



SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

South-South Cooperation and Indonesia's National Interests

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ABSTRACT

South-South Cooperation (SSC) is one of the outcomes of the Ten Bandung Principles agreement which became the basis for the Non-Aligned Movement. As one of the initiators of the Non-Aligned Movement, Indonesia views SSC as being in line with the spirit of the Ten Bandung Principles and helping developing countries. This article aims to provide an understanding of how SSC can be used to achieve Indonesia's national interests as well as what challenges should be considered in its implementation. It argues that the Indonesian government utilises South-South Cooperation as a strategy for achieving its national interests. By using a qualitative research method and Donald E. Nuechterlein's concept of national interests, this study found that SSC is indeed used to advance Indonesia's national interests. These interests align with the Indonesian Dream 2015–2085 vision of becoming an independent country, the most influential nation in the Asia-Pacific region, and the center of the world's economic barometer. The SSC can also be used as a tool for Indonesia to contribute to the world order.

KEYWORDS

Indonesian Dream; Indonesian Foreign Policy; National Interest; South-South Cooperation

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, President Joko Widodo emphasised his hope that Indonesia could become a developed country by 2045 ([Kementerian PPN/Bappenas, 2016](#)). This is in line with President Joko Widodo's handwriting in a time capsule in 2015 in Merauke where he listed seven points for the Indonesian Dream 2015-2085, three of which were: (1) Indonesia as the centre of education, technology, and world civilization, (2) Indonesia becoming an independent and the most influential country in the Asia Pacific region, and (3) Indonesia becoming a barometer of world economic growth ([Kementerian Sekretariat Negara, 2015](#)).

Under the current leadership of President Prabowo Subianto, there are eight missions called *asta cita* with a vision to continue the hopes of the previous government (President Joko Widodo) with the theme 'Together Indonesia Progressing Towards Golden Indonesia 2045'. Mission number two stipulates 'Strengthening the state's defence and security system and encouraging national independence through self-sufficiency in food, energy, water, creative economy, green economy, and blue economy' ([Wisnubroto, 2024](#)). In addition, there is the ambitious goal of President Prabowo Subianto and Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka who set an economic growth achievement of eight percent in five years ([CNN, 2024](#)). This mission aligns with Indonesia's previous national interests, especially in becoming an independent and influential country.

These hopes are not an easy task to fulfil as they need to be carefully planned through official government documents. Indonesia's national interests are written in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan document ([Kementerian PPN/Bappenas, 2019](#)). For this research, Indonesia's national interests as written in the 2020-2024 RPJMN document focused on two main pillars, namely: increasing public welfare and establishing an increasingly advanced and solid economic structure.

Looking at Indonesia's national interests, it is clear that the focus is on two sectors, namely the economy, where Indonesia wants to be the centre of the world's economic barometer marked by a solid economic structure, and a good level of community welfare and politics, namely Indonesia wants to be an independent and influential country in the Asia-Pacific region. Realising its national interests is a must for the Indonesian Government hence various ways must be conducted to achieve them. Indonesia already has the modalities to achieve these national interests. From a geographical aspect, Indonesia has great potential in the maritime sector as the largest archipelagic country in the world and its location between the Indian and Pacific Oceans ([Santoso & Nafisah, 2017](#)). In terms of leadership, Indonesia made history by becoming a member of the Group of Twenty (G20) in 1999.

This membership is special because Indonesia is the only country in the Southeast Asia region in the group ([Astuti & Fathun, 2020](#)). Moreover, Indonesia held the G20 chairmanship from 1 December 2021 to 30 November 2022 and it was also the first developing country to be entrusted to chair meetings for the G20 forum ([Sekretariat Kabinet, 2022](#)). One year later, Indonesia again secured a strategic position by holding the ASEAN

chairmanship for 2023 ([Julina, 2023](#)). The chairmanship of these two activities demonstrates external parties' trust in Indonesia in leading global forums aimed at addressing various challenges and issues at the world level. In terms of the economy, Indonesia is considered to have a strong economic foundation, marked by being the country with the largest economy in Southeast Asia, the sixteenth largest economy in the world, and the seventh largest in terms of purchasing power parity ([Breuer & Kinda, 2018](#)). With these many potentials, Indonesia is predicted to play a central and dominant role in becoming a leader and developing the regional and global economy.

