
PACIFIC ELEVATION: INDONESIA'S VISION FOR STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL DIPLOMACY

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ABSTRACT

The Pacific region, historically overlooked in international relations studies, now faces urgent global challenges and has become an arena for new strategic partnerships. This study examines Indonesia's 'free and active' foreign policy through the *Pacific Elevation* vision and its role in strengthening Indonesia's engagement in the region. Through a qualitative literature review, this study finds that *Pacific Elevation* is a strategic initiative that enhances Indonesia's diplomatic presence through equal and mutually beneficial partnerships. This role is actualized through sustainable development programs (renewable energy, education, disaster mitigation), cultural diplomacy, and South-South cooperation, which effectively bridge historical differences. These efforts contribute to regional stability and shared prosperity in the Pacific region.

Keywords: Independent and Active Foreign Policy, Indonesia, Pacific Elevation, South-South Cooperation

ABSTRAK

Kawasan Pasifik, yang secara historis kurang mendapat perhatian dalam studi hubungan internasional, kini menghadapi tantangan global mendesak dan menjadi arena kemitraan strategis baru. Penelitian ini mengkaji kebijakan luar negeri bebas-aktif Indonesia melalui visi *Pacific Elevation* serta perannya dalam memperkuat keterlibatan di kawasan tersebut. Menggunakan metode studi literatur kualitatif, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa *Pacific Elevation* merupakan inisiatif strategis yang meningkatkan kehadiran diplomatik Indonesia melalui kemitraan setara dan saling menguntungkan. Peran ini diwujudkan melalui program pembangunan berkelanjutan (energi terbarukan, pendidikan, mitigasi bencana), diplomasi budaya, dan kerja sama Selatan-Selatan yang efektif menjembatani perbedaan historis. Upaya Indonesia ini terbukti berkontribusi pada stabilitas dan kesejahteraan bersama di kawasan Pasifik.

Kata Kunci: Indonesia, Kebijakan Luar Negeri Bebas Aktif, Kerja Sama Selatan-Selatan, Pacific Elevation

BACKGROUND

Since the end of World War II, the dynamics of international relations and regional studies have remained predominantly focused on Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. However, one region has received relatively less attention, both in academic studies of international relations and in public discourse: the Pacific and Oceania. Geographically, the Pacific and Oceania encompass a vast area spread across the Pacific Ocean, including Australia and New Zealand. This region is unique and strategically significant, as most of its countries have a land area of less than one million square kilometers and consist of small islands. Furthermore, its social landscape is renowned for preserving a rich diversity of cultures. The Pacific Island countries are traditionally categorized into three ethnographic regions: Melanesian, Polynesian, and Micronesian.

The Pacific region, particularly the South Pacific, is widely recognized for its breathtaking natural beauty. Countries such as Papua New Guinea, Tonga, the Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Fiji, Palau, Samoa, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, and Nauru exhibit distinct cultural and ecological diversity. As part of these three ethnographic communities, societies in this region maintain strong customary traditions, which profoundly influence their social structures, cultures, and political systems. In the face of contemporary global challenges, Pacific Island countries confront significant threats stemming from climate change, socioeconomic inequalities, and geopolitical tensions. Among these, climate change remains the most pressing concern, as rising sea levels intensify environmental vulnerabilities while simultaneously endangering lands of profound historical and spiritual significance to local communities. For these societies, ancestral land is not merely a place of habitation but an essential pillar of their cultural identity and heritage, safeguarded and passed down through generations. In regional and international forums, Pacific countries consistently emphasize climate change as an existential threat, one that extends beyond environmental degradation to endanger their long-standing sovereignty and way of life, which they have preserved for centuries.

Recognizing the increasingly tangible consequences of these challenges, Pacific nations have become more proactive in forging partnerships with various international actors, particularly Indonesia. These collaborative efforts aim to develop sustainable solutions, both in terms of mitigation and adaptation, to address global threats. By strengthening regional solidarity, Pacific Island communities hope to safeguard their long-term survival while ensuring a more secure environment for future generations.

The various dynamics faced by the Pacific region have fostered a sense of responsibility within Indonesia to contribute to supporting its neighboring countries.

Geographical proximity, shared cultural traditions in the eastern regions, and the evolving contemporary regional issues have been key factors driving Indonesia to deepen its engagement in the Pacific, including through forums such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG).

As an archipelagic nation, Indonesia shares deep connections with Pacific countries, particularly on issues of mutual concern, such as climate change and cultural exchange. Over time, Indonesia's role in foreign policy decision-making concerning this region has grown increasingly important. Indonesia's interests in the Pacific and Oceania cannot be overlooked, given that the region plays a crucial role in South-South Cooperation, which is aligned with the development philosophy of the 2030 Agenda. Beyond strategic interests, Indonesia's engagement is also driven by a spirit of solidarity and humanitarian values, which have long served as the foundation of its relations with Pacific countries (Buiney & Wambrauw, 2024).

In the context of international relations, reassessing the role of cultural diplomacy as a fundamental pillar in enhancing cooperation between Indonesia and Pacific countries is crucial. The significance of culture in this regard stems from the Pacific and Oceania's exceptionally diverse and unique cultural heritage. This perspective should serve as a foundation for Indonesia to incorporate cultural elements into its diplomatic strategy, thereby fostering stronger ties and addressing historical gaps in its regional engagement. However, cultural diplomacy has not been a primary focus of Indonesia's foreign policy. As a result, over the past three decades, this limitation has contributed to a less favorable perception of Indonesia among Pacific and Oceanic communities.

Thus, Indonesia must become more proactive in utilizing a cultural approach as a bridge to strengthen relations and foster a positive image in the region. This is key to gradually redefining the Pacific and Oceania as a collective effort to achieve shared prosperity and self-sufficiency based on mutual interests, equality, peer-to-peer collaboration, and reciprocal benefits among developing nations in the region (Budiono, 2022).

In developing cooperation with the Pacific and Oceania, Indonesia upholds the principle that no nation is so wealthy that it cannot learn, and no nation is so poor that it cannot teach. Therefore, Indonesia is committed to advancing diplomacy through a developmentalism-based approach that integrates grassroots traditions within a cooperative framework oriented toward "Pacific Elevation." This concept, promoted by Indonesia, carries significant meaning within this study and will be further explored in the discussion section. The phrase serves as a reflection on exploring

strategic cooperation initiatives with the Pacific region to collectively address shared challenges and interests.

Research Question

This research seeks to examine how the Pacific Elevation vision contributes to strengthening Indonesia's diplomacy with the Pacific region while overcoming historical challenges. This question arises from Indonesia's complex relations with several Pacific countries, which have often been marked by tensions, particularly concerning the West Papua issue and aspirations for Melanesian unity frequently discussed in multilateral forums. However, Indonesia aims to rebuild trust and enhance its positive image in the Pacific by promoting win-win cooperation and mutual benefits. This commitment is reflected in Indonesia's efforts to support the region's economic growth, green energy transition, education development, digital economy, and sustainable international development.

As part of its independent and active foreign policy, Indonesia leverages development assistance, financial grants, and technical cooperation as key instruments to foster prosperity and stability in the Pacific. In this context, it is crucial to assess the extent to which Pacific Elevation strengthens Indonesia's position in the Pacific-Oceania region while contributing to sustainable development and regional well-being.

Purpose and Objective

This research aims to examine the contribution of Indonesia's foreign policy through Pacific Elevation in strengthening stability and sovereignty in the region. Historically, Pacific Island countries have often been perceived as dependent on foreign aid and international development programs. However, over the past decade, the region has undergone significant changes. The Pacific region has taken a more active role in shaping their own development trajectory, moving beyond being passive aid recipients. This shift has created opportunities for various external actors to establish more dynamic partnerships, including Indonesia, which has intensified its engagement with the Pacific region.

As part of efforts to strengthen ties with the Pacific, Indonesia has developed a comprehensive partnership strategy at the bilateral, regional, and global levels. Indonesia's Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2014 to 2024, Retno Marsudi, reaffirmed this commitment by inviting representatives from small Pacific Island countries to various international meetings, including forums such as the G20. During her visit to Fiji and the Solomon Islands on September 6–7, 2022, she emphasized that Indonesia

would place special attention on strengthening relations with the Pacific through concrete initiatives.

