



## Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest

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The *Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest* is a biweekly collection of summaries of articles related to conservation, the environment, and sustainability in Indonesia that have appeared in print or online in local, regional, and global English-language media. We welcome comments, suggestions, and corrections. To learn more about us and to access previous editions of the News Digest, please visit our website at [www.starlingresources.com](http://www.starlingresources.com). If you would like to add colleagues or friends to our distribution list or unsubscribe, please contact us at [newsdigest@starlingresources.com](mailto:newsdigest@starlingresources.com).

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### CONTENTS

- A. Marine and Fisheries
- B. Forests and Land Use
- C. Biodiversity, Conservation, and Protected Areas
- D. Climate Change, Energy, and Mining
- E. Pollution and Waste
- F. Investment and Finance
- G. Human Rights and Gender Equality
  
- I. Presidential Race

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### A. Marine and Fisheries

#### [Indonesian village forms coast guard to protect octopus in Mentawai Islands](#)

—Jaka Hendra Baitri, *Mongabay*, 3 October 2023

An island community in Indonesia's Mentawai archipelago has implemented a seasonal fishing closure to protect octopus stocks, which have been declining due to high demand. 10 fishers chosen by the island's Hamlets represent the *sjago koat*, the coast guard team in charge of surveillance and enforcement of the closure. The Citra Mandiri Mentawai Foundation (YCMM), a local NGO, estimates that around 8 metric tons of octopus are caught in the region each month, except during violent swells from June to September. The closure aims to conserve octopus stocks which not only provide a critical source of income for the region's fishermen, but also a crucial source of micronutrients vital for reducing child stunting, which affects nearly a third of children in the Mentawai Islands. Research has shown that sustainable artisanal octopus fisheries provide essential micronutrients for children,

contributing to improved nutrition and better long-term outcomes. By giving nature a chance to restore itself, the fishing closure seeks to strike a balance between economic livelihoods and environmental conservation in a remote coastal community facing challenges due to overfishing and climate change.

### [Fisherwomen fight plan for coastal salt farms on Indonesia's Madura Island](#)

—Moh. Tamimi, *Mongabay*, 22 September 2023

Fisherwomen on Indonesia's Madura Island are leading a protest against the conversion of their coastline into salt farms, aiming to protect their vital ecosystem and livelihoods. They argue that this proposal could jeopardize their fishing jobs and harm the marine ecosystem they've relied on for generations, possibly contributing to local flooding. In 2009, the local government issued land titles for 73 hectares of coastal land for conversion to salt farms. Today, only 20 hectares remain undeveloped and contentious, with fisherwomen opposing the plan since 2013. The protesters demand transparency regarding project permits and environmental impact assessments, which the government has yet to provide. This protest is part of a broader trend against coastal aquaculture development in Indonesia, which aims to boost the aquaculture sector. While experts support the sector's growth, they emphasize the importance of sustainable environmental planning, particularly to protect mangrove forests and coastal ecosystems. Activists also highlight the need to include women in development agendas, ensuring their economic welfare and preserving traditional livelihoods.

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## **B. Forests and Land Use**

### [Aging Trees Show a Crisis Looms for the World's Everything Oil](#)

—Anuradha Raghu and Eko Listiyorini, *Bloomberg*, 1 October 2023

Southeast Asia, the main palm oil producer, faces a critical supply risk due to aging trees and slow replanting. Malaysia and Indonesia, which account for 85% of global production, are facing lower yields and higher costs as their oil palms approach their 25-year commercial lifespan. Many farmers are reluctant to replant their trees, which takes several years to bear fruit, due to temptingly high market prices and increased labor costs. Productivity drops significantly as trees reach their age threshold - where farmers once had up to 143 producing trees per hectare, some now have only 20. "The concern is that the cost of production will become uncompetitive," said Ivy Ng, head of plantations research at CIMB Investment Bank Bhd. in Kuala Lumpur. "The cost is going up, labor cost is going up, everything is going up — and yet your yield is falling because you didn't replant." This could lead to a decline in annual output growth and higher prices for consumers and buyers. Palm oil is already facing competition from other vegetable oils, such as soybean and rapeseed, which are normally more expensive but may become more attractive if palm oil becomes uncompetitive.