South-South Cooperation (SSC), the main focus of this study, is perceived by the authors as one of the tools to help achieve these national interests. SSC is a follow-up to Indonesia's involvement in the Asian-African Conference in Bandung in 1955 ([Pujayanti, 2015](#)) as well as the implementation of the free and active principle in the framework of Indonesia's foreign policy. SSC is a collaboration between developing countries that experience imbalances in the dynamics of international cooperation between developing and developed countries, where developing countries are always seen as a minority ([Indrawan, et al., 2023](#)). SSC is a real step to realise solidarity and strengthen collective action among developing countries to form a new force to achieve better conditions based on the values of togetherness, equality, and justice ([Pujayanti, 2015](#)).

Utilising SSC to help Indonesia pursue its national interests presents some challenges. In the SSC forum, Indonesia's modalities do not necessarily facilitate the achievement of its national interests. In the economic context, competition between nation-states in utilising export markets has increased, especially amidst fears for the future with the re-election of Donald Trump as President of the United States (US). President Donald Trump has stated that he will implement a strict protectionist policy which will ultimately make countries that have been trading partners of the United States to divert or find new export markets. The United States and China trade war will also have an impact on the shift of Chinese export products to developing countries. The threat of a major war in the European region (Russia-Ukraine) will also disrupt the achievement of Indonesia's economic interests, especially with President Prabowo Subianto's ambitious goal of eight percent economic growth.

Moreover, Indonesia's desire to join the BRICS needs to be considered because President Trump has stated that he will impose high import tariffs on countries that are BRICS members, which he views as new competitors of the United States as they are striving to become dominant actors in the global economy. In the political aspect, the desire to become an influential country in the Asia-Pacific region also requires robust strategies and measures. The competition for influence between the United States and China in Southeast Asia and the statements of some Pacific countries on the Papua issue are additional concerns. Indonesia must be able to utilise its position as a pioneer of the Non-Aligned Movement and a donor country in SSC to gain support to achieve the goal of becoming an influential country in the Asia-Pacific.

This article focuses on two research questions. First, how can South-South Cooperation be a tool to achieve Indonesia's national interests amidst global uncertainties? Second, what are the challenges in utilising South-South Cooperation for Indonesia's national interests? The purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of the use of SSC to achieve Indonesia's national interests and what challenges must be considered in its pursuit. Scholars and practitioners have underlined the importance of SSC as a tool to achieve Indonesia's national interests. This article argues that South-South Cooperation is used by the Government of Indonesia to achieve its national interests, such as showing the leadership of Indonesia in the Asia-Pacific region, promoting the Indonesian brand internationally, and countering negative narratives related to conflicts in Papua. It also argues that the main challenge in utilising SSC occurs internally where the political will to develop the single agency, Indonesian AID, remains weak.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indonesia plays an active role in the international cooperation of SSC or South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC). Historically, its involvement in the cooperation dates back to 1946 when the newly independent country sent humanitarian aid to India. Since then, Indonesia's activism in Global South cooperation has become more apparent ([UNDP, 2015](#)). As a result, there are numerous discussions over Indonesia's role and involvement in the SSC and SSTC. The discussion mainly focuses on two themes: the implementation of the projects and the fulfilment of Indonesia's national interests (see [Pujayanti, 2015](#); [Apresian, 2016](#); [Abdurachman & Prakoso, 2017](#); [Rachmawaty et al., 2019](#); [Bramasta, 2020](#); [Mahalia, 2022](#); [Indrawan et al., 2023](#)). The first theme concerns the types and mechanisms of Indonesia's assistance, the effects of the projects towards the recipients, challenges and prospects for Indonesia, as well as the main recipients of Indonesia's assistance. Meanwhile, the second theme is about the main objectives of Indonesia's involvement in the SSC and SSTC which typically discusses the diplomatic side of the cooperation and the fulfilment of Indonesia's national interests through such projects.

[Rachmawaty et al. \(2019\)](#) discuss how the SSC impacts recipient countries, especially those in the Asian region. They said that the Government of Indonesia prioritises Asian countries for its SSC, and it is implemented through financial and non-financial aid. They further stated that there is a positive impact of the SSC by the Indonesian Government which many recipient countries benefit from, particularly from non-financial projects, such as through capacity building, workshops or training programmes provided by Indonesia. In a more detailed explanation, [Apresian \(2016\)](#) and [Bramasta \(2020\)](#) stated that the Indonesian Government focuses more on non-financial projects in the SSC and SSTC, for example by sending experts, providing capacity-building training, and providing equipment. Apresian further underlined that, financially, Indonesia's involvement in the cooperation is supported by developed countries like the United States and Japan. Apresian also outlined the three main challenges for Indonesian involvement in the SSC and SSTC, which are the

documentation of the programme, coordination, and information dissemination of the programmes to secure people's support for the projects. Regarding the challenges, [Pujayanti \(2015\)](#) describes that one of the challenges of SSC and SSTC for Indonesia is to find the economic benefits and developments for local cities as well as people in Indonesia.

