholders. The World Bank is working closely with the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF), National Agrarian Agency (Badan Pertanahan Nasional/BPN) and National Geospatial Agency (Badan Informasi Geospasial/BIG).

Support to institutionalising multi-door approach to counter environment-related crimes

Delivered through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), this Multi-Door Approach (MDA) activity aims to strengthen law enforcement (inquiry, investigation and prosecution) of forestry and other environment-related crimes. The activity provides technical support and capacity building activities to institutionalise MDA in relevant agencies, including establishing an MDA Secretariat at MoEF and coordinate law enforcement and processing of priority cases. UNDP is working closely with MoEF's Directorate General of Law Enforcement, and the Attorney General Office. UNDP will also coordinate with other relevant agencies such as the Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi/KPK), and the Indonesian Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (Pusat Pelaporan dan Analisis Transaksi Keuangan/PPATK).

Improving Indonesia's measurement, reporting and verification system

Delivered through Australia's Department of Environment and Energy (DoEE), this activity aims to support the government of Indonesia's implementation and continuous improvement of its GHG Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) system, robust reporting of Indonesia's emissions to the UNFCCC. DoEE is working closely with the MoEF's Research, Development and Innovation Agency (Badan Penelitian, Pengembangan dan Inovasi/BLI). DoEE is also leveraging and using its network of partnerships and involvement with other global MRV programmes such as the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and the Global Forest Observations Initiative.

Improving community fire management and peatland rehabilitation in Indonesia

Delivered through the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR), this interdisciplinary research activity aims to reduce unwanted peatland fires through a generation of new knowledge to underpin peatland restoration, and develop sustainable livelihoods in restored peatlands. The activity builds on partnerships between Australian institutions (CSIRO, Australian National University/ANU, La Trobe University, James Cook University, and the University of the Sunshine Coast) and Indonesian organisations (Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation/BOSF, Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta/YTS, Bogor Agricultural University, and the University of Palangka Raya). ACIAR is working closely with GoI partners, including MoEF's BLI and the Peat Restoration Agency (Badan Restorasi Gambut/BRG).

More than ever, Australia and Indonesia are well placed separately and together to champion an integration of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of human and planetary health. Such an approach is needed if both nations are to deliver on shared aspirations to ‘build back better’. Pathways towards cooperation include the following:

1. Maintain and develop policy dialogue and research collaboration

Australia and Indonesia continue to take positive steps in collaborating on climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. Key examples are found in forest monitoring, carbon sequestration, sustainable oceans programs, as well as in collaborative research on forest, peatland and fire management.

However more can be done to maximise the potential to learn from each other’s experiences and perspectives while maximising synergies in the relationship; including in the following areas:

1. Improving public health and health care outcomes, including through sustainable hospital systems and enhanced risk communication.
2. Sustainable ocean innovations, marine waste, blue economy, resilience of ecosystems and communities in coastal and small island regions.
3. Fiscal stimulus measures and economic investments to promote climate-friendly sustainable growth, while understanding the role of government in establishing and regulating domestic carbon markets.
4. Sustainable agriculture as part of the food estate program.
5. Sustainable, community-led tourism.
6. Management of forest fires, early warning systems and disaster risk reduction.
7. Making the just and clear transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy,¹⁵ including enhanced information sharing on renewable energy financing and distribution, electric vehicle manufacturing and asset maintenance and disposal.

Bilateral business councils, provincial and community networks will play a critical role in mobilising private sector interest and investment in new research opportunities and should be included within ongoing research-focused dialogues.

2. Champion inclusive, sustainable policy priorities and outcomes

Managing the social, economic and environmental impacts of COVID-19 response and recovery efforts on vulnerable communities will be the responsibility of nations across the Asia Pacific. Recognising and understanding the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals, alongside the intergenerational significance of recovery as future generations deal with inherited debt, is critical to recovery.

Australia and Indonesia are well placed to involve civil society, private sector and media actors in policy development and decision making to improve transparency, accountability and just approaches in policy development and delivery. Additionally, both nations must take up opportunities to ensure the voices and experiences of women, young people, indigenous communities, and marginalised groups—those most significantly impacted by the pandemic, and by climate change—are heard to inform inclusive, effective and just recovery policy into the future.

3. Develop opportunities for diplomatic partnership in leading agendas

As self-described ‘middle-regional-constructive’ powers, Australia and Indonesia are active and engaged in regional and global multilateral arenas. The two nations can work beyond their bilateral relationship—separately and as partners—to lead on ‘triple-dividend priorities’ through informal and formal multilateral channels (including through the MIKTA, ASEAN and the ASEAN Regional Forum, PIFS and the G20). In particular, Indonesia’s commitment to host the G20 in 2022 offers a significant opportunity for this agenda.

4. Invest in people-to-people connections – including through ‘virtual’ options

Sustained investment is needed to enhance people-to-people relations between Australia and Indonesia in the context of regional COVID-19 recovery. The borderless nature of COVID-19 and climate change underscore the urgency for strong and diverse partnerships within the region and globally. The multidimensional effects of the pandemic provide an opportunity to apply lessons learnt in local and national responses to climate change.