To foster more substantial partnerships, Indonesia has promoted at least ten cooperation projects spanning energy, climate change, maritime affairs, disaster mitigation, and financial mechanisms aligned with the interests of small island states in the Pacific. One notable initiative is Indonesia's collaboration on solar power development in several Pacific countries, supporting their transition to sustainable energy. Additionally, Indonesia has provided technical assistance for disaster management, particularly for countries highly vulnerable to natural disasters, such as Vanuatu and Tuvalu.

In its capacity as ASEAN Chair in 2023, Indonesia developed a comprehensive roadmap aimed at strengthening diplomatic and cooperative relations between ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). A pivotal initiative in this strategic framework was the Indonesia Pacific Forum for Development (IPFD), convened on December 7–8, 2022. This forum marked a significant milestone in advancing prospective development collaborations between Indonesia and Pacific nations. The findings of this research further substantiate Indonesia's positioning within the Pacific Elevation framework, highlighting its dual role not only as a development partner but also as a proactive advocate for global challenges that directly impact Pacific Island countries. The Pacific Elevation initiative underscores the importance of multi-sectoral, development-oriented cooperation as a means to expand Indonesia's regional influence and strengthen its role as a key player in Pacific geopolitical and economic dynamics.

This article is structured into five principal sections. The introductory section outlines the research background and objectives. The second section elaborates on Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy doctrine, serving as the conceptual foundation for the analysis. The third section details the research methodology employed in data collection and analysis. The fourth section critically examines the complexities of Indonesia's engagement with the Pacific, particularly in the context of the West Papua issue, the efficacy of cultural diplomacy, and the strategic role of Papua as a gateway to reinforcing Indonesia's positive image in the Pacific region. Furthermore, this section explores the Pacific Elevation concept as an integral element of Indonesia's regional identity within the broader Pacific community.

Additionally, the Pacific Elevation framework will be analyzed as a tangible manifestation of Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy, particularly in the context of its engagement in South-South and Triangular Cooperation. Indonesia's dedication to providing development assistance to Pacific countries aligns with this

strategic vision. Lastly, the conclusion synthesizes the key findings of the research and discusses their broader implications for Indonesia's foreign policy in its interactions with Pacific countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Independent and Active Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is a set of goals, strategies, and actions formulated by a state or non-state actor in its interactions with other entities within the international system. This policy reflects national interests, values, and stakeholder preferences, serving as a guideline for decision-making and behavior in the global arena (Beach, 2012). In the contemporary context, foreign policy is no longer solely dependent on military or economic power; it also involves soft power instruments such as cultural exchanges, humanitarian aid, and public diplomacy. These tools are employed to achieve national objectives and foster constructive cooperation with other states rather than generating conflict or tension.

Each country formulates its foreign policy principles in alignment with its identity and interests. Indonesia, as a nation that upholds sovereignty and the welfare of its people, adopts the principle of an independent and active foreign policy. Since gaining independence in 1945, this concept has served as the foundation for Indonesia's diplomatic direction amid global dynamics. The principle of independence signifies that Indonesia does not align itself with any particular power, while activeness emphasizes Indonesia's role in promoting global peace and justice through various diplomatic initiatives.

Historically, the independent and active doctrine emerged as Indonesia sought to safeguard its sovereignty. At that time, national leaders recognized the necessity of designing a foreign policy that could protect national interests and ensure national well-being amidst geopolitical competition, particularly during the Cold War era. Five fundamental objectives underpin this policy, one of which is fostering closer ties with neighboring countries to promote regional stability.

Indonesia's perception of its international role has evolved in response to shifting global dynamics. Drawing from historical experience, Indonesia understands the significance of solidarity with other nations, especially in addressing post-Cold War non-traditional security challenges, including climate change, economic inequality, and geopolitical conflicts. Consequently, Indonesia continues to adapt its

independent and active foreign policy to remain relevant in various international contexts.

In practice, Indonesia adopts an inclusive diplomatic approach, as reflected in the slogan “a thousand friends, no enemies.” One concrete manifestation of this policy is Indonesia’s diplomatic engagement in the Pacific and Oceania regions. In recent years, the Indonesian government has intensified its development cooperation with Pacific countries, emphasizing the importance of collaboration in strategic areas such as infrastructure development, regional stability, and climate change mitigation (Wicaksana, 2023).

Regarding its relations with Pacific countries, the principle of independence allows Indonesia to engage with various actors in the region without being bound by the geopolitical interests of major powers. Meanwhile, the active component is reflected in Indonesia’s efforts to empower Pacific countries, most of which are developing states to become more integrated into the global economy and advance their development agendas.

As part of this initiative, Indonesia plays an active role in multilateral forums and organizations such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF), and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). Indonesia’s participation in these organizations underscores its commitment to supporting the aspirations of Pacific region, particularly in achieving sustainable development and addressing existential threats such as climate change, which poses the risk of submerging several small island states.

Beyond multilateral diplomacy, Indonesia also strengthens bilateral relations with Pacific countries across various strategic sectors. Ongoing cooperation initiatives include border and “Ekonizone” agreements with Papua New Guinea, international trade, migrant worker protection, and environmental sustainability efforts. Underlying these efforts, Indonesia seeks to reduce the dominance of major powers, such as the United States, China, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and France; in the region while managing the geopolitical repercussions of their external influences.

Furthermore, Indonesia leverages ethnic and cultural ties to strengthen its relations with Melanesian countries, positioning itself as a bridge between ASEAN and the Pacific-Oceania region (Wati et al, 2015). This approach aims to enhance regional

stability and solidify Indonesia's role as a strategic regional actor with a long-term vision.

Overall, Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy continues to demonstrate its relevance and adaptability in navigating complex global challenges. This strategic approach enables Indonesia to align its diplomatic priorities with both national interests and broader international objectives aimed at fostering a more equitable and stable regional order. By consistently adhering to these principles, Indonesia not only strengthens its diplomatic ties but also plays a significant role in promoting sustainable development across the Pacific region. Through active participation in various multilateral and bilateral initiatives, Indonesia endeavors to cultivate a more stable, peaceful, and economically resilient Pacific-Oceania landscape while proactively addressing potential sources of tension, including issues surrounding West Papua.

Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy in the Pacific

This study also draws on Joseph Nye's concept of soft power to analyse the cultural initiatives of Indonesian's government in the strategies of regional diplomacy. Soft Power is the common theory in studying cultural diplomacy which analyses national non-military power in the process of developing national image and influences in the sphere of diplomacy. The theoretical approach will assist to evaluate the effectiveness of the cultural policies in improving Indonesia's positive image in the Pacific region and how the shared cultural identity strengthens the Indonesia's version for strategic regional diplomacy in this region

To analyse Indonesia's approach to regional diplomacy more comprehensively, this study applies the concept of soft power, coined by Joseph Nye in 1989. Nye describes power as the capacity to shape others' behavior to achieve desired outcomes, whether through coercion (sticks), incentives (carrots), or appeal and persuasion (soft power) (Nye 2019). Soft power operates by drawing others in through admiration of a country's cultural identity, political ideals, and international conduct. Although it cannot function alone, soft power significantly strengthens a nation's global influence by shaping preferences through attraction rather than force or monetary incentives (Nye 2019).

In international relations, soft power has become a strategic tool for states seeking to enhance their global image and secure cooperation without military or economic pressure. The connection between soft power and outcomes in international

relations is complex. Soft power plays a crucial role in shaping diplomatic ties, encouraging global collaboration, and supporting peaceful conflict resolution. Countries that effectively project soft power are often more successful in forming alliances, securing beneficial agreements, and resolving disputes without resorting to force (Charles 2023).

In the Pacific region, Indonesia exercises soft power through cultural exchanges, scholarships, humanitarian aid, and public diplomacy to build trust and promote a positive image. Engagement with Melanesian countries—via shared culture and institutions like the MSG—positions Indonesia as a natural regional partner and bridge between ASEAN and the Pacific. These cultural efforts also aim to counter negative views, especially on West Papua, by shifting focus to shared heritage and development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method to analyze issues based on collected data. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative data analysis is conducted simultaneously with data collection, interpretation, and the formulation of the research narrative. Rather than occurring as separate phases, this process begins at the early stages of the research. The first step in qualitative data analysis is data reduction, where information is organized into specific patterns. Next, categorization is conducted based on relevant themes, followed by data interpretation in accordance with the predetermined analytical framework. Ensuring data validity is a primary concern throughout this process, requiring meticulous execution at every stage to guarantee the accuracy of research findings. The data sources for this research include literature reviews, scholarly journals, books, and secondary data obtained from the internet and other academic sources.