Besides the implementation of the SSC and SSTC by the Indonesian Government, there are also discussions related to the country's main motives for its SSC and SSTC programmes, which typically centre on its diplomatic goals and whether it can help Indonesia achieve its national interests. For Indonesia, the SSC and SSTC can improve the international image of Indonesia given that international actors have started paying attention towards SSC and SSTC, for example, the G20 (see [Apresian, 2016](#); [Abdurachman & Prakoso, 2017](#)). [Bramasta \(2020\)](#) stated that one of the motives for Indonesian involvement in the SSC and SSTC for Asia-Pacific countries is to suppress the issue of the Papua movement. This intention shapes the purpose of foreign aid in managing relations between governments ([Lancaster, 2007](#)). Further, [Indrawan et al. \(2023\)](#) stated that Indonesia can use SSC and SSTC as diplomatic tools in the global arena. In this context, [Mahalia \(2022\)](#) underlined three motives and benefits for Indonesia to be involved in the SSC and SSTC: public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and foreign aid diplomacy.

The discussion highlights that most of the articles focus on the implementation and the general motives of Indonesia in the SSC and SSTC. Most authors believe that SSC and SSTC can serve as diplomatic tools for Indonesia to achieve its national interests. However, only a small number of authors link Indonesia's foreign policy, national interests, and its leadership role. As such, this article will try to address the gap, by analysing how the Indonesian Government utilises SSC and SSTC to achieve the Indonesian Dream 2015-2085 and what to expect under the new leadership of Prabowo Subianto.

METHODS

This article adopts a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research can be defined as: "... an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" ([Creswell, 1994](#)). Moreover, qualitative research helps to explain social behaviour and thinking using existing concepts including the actions of nation-states in world events ([Yin, 2016](#)). This study applied qualitative methods to explain how Indonesia's involvement in the SSC is used as a tool to achieve Indonesia's national interests as written in the Indonesian Dream 2015-2085.

Data for qualitative research can be collected through several online traditional and non-traditional media resources such as electronic documents and library databases ([Lamont, 2015](#)). Moreover, potential data collection methods are through interviews, observations, collection and examination, and feelings ([Yin, 2016](#)). In this research, data collection was carried out through a literature study using official documents including online databases such as books, journal articles, and newspaper reports. Data collected

through books and journal articles can be used to build an analysis through the following steps: collecting and preparing, reading, and analysing data, conducting comprehensive analysis, and presenting it in narrative or report form ([Creswell, 2010](#)). Hence, using Yin and Creswell's approach, the authors collected written official documents, analysed all documents and then, presented them in a written report narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The history of South-South Cooperation

The emergence of the spirit of south-south cooperation began when a meeting of non-European countries was held in Bandung on 18-24 April 1955 which also coincided with the Cold War period. At that time, the world order was dominated by two superpower blocs: the West (the United States of America and its allies) and the East (the Soviet Union and its allies). This conference was a historic milestone for Asian-African countries to be involved in world peace and diplomatic cooperation ([Dien & Sunarti, 2024](#)).

The conference produced ten important principles called the Ten Bandung Principles (*Dasasila Bandung*) which were in line with the spirit of anti-colonialism and adopted the principles in the Charter of the United Nations. Cited from [Sulton et al., \(2023\)](#), the ten principles are: 1) Respect for human rights and respect for the purposes and principles in the UN Charter. 2) Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries. 3) Recognize the equality of all races and the equality of all large and small countries. 4) Non-interference in the internal affairs of others. 5) Respect for the right of every country to defend itself or collectively, in accordance with the UN Charter. 6) Not to use collective defence arrangements for the special interests of any large country and Not to exert pressure on any other country. 7) Not to threaten and commit acts of violence against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country. 8) Resolve all international disputes by peaceful means, such as through negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, or legal settlement, or by other peaceful means chosen by the parties concerned in accordance with the UN Charter. 9) Enhance mutual interests and cooperation. 10) Uphold justice and international obligations.