The opportunity to build and extend connections through student mobility opportunities (including through virtual mobility opportunities) is critical to maintaining and ‘future-proofing’ the depth and breadth of people-to-people connections within the broader relationship. The Australian Government’s recent agreement to apply New Colombo Plan funding to support the take up of virtual mobility projects by Australian undergraduate students is welcome news. Australian university institutions are well placed to support student mobility engagements in policy-relevant domains—including working through established organisations like ACICIS. The Indonesian Government’s commitment to developing human resource capacity, including through targeted government scholarships programs might be similarly supported through online channels.

Policymakers, academics and business networks play a vital role in supporting research, capacity building and education to improve understanding amongst wider populations about the multiple challenges of sustainable recovery. Coordinated investment and collaboration between the scientific community, good policy and diplomatic resources is critical for responses that recognise the deep interdependence between human and planetary health.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 outbreak has revealed the precarious relationship that exists between humans and their environment. While primary policy emphasis has been placed on ensuring human health and safety, we should not dismiss the importance of bearing down through coordinated and cooperative efforts—within the region and globally—to restore and preserve planetary health.

Australia and Indonesia face distinct and shared challenges in responding to the serious immediate and longer-term impacts of COVID-19, while maintaining and even lifting their commitment to low carbon and sustainable development. Separately and together the two nations are well placed to champion the integration of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of human and planetary health while delivering on shared aspirations to ‘build back better’. Working together through multilateral forums, they share a responsibility for building trust in multilateral climate negotiations while building the necessary momentum for collective responsibility.

Maintaining the underpinning habits of dialogue and cooperation are critical to the long-term success of the Australia-Indonesia bilateral partnership. IA-CEPA offers a valuable framework through which Australia and Indonesia can advance the regular and ongoing forms of multisectoral-multistakeholder dialogue required to unlock the vast potential of the bilateral partnership via knowledge exchange, research collaboration and capacity building.

In the post-COVID-19 world, lifting bilateral ambitions for climate action and sustainable development demands a triple dividend imperative—maximising investments in economic, health and social recovery to achieve climate friendly, sustainable and just growth that can be delivered for local, regional and global impact.



Notes

1. Marise Payne, 'Australia and the world in the time of COVID-19', Speech delivered to National Security College, Canberra, 16 June 2020.
2. The inaugural Witoelar Dialogue was held in Brisbane in March 2019 with the support of the Australia-Indonesia Institute (AII).
3. With over 10% of the population currently lacking access to electricity, the Indonesian government's commitment for greater renewable energy capacity sits alongside a commitment to improve the national electrification rate.
4. Medrilzam Medrilzam and Helen Mountford, 'A low carbon economy can create jobs and boost Indonesia's economy', World Resources Institute, 15 July 2020.
5. For latest updates see, Worldometers, *Indonesia*, www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/indonesia/.
6. Prima Wirayani and Farida Susanty, 'Indonesia's Covid19 stimulus playbook explained', *The Jakarta Post*, 1 April 2020.
7. See also: Tiza Mafira, Bruce Muhammad Mecca, Saiful Muluk, 'Indonesia environment fund: bridging the financing gap in environmental programs', *Climate Policy Initiative*, 27 April 2020.
8. See also: Hans Nicholas Jong, 'Indonesia to receive \$56 million in payment from Norway for reducing deforestation', *Mongabay*, 29 May 2020. Also, Indonesia's Vice Minister for the Environment Alou Dohong particularly noted the payment reflected deforestation efforts in East Kalimantan and Berau.
9. Coronavirus cases as at 14 January 2021. For additional updates on Australian COVID-19 cases refer to www.health.gov.au.
10. Kathryn Murphy and Adam Morton, 'Morrison's tech roadmap flags more investment in carbon capture and storage', *The Guardian*, 22 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/sep/22/morrison-tech-roadmap-flags-more-investment-in-carbon-capture-and-storage> and Interview Panel, 'Insiders', *ABC News*, 20 September 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/insiders/sunday-20-september-full-program/12682752>.
11. James Fernyhough, 'Business, unions unveil green nation-building plan', *Australian Financial Review*, 28 September 2020.
12. Centre for Policy Development, 'Climate and Recovery Initiative: Roundtable 1 - Framing Paper', 25 September 2020, <https://www.afr.com/policy/energy-and-climate/business-unions-unveil-green-nation-building-plan-20200925-p55zbf>.
13. See also Paul Karp, 'How will Australia spend the \$500m it has committed to the Pacific?' *The Guardian*, 13 August 2019.
14. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Indonesia Australia Partnership in Environmental Governance brief*, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/indonesia-australia-partnership-environmental-governance-brief>.
15. The transition towards a low-carbon future is a shared aspiration. Importantly, when Prime Minister Scott Morrison and President Jokowi met in early 2020 they agreed to establish a bilateral energy dialogue between the two nations underpinned by collaboration on science and research and technology.

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