### [Experts slam massive 'discount' in fines for Indonesian palm oil billionaire](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 27 September 2023

Indonesia's Supreme Court has faced backlash for slashing palm oil billionaire Surya Darmadi's fines from US\$2.7 billion to US\$144 million in return for extending his prison sentence by one year in a landmark corruption case. Surya was convicted of conspiring with a local official to obtain licenses for his oil palm plantations illegally. Environmental experts criticize the decision, fearing it sets a dangerous precedent for future anti-corruption and environmental law enforcement. The ruling leaves unclear who should bear the responsibility for the substantial environmental damage inflicted by Surya's illegal plantations. Estimates indicate that these damages could cost billions to rectify. Notably, Surya's plantations

operated on tropical peatlands, vital for storing carbon, and have severely affected indigenous communities and ecosystems. Environmental advocates argue that the court's decision fails to prioritize recovering state losses caused by environmental crimes. They worry that this ruling could discourage judges from imposing substantial fines in future cases, making it challenging to address environmental damage caused by illegal activities.

#### [Deforestation for palm oil continues in Indonesia's 'orangutan capital'](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 22 September 2023

Despite commitments from global brands and the government to protect Indonesia's Leuser Ecosystem, a recent investigation by Rainforest Action Network (RAN) reveals the ongoing development of new palm oil plantations and drainage of carbon-rich peatlands within the ecosystem. RAN's satellite and drone footage uncovered a 57% increase in deforestation in the first half of 2023 compared to the same period in the year prior, as well as 26 kilometers of new canals in 2023, up from 9 kilometers in 2022, in the Rawa Singkil Wildlife Reserve, part of the Leuser Ecosystem and one of the largest remaining peatland forests in Sumatra. This destruction poses a significant threat to the wildlife, including critically endangered Sumatran orangutans, tigers, rhinos, and elephants. Furthermore, it releases massive amounts of carbon stored in peat-swamp ecosystems into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change. RAN has called on major brands like Procter & Gamble, Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Unilever to address the development of new canals and illegal plantations in their supply chains. Despite their "no deforestation" policies, some of these brands reportedly source palm oil from illegal plantations within the reserve.

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### **C. Biodiversity, Conservation, and Protected Area**

#### [North Sumatra police arrest orangutan trader](#)

—Apriadi Gunawan, *TheJakartaPost*, 5 October 2023

The North Sumatra Police have arrested a man in Langsa, Aceh, for his involvement in the illegal trade of orangutans, even to overseas customers. Authorities obtained evidence linking the individual, named Ramadhani, to the illegal orangutan trade, revealing his connections to an international network of wildlife traders. This arrest follows a previous case where Reza, a courier working for Ramadhani, was arrested in Medan on September 27th. During Reza's arrest, police confiscated two orangutans, a male and a female, both around five months old, which originated from Aceh. The cooperation of authorities from the Gunung Leuser National Park in Aceh played a vital role in uncovering the orangutan trade network. The two rescued orangutans are now under the care of the North Sumatra Natural Resources Conservation Agency and are currently undergoing rehabilitation at the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Center in Deli Serdang regency.

#### [Sumatran rhino birth is rare good news for species sliding to extinction](#)

—Jeremy Hace, *Mongabay*, 3 October 2023

On September 30th, Indonesia announced the birth of a female Sumatran rhino at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS), increasing the captive population of this critically endangered species to 10. Sumatran rhinos are one of the world's most endangered species, with an estimated 34-47 individuals left in the wild. This news is significant as each calf born in captivity offers hope for the species' continued existence. The newborn calf is the fourth to be born at the SRS, demonstrating the success of the breeding program, even with a limited number of animals. The Sumatran rhino is the smallest of the five rhino species and is known for its distinctive hairy appearance. However, concerns remain about the long-term viability of

the captive population as all the males are closely related. Indonesia had plans to capture more rhinos from the wild to increase genetic diversity, but progress has been slow, with only one rhino captured so far. Additionally, the wild population is dwindling. Despite the challenges, conservationists are hopeful that assisted reproductive technology (ART) could help increase genetic diversity.