These ten principles were the basis for Asian-African countries in determining their respective futures without pressure from the hegemonic powers (Western bloc and Eastern bloc) at that time. The spirit of the *Dasasila Bandung* then became the basis for SSC among Asian-African countries with a spirit of equality, solidarity, and mutual benefit.

In line with the Spirit of the Ten Principles of Bandung, Indonesia needs to formulate the direction of its foreign policy so that the ideals stated in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution and the Indonesian Dream 2015-2085 can be realized. There are basic needs inherent in the national interests [of a country]: defence, economic, world order, and ideology ([Nuechterlein, 1976](#)). The need for economic, world order, and ideological interests will be the basis for why Indonesia uses SSC to achieve its national interests. Indonesia's current economic interest is to achieve an average economic growth of eight percent as

mandated by President Prabowo which can be done by conducting various economic cooperation and opening new non-traditional markets. Further, Indonesia is interested in maintaining world order so that international economic and political activities run peacefully so that the achievement of the national interests of each country (including Indonesia) can be fulfilled. As the host of the 1955 Asian-African Conference, Indonesia must ensure that the ideology of the Global South will continue to be fostered by promoting South-South Cooperation.

South-South Cooperation as a Means to Achieve Indonesia's National Interest

It is common knowledge that SSC is a strategic instrument for developing countries in achieving development targets, economic opportunities, and collective interests such as tackling climate change or ending poverty. During the plenary of the UN High-Level Conference on SSC in Buenos Aires, Argentina, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres highlighted that SSC resulted in a significant impact on development. It enabled developing countries to conduct knowledge-sharing and peer learning which enabled them to identify common problems and develop proposals for solutions that fit the Global South context ([Rinaldi, 2023](#)). International organisations, such as United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) also acknowledge the significance and importance of SSC. On its website, UNCTAD highlights that when the knowledge, skills, and expertise of developing countries are shared through SSC, it becomes a powerful tool that can take many forms. For instance, the collaboration between Brazil and India can monitor deforestation in the Amazon using satellite technology ([UNCTAD, 2023](#)).

With the existing modalities, Indonesia can take advantage of the benefits to achieve its economic national interests. For example, as a member of the G20, Indonesia can gain more open market access to the global economy, increasing commodity quality standards per international market demands, and improving its bargaining position in international forums ([Sushanti, 2019](#)). SSC, in addition to being intended to strengthen the spirit of the Global South, can also be utilised to fulfil Indonesia's national interests as well as to show the country's interest in the world order as mentioned by Nuechterlein, especially with its status as a pioneer of the Non-Aligned Movement. SSC can be used to fulfil Indonesia's economic interests to help achieve the dream of becoming the centre of the world's barometer by carrying out various cooperation with developing countries, while fulfilling the dream of becoming an independent and influential country in the Asia-Pacific region through the provision of assistance and cooperation, particularly to Asian-African countries ([Pakpahan, 2023](#)). It is interesting to analyse Indonesia's position towards the development of SSC and whether the country views it as an instrument for achieving its national interests.

This article uses the Indonesian Dream 2015-2085, formulated by President Joko Widodo (Jokowi), to identify Indonesia's national interests. Although Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto was newly elected in 2024, this article argues that there will be no significant changes in Indonesia's foreign policy towards SSC. The candidacy of President

Prabowo in the Presidential Election 2024 was endorsed by President Jokowi, and Jokowi's son was chosen as Prabowo's running mate. On many occasions during the 2024 election, President Prabowo often announced publicly that he would continue President Jokowi's programmes ([CNN Indonesia, 2024](#)), hence the Indonesian Dream 2015-2085 remains a relevant discussion when analysing Indonesia's national interests.

Within Indonesian Dream 2015-2085, there are at least three points that are relevant to identify Indonesia's national interests related to SSC. Point 3: Indonesia as the centre of education, technology, and world civilization. Point 6: position Indonesia as an independent country and the most influential country in the Asia-Pacific region. And Point 7: making Indonesia as a barometer of world economic growth. Several examples of SSC projects conducted by the Indonesian Government and its partners will be analysed using these three main points. This article analyses several SSC projects that can be found on the Indonesian AID website (<https://ldkpi.kemenkeu.go.id/>).