DISCUSSION

The Complexity of Indonesia-Pacific Relations Amid the West Papua Issue

The Pacific and Oceania, particularly the South Pacific, shares strong geographical and historical ties with Indonesia, specifically through Papua, which directly borders Papua New Guinea. In addition to geographical proximity, the Papuan people also share ethnic similarities with the inhabitants of South Pacific nations, as they belong to the Melanesian race. The term Melanesia itself is derived from two words: *mela*, meaning "black," and *nesia*, meaning "islands," thus literally referring to the black-skinned peoples scattered across various regions, including

Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji, and Aboriginal communities in Australia.

A significant number of nations in the South Pacific were previously under the colonial rule of major powers, including the United Kingdom, France, and Australia. This prolonged history of colonialism fostered a strong anti-colonial sentiment, which later evolved into the concept known as The Melanesian Way. This idea was first introduced in the 1970s by Bernard Narokobi, a philosopher from Papua New Guinea. Narokobi encapsulated the values of Melanesian society in a 17-page essay that was disseminated through newspapers across Melanesian countries. His ideas aimed to instill a sense of freedom and self-determination among Melanesians, encouraging them to break free from the remnants of colonial oppression (Dobrin & Golub, 2020).

Aligned with these values, several South Pacific countries have expressed support for Papua's independence movement, perceiving it as part of a broader anti-colonial struggle. However, this support is not unanimous. On the contrary, some Melanesian countries have chosen to recognize Indonesia's sovereignty over Papua, posing significant challenges to pro-independence groups such as the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, OPM) and the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) (Sudana, 2024). The lack of unanimous backing from the South Pacific has hindered efforts to internationalize the Papua issue, making diplomatic channels increasingly complex.

This divided stance has influenced Indonesia's foreign policy approach toward the Pacific and Oceania, shaping its regional engagement strategies. Historically, Indonesia has placed limited strategic emphasis on this region, often perceiving it as a peripheral area within its broader geopolitical framework. As a result, diplomatic interactions between Indonesia and Pacific nations have been marked by periodic tensions, particularly regarding the West Papua issue, which continues to pose a major challenge to regional cooperation (Darmawan, 2022). Indonesia's strained relations with certain Pacific Island states, particularly Vanuatu, further highlight these tensions, as Vanuatu has consistently raised concerns over alleged human rights violations in West Papua within international forums.

Despite Indonesia's efforts to solidify its position in the region, skepticism remains among some segments of Melanesian society. Although Jakarta has secured official recognition of its sovereignty over Papua from Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) member states, the MSG has played a dual role in the discourse, granting the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) observer status while deliberating on its potential full membership. This development reflects lingering doubts about Indonesia's commitment to fostering genuine engagement with Pacific countries. Many perceive Indonesia's diplomatic initiatives as primarily politically

motivated — aimed at containing pro-independence sentiment at the international level rather than fostering meaningful cooperation (Fadhilah, 2019). Consequently, the Papua issue continues to serve as both a point of contention and a key factor influencing Indonesia's broader regional diplomacy.

The complexities of Indonesia-Pacific relations are further exacerbated by the fact that the Papua independence movement is not confined to Indonesia but extends to the international stage, where various political groups actively seek global support. One such organization is the West Papua National Authority (WPNA), established in 2004, which advocates for international recognition of the Federal Republic of West Papua (Negara Republik Federal Papua Barat, NRFPB) as a legitimate political entity.

In addition to WPNA, the West Papua National Council for Liberation (WPNCL) was formed in Vanuatu in 2005 with the goal of garnering support from Pacific countries. The organization sought membership in the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), a regional bloc of Pacific countries, but its application was rejected due to concerns that it did not adequately represent the entire Papuan population.

"Over the years, multiple pro-independence factions in Papua have unified under a single coordinating body, the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), which was formally established on December 7, 2014. Since then, ULMWP has intensified its international advocacy for West Papua's independence. In 2015, it successfully secured observer status in the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), marking the first instance of diplomatic recognition for West Papua since 1963. This status has also reinforced West Papua's presence in international forums, positioning it as a 'nation in waiting' (Wanggae & Lawson, 2023).

Beyond the Pacific region, ULMWP has continued expanding its diplomatic outreach. On May 3, 2016, at the UK Parliament in London, ULMWP leader Benny Wenda attended a declaration of support for West Papua's independence. The event was attended by officials and politicians from various countries, who thereafter signed the Westminster Declaration. This declaration received backing from key figures, including the Prime Ministers of Tonga and the Solomon Islands, the Foreign Minister and Forestry Minister of Vanuatu, the Education Minister of Guyana, as well as representatives from the UK Parliament, the Australian Parliament, and politicians from New Zealand and Papua New Guinea (Zahidi, 2020).

This growing international recognition has further strengthened the legitimacy of the Papua independence movement, particularly within regional organizations such as the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). Within MSG, the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) has persistently framed the hardships faced by Melanesians in Papua as a focal point for mobilizing public support among its member

states. By portraying the struggle for independence as an extension of the broader Melanesian identity, ULMWP has successfully influenced several Pacific countries to express solidarity with West Papua, reinforcing the movement's presence in both regional and international diplomatic arenas.

However, this growing alignment between Pacific countries and the Papua independence movement presents a diplomatic challenge for Indonesia. The increasing involvement of regional actors in the West Papua issue has intensified scrutiny of Indonesia's governance in the region, potentially straining Jakarta's bilateral and multilateral relations with Pacific Island countries. Moreover, as support for West Papua gains traction in international forums, Indonesia faces the difficult task of maintaining its sovereignty claims while simultaneously fostering constructive engagement with the Pacific region. The balancing act between addressing human rights concerns, upholding territorial integrity, and strengthening regional diplomacy will remain a critical aspect of Indonesia's foreign policy in the Pacific.

The Effectiveness of the Cultural Approach and Papua as a Regional Gateway in Improving Indonesia's Positive Image in the Pacific in response to the growing diplomatic challenges stemming from the internationalization of the Papua issue, Indonesia has reinforced its commitment to maintaining national sovereignty while simultaneously strengthening its engagement with Pacific countries. The Indonesian government asserts that West Papua remains an inseparable part of its territorial integrity and perceives the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) as a separatist entity whose activities are influenced by external political dynamics.

Over the past decade, Indonesia has implemented various initiatives to promote equitable development in West Papua, aiming to enhance the region's socioeconomic conditions. In addition to infrastructure expansion, the government has emphasized the cultural identity of West Papuans as an integral part of the broader Melanesian heritage. Recognizing this cultural connection, Indonesia has strategically incorporated it into its broader diplomatic vision to strengthen relations with its Pacific and Oceanian partners. As a result, cultural diplomacy has emerged as a key soft power strategy, allowing Indonesia to shape regional perceptions, reinforce its national identity, and gradually cultivate a more favorable image in the Pacific region.

Enhancing development aid and technical assistance alone is deemed insufficient, as the Pacific and Oceania regions share strong cultural ties despite their high degree of heterogeneity. Unlike other regions, the Pacific and Oceania emphasize cultural approaches, which are considered more effective than high politics in diplomatic engagements. The cultural approach method represents Indonesia's initial step in shifting its diplomatic focus from Asia-Africa to the Pacific and Oceania. This

strategy aims to establish connectivity between Indonesia and the Pacific Ocean while mitigating potential conflicts related to the West Papua issue.

The dissemination of culture has long been a tool of international relations, with a high success rate in fostering mutual understanding among diverse populations. According to Prasetyo and Zahidi (2022), cultural diplomacy encompasses a set of initiatives centered on the exchange of ideas, values, traditions, and other elements tied to cultural identity. This approach is not solely aimed at enhancing socio-cultural cooperation with Pacific and Oceanian countries but also extends to various other domains, ultimately serving as a strategic instrument to promote Indonesia's national interests. Cultural diplomacy facilitates reconciliation and the reconstruction of a positive image.