#### [Indonesia Pledges to Protect Marine Biodiversity in High Seas](#)

—Jayanty Nada Shofa, *JakartaGlobe*, 21 September 2023

Indonesia has signed a global Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty, which aims to protect marine biodiversity in the high seas. The treaty was opened for signatories at the UN headquarters on Wednesday, September 21, 2023. Indonesia was one of the 70 countries that signed the treaty on the first day. In addition to conserving marine life and ecosystems in the high seas, which make up almost two-thirds of the ocean, the BBNJ will also support the transfer of marine technologies between signatories and feed into the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Indonesia's foreign minister, Retno Marsudi, said the treaty was extremely important for Indonesia, which has one of the world's longest coastlines and is affected by whatever happens in the high seas.

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## D. Climate Change, Energy, and Mining

#### [Indonesia's Carbon Exchange Holds Rp 3,000t Potential: Jokowi](#)

—Jayanty Nada Shofa, *JakartaGlobe*, 26 September 2023

Indonesia has inaugurated its first-ever carbon exchange, IDX Carbon, aimed at facilitating carbon credit trading among emitters. Carbon credits permit organizations to emit a specific amount of carbon, and this exchange will enable major emitters to purchase credits from companies with surplus quotas. President Joko Widodo stated that Indonesia possesses approximately 1 gigaton of carbon credit potential, presenting a significant economic opportunity. IDX Carbon aligns with global trends toward a green economy and can help Indonesia achieve its emission reduction targets, aiming to reduce emissions by 31.89% by 2030. The country is open to raising this target to 43.2% with technology transfers and funding from other nations. IDX Carbon is expected to attract participants from various sectors, including coal-fired power plants, forestry, agriculture, waste, industry, oil and gas, and the maritime industry, fostering sustainable environmental practices and carbon trading opportunities.

#### [Delay of Indonesia's energy transition plan a chance to get public input](#)

—Hans Nicholas jong, *Mongabay*, 25 September

The launch of Indonesia's Just Energy Transition Partnership's (JETP) investment plan was delayed from August to the end of the year for missing data on captive coal plants. The delay is seen as an opportunity for civil society groups to provide more feedback on the draft plan, which has been criticized for lacking transparency and public participation. There have been concerns around how the plan will address the impact of phasing out coal plants without adequate protection for those dependent on them for their livelihoods, as well as whether funding will be used to provide opportunities to local and Indigenous communities as opposed to mostly big companies in the constructing of renewable energy power facilities. Furthermore, observers stress the importance of the JETP funding composition, advocating for more grants and less loans to avoid burdening Indonesia with debt. Indonesia's success in

transitioning to renewable energy is contingent on retiring its coal plants, but the current JETP allocation for this purpose remains insufficient.

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## E. Pollution and Waste

### [Tepco starts releasing second batch of treated radioactive water from Fukushima nuclear plant](#)

—Sakura Murakami, *Reuters*, 5 October 2023

Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco) has initiated the second release of treated radioactive water from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The release will discharge approximately 7,800 cubic meters of wastewater over 17 days into the Pacific Ocean. While nuclear authorities, including the United Nations nuclear watchdog, claim the plan will have minimal environmental and human impact, it has triggered strong objections from neighboring countries, particularly China. The initial water release in late August led China to impose a blanket ban on Japanese seafood products and prompted numerous harassment calls to businesses and offices, believed to originate from China. Japan asserts the water has been treated to remove most radioactive elements, except tritium, a hydrogen isotope that must be diluted due to filtration difficulties. Tritium levels in the surrounding waters have met predetermined standards, with no identified issues in the first water release, according to Tepco's tests. The water discharge is part of the Fukushima plant's decommissioning process, following the 2011 tsunami-induced meltdowns, marking the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

### [Indonesian startup Nafas takes on urban air pollution](#)

—Randy Mulyanto, *NikkeiAsia*, 2 October 2023

Jakarta, one of the world's most polluted cities, is battling air pollution with the help of local startup Nafas. The company uses a network of ground-based sensors to provide air quality data through a smartphone app. Nafas has installed around 180 sensors in 15 Indonesian cities and aims to have 1,000 sensors in more locations by the end of 2024. "Having a ground-based network enables us to provide a higher degree of accuracy, and we can also detect hyperlocal sources like trash burning," co-founder Roestandny notes. The startup also sells air purifiers and monitors and offers a B2B subscription service to help businesses improve indoor air quality. Air pollution in Jakarta poses significant economic losses and health risks, and Nafas aims to provide citizens and organizations with actionable data to address the problem.