Indonesian AID (Lembaga Dana Kerjasama Pembangunan Internasional/ LDKPI) is an agency established by the Indonesian Government to distribute aid to Indonesia's partners in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific regions. It has been operating for around five years and has distributed foreign aid to 97 countries as of October 2024 with a total budget of approximately IDR 523.56 billion or around USD 33 million ([LDKPI, 2024](#)). Most of the foreign aid was distributed to Asia (37 percent), followed by Africa (27 percent) and the Pacific (15.7 percent) regions in three main sectors: health (38.7 percent), humanitarian aid (26.7 percent), and education (24 percent) ([LDKPI, 2024](#)). Considering that Indonesia has three main regions for foreign aid distribution and SSC, this article selects one project from each region (Asia, Africa, and the Pacific) that can highlight three of Indonesia's national interests listed in the Indonesian Dream 2015-2085.

Timor-Leste, Kenya, and Fiji are selected as case studies in this article since the assistance delivered to those three countries is unique. First, Timor-Leste was part of Indonesia but became independent in 2002, however, Indonesia maintains good bilateral relations and provides aid to the country. Kenya is an African country that is highly populated and faces a high mortality rate for women. Indonesia was successful in implementing birth control programmes thus the Southeast Asian country has shared its best practices in dealing with population growth. The aid to Fiji is also a unique case because there are economic motives behind the Government of Indonesia's aid to provide the country with hand tractors. These three countries thus represent aid in different sectors: health, politics, and agriculture.

Below are some examples of Indonesia's SSC in these three regions: the Pacific, Africa and Asia. These examples show how Indonesia utilises the SSC to promote and achieve its interests, including economic and political interests in addition to enhancing its international image.

Pacific Region: Indonesia – Fiji

The Indonesian Government focuses on establishing cooperation in the agricultural sector with Fiji, which is a key sector for Fiji's national economy. The population of Fiji is around 903 thousand people and around 61 thousand people work in the agricultural sector ([IOM, 2022](#)). Indonesia delivered a IDR 3,508,975,242 grant or around USD 220,000 in 2023 ([LKDPI, 2023a](#)). The grant was aimed to establish a Regional Training Centre in Fiji. The Indonesian AID website stipulates that the Indonesian Government has an economic interest in increasing Indonesia's trade surplus with Fiji through SSC in the agricultural sector. Indonesia has delivered 100 tractor units and provided agricultural training to modernise Fiji's agricultural sector. Indonesia expects that this initiative will lead to an increase in demand for tractor units made in Indonesia in the future ([LDKPI, 2023a](#)).

This project reveals that the Indonesian government aims to achieve Indonesian Dream points three and six. Through SSC with Fiji, the Indonesian Government can make Indonesia the centre of technology and world civilization for the agricultural sector. Moreover, this cooperation also positions Indonesia as an independent country that brings significant influence in the Asia-Pacific region by providing aid needed by Small Island Countries in the Asia-Pacific. This action helps Indonesia to remain relevant in the Asia-Pacific region

Africa Region: Indonesia – Kenya

In SSC with Kenya, the Indonesian Government focuses on the reduction of maternal mortality in which Indonesia has distributed a IDR 1,303,166,436 grant or around USD 82,000 to assist the Kenyan Government ([LDKPI, 2023b](#)). The grant was aimed at building the Kenyan Government's capacity to implement the Family Planning (*Keluarga Berencana*) programme in Kenya, especially to reduce the maternal mortality rate. In addition, Indonesia and Kenya are members of the Population Development Partners and SSTC (see [Pujianto, 2023](#); [NCPD, 2015](#); [Indonesian Aid, 2023](#)). Kenya has a high maternal death rate, with 2015 data showing 400-600 deaths per 100,000 live births. There has since been a slight improvement, with 2017 data reporting 342 deaths per 100,000 live births. In this regard, Kenya must improve the situation.

Indonesia has attained success with its Family Planning programme since 1957, where it has promoted the use of contraception to control population growth, limit birth rates, and regulate birth spacing ([Kulsum, 2023](#)). As such, Indonesia shares its best practices, particularly in promoting contraception to regulate spacing between children – an effort to prevent maternal deaths ([Astuti, 2023](#)). By sharing best practices based on the success of its Family Planning programme, the Indonesian Government assists the Kenyan Government in lowering the maternal mortality rate and protects mothers from the four causes of maternal death. This effort is in line with SDG number three on ensuring good health and well-being, particularly among Indonesian friends of the Global South ([Indonesian Aid, 2023](#)).