Building on shared cultural heritage, Indonesia has sought closer ties with Pacific countries through various cultural diplomacy initiatives. One example is the Arts, Music, and Culture Performances, which feature collaborations between musicians from East Nusa Tenggara, Papua, Tonga, and Samoa. Through such approaches, Indonesia not only reinforces its position as part of the Pacific community but also strengthens its kinship with people in the region.

In recent years, Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has actively promoted the branding "Indonesia as Part of the Pacific Melanesian Community" while utilizing digital media and strategic communication in cultural diplomacy to engage the broader Pacific Islander audience. In practice, cultural diplomacy encompasses a diverse range of cultural exchange programs, international delegations, and even sports competitions. One notable initiative is "The Symphony of Friendship" music festival held in New Zealand, featuring collaborations between musicians from Eastern Indonesia, Australia, Melanesia, and the Maori community. This festival has the potential to strengthen Indonesia's relations with Pacific countries by highlighting cultural similarities with Melanesian traditions (Bernadette et al, 2022).

As part of its cultural diplomacy efforts, Indonesia organized the Pacific Cultural Forum for the first time on July 13, 2019, at the SkyCity Convention Center in Auckland, New Zealand. The forum, themed "Our Way Forward: Fostering Cultural Cooperation Among Pacific Nations," provided a platform for discussions on Pacific history, cultural diversity, and regional identity. Additionally, the event facilitated the exchange of academic and expert perspectives on the cultural linkages between Indonesia and Pacific countries.

The forum was attended by representatives from 19 countries, including Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste. One of the key discussions focused on a joint cultural heritage nomination initiative to UNESCO, aimed at

strengthening regional cooperation and affirming the cultural alignment between Indonesia and the Pacific under the "One Pacific Identity" concept (Wardhani, 2023).

Cultural promotion has also played a crucial role in opening new markets, as Indonesia has introduced traditional products such as tempeh and rendang (Indonesian cuisine) to Pacific countries, where logistical barriers have previously hindered trade access (Wardhani, 2023). This aspect of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy has been well received by the Pacific region. Recognizing that contemporary international relations in the Pacific and Oceania demand more than just grants, but also market access and infrastructure development, Indonesia has adopted a unique strategy, combining product exhibitions, trade and investment promotions, and cultural showcases during major festivals.

Beyond cultural approaches, Indonesia is positioning Papua as a diplomatic hub for the Pacific Island Countries. Geographically, Papua holds a strategic position, bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the north and the Arafura Sea to the south, which serve as maritime routes to Australia. To the east, Papua shares a land border with Papua New Guinea, while to the west, it is adjacent to the Banda Sea. The geographical proximity between Papua and Papua New Guinea makes the Papua border a key trade corridor, encompassing several strategic points, from Skouw, Arso, Waris, Senggi, and East Kiwirok in the north to Merauke in the south, which has direct access to Papua New Guinea's trade routes, including Bewani, Wutung, Imonda, and Sepik (Pugu, 2024).

With its direct border with Papua New Guinea, Papua has significant potential to become a primary gateway for land-based trade between Indonesia and the Pacific region. This geographic advantage enables goods and services to flow from the Pacific into Indonesia via land routes while simultaneously facilitating Indonesian exports to Pacific nations through a more efficient trade network.

Papua serves as a crucial entry point for Indonesia's access to Pacific markets and vice versa, positioning it strategically with significant economic advantages. In addition to its economic contributions, Papua's involvement in Indonesia-Pacific trade relations holds the potential to drive growth in various development sectors.

In the context of Indonesia-Pacific trade relations, Papua has made a notable contribution. In 2018, the total trade volume between Indonesia and Pacific countries reached USD 10.67 billion, reflecting a 3.05% increase from the previous year. In the first quarter of 2019 (January–March), the total trade value between Indonesia and the Pacific region stood at USD 2.04 billion (Abbas et al, 2021). Indonesia exports various commodities to major Pacific trading partners, with Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji as its largest trade counterparts.

According to Abbas et al (2021), Papua possesses abundant natural resources that can be optimized for export to the Pacific, including rubber, cocoa, palm oil, mining products, coffee, and fisheries. These commodities position Papua as a key supplier in strengthening Indonesia's trade relations with Pacific countries. Although trade between Papua and Pacific countries remains limited, the region's abundant natural resources offer considerable potential for Indonesia to reinforce and diversify its economic partnerships across the Pacific.

To maximize Papua's role in Indonesia-Pacific economic relations, a comprehensive and sustainable strategy is required from the government. Strengthening trade connectivity not only boosts economic sectors but also reinforces social, cultural, and political ties between Indonesia and the Pacific region. Establishing Papua as a bridge to the Pacific represents a policy that could drive multi-sectoral development in the region. Additionally, greater openness between Papua and the Pacific can foster trust and deepen bilateral and multilateral partnerships across various fields (Pugu, 2024).

Beyond economic relations, Indonesia's engagement with the Pacific extends to environmental cooperation, cultural exchanges, and paradiplomacy between local governments. For instance, Pugu (2024) highlights the "sister city" concept in paradiplomacy, which can be developed between Indonesian cities with ethnic and cultural ties to Pacific countries, particularly within Melanesian, Polynesian, and Micronesian communities.

Furthermore, Indonesia's presence in the Pacific carries important geopolitical dimensions. Strengthening Papua's role as a regional trade hub enhances Indonesia's geopolitical standing in the Pacific, a region of strategic importance in regional power dynamics. By optimizing Papua's role, Indonesia not only secures economic benefits but also strengthens its influence within the Pacific region.

The Vision of "Pacific Elevation": A Hope for the Realization of Indonesia's Peaceful Diplomacy in the Pacific Region

Indonesia, as a sovereign nation over its entire territory, including Papua, has undertaken various diplomatic efforts to strengthen relations with countries in the Pacific region. While certain nations such as Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, and New Caledonia actively voice support for Papua's independence movement in various international forums, others, including Fiji and Papua New Guinea, choose to respect Indonesia's sovereignty over Papua and refrain from engaging in separatist issues. Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Retno Marsudi, has emphasized that while freedom of expression is a right for all countries in international forums, Indonesia will not entertain discussions on self-determination and separatism (Wati et al., 2015).

Consequently, Indonesia's diplomacy has been directed toward altering the perception of Pacific countries and reinforcing its position as an integral part of the Pacific community.

Historically, Indonesia's approach toward the Pacific region has evolved across different administrations. During the New Order era, President Suharto prioritized the Pacific within Indonesia's foreign policy framework, as reflected in the Broad Outlines of State Policy (GBHN) of 1978, 1983, and 1988 (TAP MPR No. II/1988). Diplomatic relations with several Pacific countries were established, including Fiji (1974), Papua New Guinea (1975), the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia (1983), and Vanuatu (1995). Additionally, Indonesia provided technical assistance through the Technical Cooperation Among Developing Countries program, offering training in agriculture, livestock management, construction, and media for Pacific nations, including Fiji in 1982 (Rani, 2016).

During the Reform Era, Indonesia's diplomatic approach toward the South Pacific underwent significant changes. Under President Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia intensified informal diplomacy to counter separatist campaigns supported by some Pacific nations, particularly Vanuatu. A strategic measure undertaken was the establishment of the West Pacific Forum (WPF), which later evolved into the Southwest Pacific Dialogue (SWPD). This forum, comprising Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, and Timor-Leste, was aimed at addressing regional issues and strengthening Indonesia's image as an inclusive pluralistic nation. Furthermore, Indonesia became a dialogue partner of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in 2001, enabling it to respond to the Papua issue raised in the forum (Rani, 2016).

During the administration of Megawati Soekarnoputri, the Look East Policy was reinforced by enhancing engagement in PIF and SWPD. Indonesia initiated a micro-credit training program with the Marshall Islands, Vanuatu, and Tonga and expanded cultural diplomacy through scholarships for SWPD member states and Fiji (2003–2004). Between 2000 and 2007, Indonesia actively sought to garner support in PIF meetings to prevent the Papua issue from being raised in international forums (Policy Analysis and Development Agency, 2013).

