Auditing Social Forestry Program: Applying Indigenous Knowledge in Forest Management to Achieve Sustainable Development

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), one of the actions that can be done in maintaining the role of forest in ecosystem regulation, biodiversity protection, supporting livelihoods, enhancement of carbon cycle, and supplying goods and services is by enabling rights-based land use to ensure community involvement in land-use outcomes. In 2015, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia initiated forest area access granting to local communities in the form of Social Forestry program. The program incorporates the indigenous knowledge of the local and indigenous communities, who have managed forests according to their own values and traditions, in sustainable forest management. It is expected to improve communities' livelihood through empowerment, resource mobilization and sustainability as well as to preserve forest ecosystem. The Government also encourages investment and development of business opportunities for communities practicing social forestry. The program also supported by FAO, UNEP, and other partners through the United Nations' Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (UN-REDD) programme.

The Audit Board of the Republic of Indonesia has conducted performance audit on social forestry management in 2017, which assess the community involvement in forest management. The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of access granting of the forest area to the local communities in the framework of social forestry. The audit focused on several aspects, which include policy and regulation, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and coordination among stakeholders. The audit criteria were derived from relevant regulation and best practices in sustainable forest management. The criteria covered legal aspect, conflict resolution, economic development, reduction of inequality, and community empowerment.

Rooms for improvement recorded in the audit include:

a. Regulations related to forest area access granting have not covered the procedure for forest area clearance;
b. The coordination between relevant stakeholders has not been optimal;
c. Forest area access granting have not fully benefitted the local communities;
d. Inadequate monitoring and evaluation for forest area access granting; and
e. Business development for local communities has not been optimal.

The rooms for improvement are mainly due to the insufficient number of technical implementation units, insufficient amount of the available budget compared to the target to be achieved, and existing human resources have not met the ideal number.

The recommendations to overcome the conditions are:

a. To improve coordination with relevant stakeholders especially in program implementation, monitoring, and evaluation;
b. To establish regulation on forest area clearance procedures, especially that address tenurial conflict resolution;
c. To carry out regular monitoring and evaluation accordingly;
d. To allocate sufficient resources in business development and project implementation; and
e. To conduct socialization to the local communities regarding social forestry implementation.