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## F. Investment and Finance

### [Rockefeller, Bloomberg, other major donors bet big on climate at UNGA](#)

—Stephanie Beasley, *Devex*, 22 September 2023

During the United Nations General Assembly, the philanthropy sector made significant commitments to combat climate change. The Rockefeller Foundation pledged \$1 billion over five years to support the global transition from fossil fuels to sustainable energy sources. Michael Bloomberg committed an additional \$500 million to the Beyond Carbon Campaign, focusing on retiring coal plants, curbing natural gas expansion, and increasing clean energy capacity in the United States. A coalition of funders, including Bezos Earth Fund, ClimateWorks Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, pledged \$340

million for data and research to promote net-zero practices in the financial sector. Corporate philanthropy also played a role. The IKEA Foundation donated \$20 million to assist workers in high-carbon industries in transitioning to renewable energy-based employment. Salesforce directed \$8.3 million toward global mangrove forest conservation and restoration and [Google.org](https://www.google.org) granted \$5 million to the Global Methane Hub, supporting satellite monitoring of methane emissions from landfills. These philanthropic commitments signify a growing emphasis on climate action despite challenges faced by multilateral efforts to address climate change at the UNGA.

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## G. Human Rights and Gender Equality

### [Indonesia's Mandalika project a litany of violations for Indigenous Sasak](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 4 October 2023

Activists are demanding the resolution of alleged rights violations by the developers of a \$3 billion tourism project on Indonesia's Lombok island. The resettlement phase of the project was expected to conclude at the end of September. However, NGOs claim that the lead developer, the state-owned Indonesian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), has failed to address numerous complaints of human rights violations by local Indigenous communities who were relocated for the project. The investigation by activist groups revealed that the resettlement process was flawed and far from complete. The ITDC's resettlement plan outlined three conditions that needed to be met before considering the process complete: providing fair resettlement, compensating for property loss in case of eviction, and restoring livelihoods for all affected individuals. None of these conditions has been fulfilled. Activists also criticize the role of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the project's main financial backer, for allowing the ITDC to operate opaquely. Human rights concerns related to the project have been raised by U.N. experts and activists repeatedly.

### [‘The kids had all been tortured’: Indonesian military accused of targeting children in West Papua](#)

—Marni Cordell, *TheGuardian*, 25 September 2023

In the remote highlands of West Papua, the Indonesian military stands accused of horrific violence against civilians, including the torture and murder of a 17-year-old high school student named Wity Unue. His death followed interrogation and detention, during which he and other detainees were subjected to brutal torture. West Papua has been the site of a long-standing conflict, with many locals demanding self-determination. However, Indonesia tightly controls access to the region, making it difficult for foreign journalists and human rights monitors to report on the situation. Concerns have grown over the serious human rights abuses committed against Indigenous Papuans, including child killings, disappearances, torture, and mass displacement. The recent military crackdown, with allegations of deliberate targeting of civilians, has led to calls for international attention and action on the West Papua issue. Critics have urged countries like Australia to reconsider their military ties and aid to Indonesia, as weapons provided may be used against West Papuan civilians, exacerbating the ongoing crisis.

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## I. Presidential Race



## **Prabowo extends poll lead ahead of presidential election**

—*TheJakartaPost*, 5 October 2023

Indonesia's Defence Minister, Prabowo Subianto, has emerged as the frontrunner in an opinion poll ahead of the country's closely watched presidential race in 2024. According to a survey by Pollster Lembaga Survei Indonesia (LSI), Prabowo garnered the support of 34% of respondents in a nationwide telephone poll of 1,206 people conducted in September. His main rivals, former Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo and former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan, secured 30.4% and 22% of the respondents' support, respectively. However, about 40% of voters remained undecided or swing voters, suggesting that the race remains fluid. None of the three prominent candidates has officially registered as a candidate yet, with registration expected between October 19 and 25. Analysts are closely watching to see who gains the support of popular incumbent Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, who cannot run for a third term. He has voiced support for his fellow party member Ganjar, but tension between him and PDI-P Chief Megawati Sukarnoputri and his frequent public appearances with Prabowo has sparked speculation about his final choice.

**End**

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