Under the leadership of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the Look East Policy was continued with a broader approach, guided by the principle of "A Million Friends and Zero Enemies." Cultural diplomacy was intensified through the Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship Program (2005), which was extended to ASEAN+3, SWPD, and PIF countries, including the introduction of Papuan culture to participants. Indonesia also increased its involvement in the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), obtaining observer status at the 18th MSG Summit in 2011. Additionally, through the Bali

Democracy Forum (BDF), launched in 2008, Indonesia invited Pacific countries such as Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands to participate in dialogues on democracy and peace (Rani, 2016).

Despite tensions posing challenges to diplomatic relations with certain Pacific Island countries in recent years, Indonesia has acknowledged the Pacific's strategic importance in its foreign policy. Under President Joko Widodo's administration, Indonesia's diplomatic engagement with the Pacific region has intensified. To foster closer relations, Indonesia has actively participated in every regional forum. In 2019, Indonesia introduced a visionary concept aimed at fostering regional stability, "Pacific Elevation," a strategy designed to enhance Indonesia's ties with Pacific Island nations, particularly in economic, tourism, and cultural cooperation (Budiana, 2023).

Pacific Elevation was introduced through a strategic initiative organized by Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Indonesian Embassy in New Zealand, known as the Pacific Exposition. This event served as a platform to strengthen cooperation in business, investment, tourism, and cultural sectors (Malak, 2024). The Pacific Exposition was a follow-up to the 2019 Indonesia-South Pacific Forum, which resulted in a commitment to building a new era of Indonesia-Pacific relations.

Held from July 11–14, 2019, in Auckland, the Pacific Exposition marked a significant milestone in implementing the Pacific Elevation concept. In her opening speech at the event, Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs (2014–2024) Retno Marsudi introduced "Pacific Elevation" as a strategic approach to deepening ties with Pacific nations. She asserted: "We are creating a momentum to engage each other and strengthen our fraternity with fellow Pacific countries and territories... This is a new era of Pacific Partnership. A 'Pacific Elevation.'"

Minister Retno Marsudi's speech was warmly received by regional leaders and high-ranking officials, including Cook Islands Prime Minister Henry Puna, Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape, New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Winston Peters, and Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs Marise Payne. Their presence reflected significant enthusiasm for Indonesia's initiative in fostering stronger and more sustainable partnerships in the Pacific.

As a symbolic gesture of friendship and cooperation, Retno Marsudi concluded her speech by inviting regional leaders to play traditional Maluku and Papuan musical instruments, such as the drum and tifa. This act went beyond mere symbolism, serving as a tangible demonstration of Indonesia's dedication to enhancing its relationships with Pacific countries.

The Pacific Exposition successfully convened numerous national leaders, senior government officials, and private sector representatives from 19 Pacific countries (including the Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, and Vanuatu), demonstrating strong support for Indonesia's initiative to enhance regional ties. One key aspect of the forum was the reinforcement of economic partnerships, particularly with three Pacific countries that hold strategic relations with Indonesia: Australia, Papua New Guinea, and New Zealand (Bernama, 2020).

According to Hutabarat and Djumala (2024), Indonesia facilitated the participation of 30 national companies from various sectors, including food and beverages, electronics, and financial services, in the forum. Additionally, strategic industries such as energy and automotive were introduced to promote Indonesia's economic potential. This trade mission created opportunities for domestic businesses to expand their global networks through trade cooperation. Enthusiasm was also evident from the participation of 50 companies from Pacific countries, contributing to exhibitions covering tourism, trade, investment, and culture.

The Pacific Exposition brought together speakers and participants from 19 Pacific countries and territories, including 20 Indonesian state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and 21 Indonesian entrepreneurs, along with 35 New Zealand companies and business representatives from Australia, Fiji, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, and Tonga. The forum not only facilitated dialogue among stakeholders but also served as a business matchmaking platform, connecting entrepreneurs across various industries. This enthusiasm was reflected in the attendance of over 1,100 business representatives from Indonesia and the Pacific region.

In the cultural sector, the forum highlighted linguistic and cultural ties between Indonesia and the Pacific, particularly the shared Austronesian linguistic heritage. The discussions resulted in a Joint Communiqué affirming Indonesia's integral role in the Pacific community and agreeing on enhanced cultural cooperation to foster mutual understanding and friendship among young generations. Throughout the event, Pacific Exposition also showcased artistic and cultural performances from various Pacific nations, including the "Sound of the Pacific" concert featuring Indonesian musicians Glen Fredly and Ivan Nestorman, as well as artists from Tonga, Samoa, New Zealand, Australia, and Fiji (Bernama, 2020).

From an economic perspective, this forum recorded a total business transaction value of USD 70 million, encompassing sectors such as tourism, fisheries, agriculture (coffee, cloves, nutmeg, seaweed), as well as rattan products and handicrafts (Bernama, 2020). This success serves as evidence that the Pacific is not only a strategic partner for Indonesia but also a larger family with significant economic potential to be developed together.

As a follow-up, Indonesia has strengthened its diplomacy by establishing diplomatic relations with the Cook Islands and Niue, further solidifying its position in the South Pacific region. The Pacific Exposition is expected to become a sustainable platform for strengthening partnerships, fostering dialogue, and creating mutually beneficial cooperation between Indonesia and Pacific nations. Building on this achievement, Indonesia hosted the second Pacific Exposition from October 27 to 30, 2021, in Christchurch, New Zealand. This initiative aimed to accelerate the Pacific region's economic recovery through various strategic activities, including tourism, business, and health forums, exhibitions, and cultural activities such as fashion shows and culinary festivals (Bernama, 2020).

The Pacific Exposition has become a cornerstone in the development of the Pacific Elevation concept, marking Indonesia's proactive efforts in deepening cooperation and strengthening friendships with Pacific countries. The vision of Pacific Elevation emphasizes peace and shared prosperity in the Pacific region, reaffirming Indonesia's position as an integral part of the Pacific community (Malak, 2024). This approach not only reflects Indonesia's diplomatic commitment to the region but also underscores the recognition that Indonesia is an inherent part of the Pacific community, both geographically and culturally.

As part of the Pacific Elevation strategy, Indonesia continues to enhance engagement with Pacific nations through various strategic initiatives. One concrete step taken was the organization of the Indonesia-Pacific Forum for Development (IPFD) in Bali in 2022, themed "Grow and Prosper Together," serving as a platform to deepen development cooperation and strengthen diplomatic relations with Pacific countries. Additionally, in 2024, Indonesia held the Indonesia-Pacific Parliamentary Partnership (IPPP), a forum aimed at fostering inter-parliamentary collaboration in the region to build more robust and sustainable regional connectivity.

Beyond strengthening diplomacy, Indonesia is also highly focused on increasing trade with Pacific countries. One example is the plan to enhance trade cooperation between Indonesia and New Caledonia through a Preferential Trade Agreement and a Bilateral Investment Treaty. In 2020, trade relations between Indonesia and New Caledonia saw substantial growth, with trade volume rising by 26.08% compared to the prior year. While the trade value between the two countries was recorded at USD 11.56 million in 2019, it rose to USD 14.58 million in 2020 (Hutabarat & Djumala, 2024). Notably, almost all trade transactions were dominated by Indonesia's exports to New Caledonia, highlighting Indonesia's role as a key trading partner for the territory.

Under the Pacific Elevation vision, Indonesia seeks to boost trade activity by emphasizing non-oil and gas exports and imports during the 2019–2024 period. Some

of Indonesia's key export products with high competitiveness in the regional market include electronic components, palm oil, tires, and tobacco. Meanwhile, Indonesia also imports various essential commodities from Pacific countries, such as bituminous coal, livestock products, wheat, iron ore concentrates, and raw sugar, which play a crucial role in supporting domestic industries (Hutabarat & Djumala, 2024).

Conceptually, Pacific Elevation represents Indonesia's dedication to enhancing its relationships with Pacific territories, achieved through both bilateral and regional collaborations, alongside direct support. Kabutaulaka (2020) examined that this approach aligns with the characteristics of Melanesian societies, which uphold values such as "Whanau" (family), "Manaakitanga" (mutual respect for both people and nature), a deep appreciation for arts and culture, and a gentle-hearted nature.

The vision of Pacific Elevation is designed to support four key objectives for Indonesia: increasing recognition from the Pacific region regarding Indonesia's presence and role in the region, expanding access for eastern Indonesian provinces, positioning Indonesia within the Pacific tourism map, and opening opportunities in non-traditional markets. According to Darmawan (2022), this increased engagement is not merely symbolic diplomacy but holds deep strategic significance, particularly in three main aspects.

First, Indonesia needs to build trust with Pacific countries, particularly in responding to human rights issues. One of the challenges faced is criticism voiced by Vanuatu regarding Indonesia's policies in West Papua, which has even been brought to the United Nations General Assembly. Although Indonesia has officially denied these allegations, an effective response cannot solely rely on formal mechanisms at the UN. A more proactive diplomatic approach with Pacific countries is also required. Establishing open dialogue and strengthening cooperation in various sectors can serve as strategic steps to create a more balanced understanding and ease existing tensions.

Second, from a geopolitical perspective, the Pacific and Oceania region now plays an increasingly central role in global dynamics. The region has become a battleground for competition between the United States and China, with some countries leaning towards Washington while others strengthen ties with Beijing. The presence of the AUKUS pact has also heightened regional tensions.

One development reflecting this dynamic is the security agreement between the Solomon Islands and China, signed in 2022. This agreement raised concerns about the potential presence of Chinese military forces in the region, particularly for Australia. While legally, every country has sovereign rights to establish defense cooperation, the agreement has sparked broader tensions in the Pacific.

Indonesia recognizes the complexity of US-China competition in the Pacific, which is one of the primary reasons behind its initiative to encourage ASEAN to develop the Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. In this context, Indonesia aims to establish itself as a viable alternative partner for the Pacific countries in development cooperation while also encouraging them to maintain neutrality amid the growing rivalry between the two global powers.

Third, Indonesia and Pacific Island countries also face shared challenges related to climate change. Despite their minimal contribution to global carbon emissions, Pacific countries are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Rising sea levels have resulted in water shortages and land erosion, with recent studies showing that at least eight islands in the Pacific have been submerged due to these environmental changes.

Rising sea levels pose a tangible threat to island nations and coastal regions, including Indonesia. Therefore, cooperation in climate change mitigation, such as mangrove conservation and the development of green infrastructure, must be prioritized in parallel with efforts to strengthen economic connectivity and sustainable development. Additionally, rehabilitating coastal ecosystems and enhancing food security resilience in the face of climate change must be adopted.

However, Indonesia's greatest challenge in fostering meaningful engagement with Pacific Island countries across these three aspects lies in resource limitations. Indonesia's efforts in recent years to provide assistance to several countries in the region have often been met with domestic criticism. Some argue that before expanding engagement with other nations, Indonesia should prioritize resolving its own internal issues.

The lack of information about Indonesia also remains a challenge, as it is not widely known by Pacific communities, including its geographical aspects. On the other hand, Indonesia is the largest landmass in the Pacific region, comprising five provinces: East Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, North Maluku, Papua, and West Papua, with a total population of 13 million, of which 40% are of Melanesian descent. However, this fact has not been widely conveyed, leading to Indonesia's image still being underappreciated in the Pacific. Many remain unaware that Indonesia is part of the Pacific region (Sudana, 2024). One key factor contributing to this perception is the limited transportation options and significant geographical distances, which hinder interactions between Indonesians and Pacific communities.

In this regard, Pacific Elevation represents a pivotal moment for Indonesia to deepen its interaction with Pacific countries. It will be intriguing to see how Indonesia's leadership under President Prabowo Subianto will take advantage of this

opportunity. Since the beginning of his leadership, Prabowo has stressed the significance of a Good Neighbor Policy, which is anticipated to be instrumental in enhancing Indonesia's influence in the Pacific region and furthering the vision of Pacific Elevation.

Pacific Elevation as a Representation of Indonesia's 'Independent and Active' Foreign Policy in South-South Triangular Cooperation and Its Commitment to Development Assistance in the Pacific Region

Strengthening and developing diplomatic ties between Indonesia and the Pacific Island nations is a central component of Indonesia's 'Pacific Elevation' initiative. Aligned with its independent and active foreign policy, Indonesia pursues two key objectives: safeguarding national interests and contributing to the resolution of global challenges. The country's policy of proactive engagement also prioritizes issues of public importance, such as promoting South-South cooperation within the Pacific region. To support the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and address global challenges, Indonesia extends assistance to developing Pacific Island nations through the South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) framework.

The SSTC model involves three distinct parties: a developing country (such as Indonesia), a development partner country or institution, and the recipient country (in this case, the Pacific nations). Within Indonesia, the term 'South-South and Triangular Cooperation' encompasses all bilateral development initiatives, whether purely South-South or involving external development partners (Apresian & Dewi, 2018).

The Pacific Island countries, especially those in the South Pacific within the Melanesian Spearhead Group, are key recipients of assistance under the South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) framework. These countries rely heavily on foreign aid, particularly in the areas of economic and social development. Given the geopolitical intricacies of the Pacific region and the shifting balance of power, Indonesia holds a strategic opportunity to expand its role, particularly in providing technical assistance aimed at reducing regional development gaps.

Indonesia's evolution from a developing nation to a middle-income country (MIC), along with its G20 membership, has significantly altered its role and responsibilities in supporting the advancement of Pacific Island countries (Buiney & Wambrauw, 2024). Leveraging SSTC as a mechanism, Indonesia plays a pivotal role in enhancing the economic and social infrastructure of these Pacific countries, thereby reducing their dependency on traditional donor countries.

Furthermore, Indonesia's contributions through technical and humanitarian assistance under SSTC can be interpreted through two lenses. Firstly, this cooperation

serves as a developmental partnership that enhances the capabilities and operational expertise of both Indonesian and Pacific Island institutions in areas such as grant management, investment strategies, and the development of sustainable infrastructure. Secondly, SSTC functions as a strategic diplomatic instrument, enabling Indonesia to cultivate positive relationships with the Pacific populations, particularly concerning its sovereignty over Papua (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2024). This initiative aligns with Indonesia's "Pacific Elevation" vision, which is reinforced through a series of high-level visits and technical engagements aimed at strengthening diplomatic and economic ties with countries in the region.

Through SSTC, the Indonesian government has allocated an additional budget of IDR 60 billion for diplomacy and cooperation with the Pacific region. The majority of this funding, IDR 20 billion, is focused on enhancing Papua's image at the international level, including cultural promotion and social development. Additionally, IDR 15 billion is allocated to strengthening bilateral relations with South Pacific nations, particularly in economic, educational, and infrastructure sectors. In parallel, Indonesia has allocated IDR 15 billion to support its cooperation with international Pacific organizations, thereby ensuring the country's active participation in regional initiatives. From a security perspective, IDR 5 billion is allocated for border management with Australia and South Pacific countries, while another IDR 5 billion is directed toward intelligence cooperation to maintain regional stability (Anggraini, 2019).

In line with this commitment, Indonesia provides economic assistance as part of a "giving hand" diplomacy approach, realized through the establishment of the Indonesia Agency for International Development (Indonesia Aid) under the coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This program was officially launched on October 18, 2019, by then-Vice President Jusuf Kalla alongside Minister of Finance Sri Mulyani. The Indonesian government allocated a permanent fund of USD 212 million from the State Budget (APBN) to support various aid programs (Sintia, 2024). The Ministry of Finance manages these funds, while policy direction is set by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

To date, aid has been distributed to five Pacific Island nations: Tuvalu, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Nauru, and Kiribati. This funding covers various strategic sectors, including climate change, humanitarian assistance, infrastructure, agriculture, and fisheries (Sintia, 2024). However, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi emphasized that Indonesia Aid does not impose strict sectoral restrictions. Recipient nations, such as Pacific Island countries, have the flexibility to determine their priorities as long as they align with Indonesia's development vision.

During the launch of Indonesia Aid, Minister Retno Marsudi underscored that this initiative is part of Indonesia's diplomatic strategy to strengthen its global role and contributions. She asserted that through Indonesia Aid, Indonesia embodies the principle of walk the talk in promoting global development partnerships (Sintia, 2024). Furthermore, this program reinforces the South-South and Triangular Cooperation mechanism and serves as a crucial instrument for Indonesia's contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The core principle upheld by Indonesia is to continue contributing to regional peace and prosperity.

Indonesia's commitment to supporting partner nations' development through Indonesia Aid is realized through concrete cooperation. One significant manifestation of this initiative was the Grant Agreement signed between Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi and Solomon Islands Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele on December 5, 2019, during the 12th Bali Democracy Forum (BDF). This agreement included the construction of a multi-purpose futsal stadium in the Solomon Islands as part of the country's preparations to host the 2023 Pacific Games (Malak, 2024). Additionally, both nations agreed on a Framework on Development Cooperation as a foundation for broader development collaboration.

The futsal stadium is designed to be multi-functional, accommodating futsal, basketball, volleyball, as well as conferences and cultural events. The project, valued at IDR 112.5 billion, was entrusted to PT Wijaya Karya, a state-owned enterprise, with a target completion date of December 2022. Furthermore, Indonesia provided an additional grant of IDR 20.77 billion to Fiji for the second phase of the Queen Victoria School development (Malak, 2024).

Additionally, on December 16, 2020, Indonesia signed a virtual grant agreement with representatives from the Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Timor-Leste. This grant, sourced from Indonesia Aid, was distributed as part of the Pacific Elevation vision, aiming to strengthen Indonesia's relations with South Pacific countries. The total aid disbursed reached IDR 29.41 billion, with each country receiving IDR 2.88 billion for procuring Indonesian-made medical equipment to support COVID-19 response efforts (Malak, 2024).

Beyond infrastructure cooperation, Indonesia has also provided humanitarian assistance in the region. On April 8, 2020, through Indonesia's Ambassador to Fiji, Benjamin Scott Carnadi, Indonesia donated USD 7,500 to victims of a tropical cyclone in Fiji. This assistance included a cash check of USD 5,000 and 100 packages of basic necessities worth USD 2,500, handed over to the Director of Fiji's National Disaster Management Office (Wanggae, 2023). This aid was delivered in a low-profile manner to maintain Indonesia's positive image in the Pacific, despite ongoing diplomatic challenges.

The establishment of Indonesia Aid serves as a tangible manifestation of Indonesia's commitment to strengthening development cooperation in the Pacific through South-South and Triangular Cooperation. This initiative reflects Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy, where economic and humanitarian diplomacy continues despite political challenges, such as resistance from certain countries with strong ideological stances on West Papua. Ultimately, Indonesia Aid not only aims to improve regional welfare and stability but also to enhance regional solidarity and support the implementation of the Pacific Elevation vision.

Pancasila, Gotong Royong, Locality, and Religious Moderation as Pillars of Indonesia's Foreign Policy in the Pacific and Papua

As an archipelagic nation rich in cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, Indonesia possesses a distinct potential to serve as a diplomatic bridge in the Pacific and Oceania. Indonesian diplomacy, rooted in the foundational values of *Pancasila*, is not solely guided by political and economic interests but also embodies a commitment to humanitarianism, social justice, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and the freedom of religion—values explicitly embedded in the second principle of *Pancasila* ("Just and Civilized Humanity") and the fifth principle ("Social Justice for All Indonesians"). Through this normative framework, Indonesia seeks to advance a model of development and peace that is inclusive, preventive, and deeply anchored in local wisdom.

Pancasila reaffirms Indonesia's sovereignty and independence in international affairs while also reinforcing its active role in promoting global peace and justice. President Prabowo Subianto, following in the footsteps of his predecessors, has reiterated Indonesia's non-aligned foreign policy stance in various international forums, including at SPIEF 2025, under the maxim: "A thousand friends are not enough, one enemy is too many." This guiding philosophy reflects Indonesia's aspiration to remain non-partisan amid great power rivalry, while remaining proactive in multilateral forums to safeguard national interests and global peace.

The moral compass of *Pancasila* underpins every dimension of Indonesia's foreign policy. The second principle compels Indonesia to speak out for justice, peace, and human rights in global affairs, including in complex domestic matters such as the Papua issue. Meanwhile, the fifth principle emphasizes equitable development and inclusive economic diplomacy, particularly in Eastern Indonesia, where regions like Papua continue to face multidimensional social, economic, and political challenges.

A concrete example of this *Pancasila*-based diplomacy and Indonesia's free and active foreign policy is reflected in its relations with Pacific Island countries, particularly Papua New Guinea (PNG). On July 15, 2024, PNG Prime Minister James

Marape visited Jakarta and held meetings with President Joko Widodo and President-elect Prabowo Subianto. This visit marked a strengthening of strategic ties, culminating in agreements on transportation, energy, trade, education, security, and defense. While economic diplomacy remains a priority, sensitive issues such as human rights in Papua have yet to be addressed substantively.

Bilateral cooperation illustrates the spirit of *gotong royong*, one of Pancasila's core values, by promoting joint efforts for mutual progress. A tangible manifestation is the development of cross-border markets facilitating grassroots trade between Keerom and Muara Tami (Papua) and Vanimo and Sepik (PNG). Indonesia has also extended technical assistance and scholarships to PNG students, demonstrating a commitment to "just and civilized humanity" while contributing to education and human capital development across the region (Loy & Wangge, 2024).

In the defense sector, both countries have ratified a border agreement covering 760 kilometers, enabling joint patrols and cross-border crime prevention, including the containment of armed separatist groups. This reflects Indonesia's preventive and non-coercive approach to regional stability, particularly in Papua. Nevertheless, challenges remain, notably regarding PNG's capacity to secure its borders and regional perceptions surrounding human rights issues in Papua (Loy & Wangge, 2024).

Regionally, Indonesia acknowledges that the Papua issue continues to attract the attention of Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) members such as Fiji and Vanuatu, who have raised concerns over alleged human rights violations. In response, Indonesia must prioritize transparency, constructive dialogue, and open communication with Pacific leaders as an expression of both the second and fifth principles of Pancasila, as well as a reflection of Indonesia's constitutional commitment to freedom of religion and belief. Interfaith dialogues and cross-border cultural diplomacy can serve as tools for soft power engagement, fostering mutual understanding and reaffirming shared humanitarian values.

One such effort is Indonesia's active engagement through its Embassy in Fiji, which hosted the "Pacific Cultural Night – Harmony for the Pacific" to strengthen cultural ties among Pacific nations. This event featured artistic exchanges between Indonesia and countries such as Fiji, Vanuatu, PNG, and the Solomon Islands, showcasing musical performances, traditional dances, and culinary exhibitions. Through an artist residency program, around 15 musicians from Indonesia and Fiji—including representatives from Papua and East Nusa Tenggara—collaborated in cultural performances in Suva (Chanel, 2024).

Indonesia also participated in the 2023 Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival (MACFEST), where artistic delegations from Papua and NTT performed traditional

Kasbi dances and original compositions symbolizing regional solidarity. Such programs strengthen people-to-people ties, foster cultural empathy, and promote Pacific unity beyond political rhetoric (Kurniawan, 2024).

Furthermore, the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom in Indonesia can serve as a cornerstone of socio-cultural diplomacy with Pacific countries, where Christianity remains the dominant faith. Indonesia can highlight its pluralistic coexistence and national initiatives promoting religious moderation, such as the *Forum for Religious Harmony* (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama*, FKUB), as models for sustaining social cohesion. This is particularly significant in addressing concerns among Pacific states about perceived human rights or religious intolerance in Papua. Therefore, transparency, dialogue, and the meaningful inclusion of local actors are imperative elements of Indonesia's preventive diplomacy.

Ultimately, a foreign policy grounded in *Pancasila* allows Indonesia to present itself not only as a pragmatic actor but also as a principled and compassionate partner. As a pluralistic and religiously diverse nation, Indonesia's commitment to religious freedom can serve as an effective tool of cross-cultural diplomacy, especially in promoting harmony within Papua and across the wider Pacific region—where spiritual, cultural, and ethnic plurality are shared realities.

The values of *gotong royong* were reflected through Indonesia's efforts to explore preferential trade agreements, sustainable tourism initiatives, and cultural preservation projects with Pacific nations. For instance, the exposition facilitated discussions on the concept of "One Pacific Destination," a visionary effort to promote the Pacific as a unified cultural and tourism zone (Wardhani, 2023). This approach aligns closely with the Fifth Principle (*Sila Kelima*) of *Pancasila*, which calls for social justice for all. By creating more equitable access to economic opportunities for small island nations—often marginalized in the global market—Indonesia promotes an inclusive development agenda. The promotion of local products such as Fiji Water or traditional Pacific cuisines, framed by cultural identity, further highlights how economic cooperation can be rooted in shared values, not merely in profit.

In the case of Papua, Indonesia must demonstrate that its engagement in the Pacific is not solely about defending territorial integrity, but also about building a regional solidarity grounded in shared experiences as maritime and archipelagic communities. Identity-related challenges faced by Papuans—ranging from socio-economic marginalization to feelings of cultural exclusion—should be addressed through a rights-based, distributive justice approach anchored in cultural reconciliation. Affirmative policies and localized empowerment programs in Papua could serve as models for Pacific nations grappling with similar internal challenges. Here, the Second Principle (*Sila Kedua*) of *Pancasila*—just and civilized humanity—

becomes profoundly relevant, emphasizing the dignity of the Papuan people as both Indonesian citizens and members of the wider Pacific community.

Local Papuan wisdom offers powerful lessons in inclusive governance and community cooperation. Traditional practices such as *Bamuskam* (customary councils), the *honai* (round communal house symbolizing unity), and rotational farming systems grounded in resource-sharing reflect strong communal values akin to *gotong royong*. In many indigenous Papuan communities, major decisions are made through inclusive consensus, mirroring deliberative democratic ideals. These practices could inform regional development models that better integrate local voices in Pacific cooperation frameworks. Likewise, cultural traditions such as the *Wuya* ceremony or *Bakar Batu* (stone cooking feast), which reinforce social cohesion, can be shared in Pacific cultural exchanges to showcase Papuan heritage.

During international cultural missions, Papua has increasingly taken the spotlight. The Indonesian Cultural Mission team from Papua has performed iconic pieces such as "Papua Dalam Cinta"—originally composed by Pay and made famous by the Papuan band Soa Soa—as well as a newly commissioned song, "Building a Bridge of Love," by musician Steven Wally. These performances not only represent cultural diplomacy but also convey a message of unity and hope through the arts (Kumara, 2023).

The involvement of Indonesian religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama in international forums like the G20 Religion Forum (R20) and the Global Interfaith Dialogue reflects Indonesia's commitment to promoting the values of religious moderation as a countermeasure to extremism and as a way to strengthen global solidarity (Andrios, 2022). This approach aligns with the principle of *gotong royong*, not only in the domestic context—such as through the Peace Village Program initiated by the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs (Kemenko PMK) and the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) to foster social inclusion in Papua—but also in international diplomacy, as seen in Indonesia's active engagement in the Pacific Islands Forum and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). In response to sensitive issues regarding Papua raised within MSG, Indonesia has adopted a transparency strategy by facilitating MSG delegations' visits to Papua in 2014 and 2018, and by establishing the Papua Council of Trustees, which includes indigenous and religious leaders in development processes—demonstrating concrete steps toward reconciliation.

Nevertheless, Indonesia acknowledges that the identity crisis in Papua remains an ongoing challenge due to a history of marginalization and cultural disconnection. To address this, Indonesia emphasizes a preventive approach rooted in Papuan local wisdom, such as the philosophy of *living in harmony with nature, traditional consensus-*

building (musyawarah adat), and the value of *rasamala*—a concept of mutual sustenance within the community—which may serve as a foundation for cultural dialogue and the restoration of dignity.

Local values from various Indonesian regions—such as *masohi* from Maluku, which emphasizes communal labor for shared benefit; *mapalus* from Minahasa, a system of mutual assistance rooted in community bonds; and *seka* from Bali, a tradition of collective engagement in social and cultural activities—all reflect the spirit of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) that forms a cornerstone of Indonesia’s national identity. These values hold great potential for cultural diplomacy initiatives across the Pacific, where similar communal traditions are deeply respected. Integrating these philosophies into regional forums like the Pacific Islands Forum or the Melanesian Spearhead Group not only strengthens Indonesia’s soft power, but also introduces a narrative of archipelagic brotherhood that resonates with Pacific cultural sensibilities.

On the other hand, the identity crisis faced by Papua within Indonesia stems not only from historical marginalization or developmental disparities, but from the limited space allowed for Papuan cultural expression within the national identity framework. An innovative approach—yet to be fully recognized by the government—is to treat Papuan identity not merely as a recipient of development but as a co-equal contributor to Indonesia’s pluralistic nationalism. For instance, incorporating Papuan local languages into cultural diplomacy programs or enabling young Papuan artists and intellectuals to participate in international forums as cultural ambassadors could serve as strategic steps toward healing alienation and fostering a genuine sense of belonging.

However, Indonesia must also address the “Java-centric” tendencies in its cultural diplomacy. While missions in places like New Caledonia have featured traditional Indonesian arts and cuisine, the overrepresentation of Javanese culture may hinder deeper identification by Pacific nations with Indonesia as a fellow island community. It is therefore crucial to broaden Indonesia’s cultural narrative to include Papua, Maluku, and other eastern regions that share historical and geographical proximity with the Pacific.

As Indonesia continues to assert its place as an integral part of the Pacific family, it must consistently emphasize that its diplomacy is not one of dominance, but of empowerment and fraternity. Moving forward, the vision of “Pacific Elevation” must be supported by sustainable initiatives, including strengthened maritime connectivity, community-based development, cross-cultural education, and public diplomacy that foregrounds Papua and Eastern Indonesia as the true face of Indonesia in the Pacific.

CONCLUSIONS

As the world's largest archipelagic nation, Indonesia shares deep historical and cultural ties with the Pacific, particularly through its Melanesian communities in Eastern Indonesia. These connections serve as a strong foundation for Indonesia's diplomacy in the region, which extends beyond strategic interests to directly impact economic development and societal well-being. In line with its independent and active foreign policy, Indonesia is committed to fostering constructive partnerships with Pacific countries, contributing to regional stability while promoting mutual prosperity. The Pacific Elevation vision reflects this commitment by prioritizing positive-sum cooperation in key areas such as economic development, maritime security, and sustainable growth. Furthermore, Indonesia's increasing engagement in the Pacific presents Papua as a regional gateway, facilitating trade, tourism, and the protection of Indonesian citizens in the region.

Amid dynamic relations with Pacific nations, the shared Melanesian culture has served as a form of soft power to enhance Indonesia's image and strengthen the effectiveness of its strategic regional diplomacy. This suggests that cultural initiatives based on shared identity can play a crucial role in reducing political obstacles (e.g., the Papua issue) and accelerating the implementation of a state's diplomatic strategies. Ideally, regional shared identities should be seen as social resources that states can leverage to initiate regional cooperation mechanisms.

However, the implementation of Pacific Elevation faces persistent challenges, particularly regarding the West Papua issue, which continues to shape perceptions of Indonesia in the Pacific. Several countries in the region remain critical of Indonesia's policies, underscoring the need for a comprehensive diplomatic strategy to address negative sentiments while reinforcing Indonesia's role as an integral part of the Pacific community. A key approach to overcoming these challenges is inclusive diplomacy driven by people-to-people engagement. Strengthening development cooperation in Papua by involving Pacific countries in strategic projects related to education, healthcare, and community-based economic initiatives, can serve as a bridge for deeper regional ties. Additionally, enhancing transparency and proactive communication through public diplomacy is essential to counter misperceptions and foster greater understanding at the regional level.

To strengthen its position in the Pacific, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, particularly the Directorate of Pacific and Oceanian Affairs, must reinforce regional cooperation mechanisms that emphasize people-centered development. Integrating Papua into broader Pacific economic and socio-cultural frameworks will further solidify Indonesia's role in the region. In addition, expanding track-two diplomacy, leveraging academia, media, and civil society organizations; can

serve as a powerful instrument in promoting Indonesia's strategic interests while fostering deeper engagement with the Pacific community.

To optimize its influence, Indonesia must further enhance market access and investment opportunities, advance sustainable development initiatives, and strengthen socio-cultural relations to build empathy and solidarity with Pacific Island countries. Moreover, Indonesia should take on a more proactive participation in regional forums such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) to advocate shared regional interests, particularly in climate change mitigation and maritime security. Through a more inclusive and transparent diplomatic approach, Indonesia can maintain domestic stability while positioning itself as a trusted regional leader in the Pacific, fully realizing the potential of the Pacific Elevation vision.

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