In 2024, Indonesia hosted the 2nd Indonesia-Africa Forum where the purpose of this forum was to address the global situation regarding an economic slowdown, unemployment, and inflation rates that did not improve, as well as ongoing geopolitical tensions that resulted in many casualties and disrupted the global supply chain. Unfortunately, countries around the world failed to adequately respond to these situations, marking a decline in international solidarity, multilateralism, and increased fragmentation. At the forum, Indonesia signed a cooperation agreement in the energy sector and community mining ([RRI, 2024](#)). The focus of this cooperation is the implementation of community mining practices with environmentally friendly principles and to minimise the risk of pollution. This cooperation is Indonesia's commitment to continue strengthening economic relations and strategic partnerships between Indonesia and Africa. This has an impact on developing countries so a new strategy is needed to realise a more equitable and inclusive development for developing countries. As the host, Indonesia is committed to being part of the global solution, defending the interests of the Global South, as well as serving as a unifying force in fighting for equality, justice, and solidarity to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs ([Sekretariat Kabinet, 2024](#)).

What Indonesia has done shows its commitment to improving strategic partnerships with the African region, particularly in aligning itself with the spirit of the Ten Bandung Principles. The framework emphasises cooperation between Asian and African countries and fostering collaboration in the field of development among developing countries.

In this regard, Indonesia is interested in assisting Kenya achieve SDG's objective number three: Good Health and Well-Being. Based on the G20 2023 Action Plan, it is stated that the G20 Leaders have consistently recognised the key role of the G20 in contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda ([G20 Research Group, 2023](#)). Indonesia, as a G20 member, has a responsibility to assist developing countries in accelerating progress on the SDGs. Delivering a grant and providing technical assistance to the Kenyan Government is a commitment of the Indonesian Government to accelerate the progress on the SDGs in Kenya as one of the developing countries. This commitment also shows the economic capability of Indonesia as one of the world's economic leaders in G20. The case of SSC with Kenya shows that Indonesia aims to achieve one of its national interests, making Indonesia a barometer of world economic growth (Dream number seven), by taking on the responsibility of helping developing countries deal with development problems, such as uncontrolled population growth and high mortality rate for women. Indonesia's cooperation with Kenya spans beyond its interest in improving economic relations given that the Southeast Asian country strives to demonstrate its commitment to the Ten Bandung Principles in addition to achieving the 2030 SDGs and the 2063 African Agenda. This shows that Indonesia is a regional power with global interests and responsibilities ([Pujayanti, 2015](#)).

Asia Region: Indonesia - Timor-Leste

After an independence referendum in 1999 resulted in a vote for Timor-Leste to become an independent country ([Strating, 2014](#)), it was not until 2002 that it became a new sovereign nation. Even though Timor-Leste is no longer part of Indonesia, Indonesia maintains good bilateral relations through several south-south cooperation projects. Indonesia has been a key supporter in helping Timor-Leste realise its ambition of joining ASEAN ([Leach & Wood, 2014](#)). The Indonesian Government also delivered several assistance programmes to Timor-Leste in 2021 and 2022. In 2021, the Indonesian Government held a capacity-building programme to improve Timor-Leste's junior diplomats to support them in the integration process of Timor-Leste as a potential member of ASEAN. In 2022, the Indonesian Government initiated an internship programme for the junior diplomats of Timor-Leste to do an internship programme in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. The total foreign aid for these two capacity-building programmes was IDR 422,569,055 or around USD 26,500 ([LDKPI, 2023c](#)).

These SSC programmes with Timor-Leste demonstrate that Indonesia has a political interest. By providing capacity building for Timor-Leste's junior diplomats, Indonesia demonstrates its capacity as an ASEAN leader which aligns with Indonesian Dream 2015-2085 numbers three and six. The south-south cooperation with Timor-Leste to support them becoming a new ASEAN member strives to position Indonesia as the centre of education for diplomacy (dream number three) and as an independent country and the most influential country in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in the Southeast Asia region (Dream number six). Indonesia has an interest in remaining relevant at the regional level, namely in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific, thus showing its leadership skills is a strategic way to realise this national interest.

What to Expect?

During the Joko Widodo administration, Indonesia consistently centred its attention on the SSC and SSTC. The effort to advance SSC and SSTC as part of Indonesian diplomacy can be seen, at least, from the policy to develop and formalise the LDKPI or Indonesian AID in October 2019 ([LDKPI, n.d.](#)). As stated by [Apresian \(2016\)](#), the coordination problem that Indonesia experiences is due to the absence of a single agency. The development of Indonesian AID means that the government takes cooperation as part of Indonesian diplomacy seriously. With the new President, Prabowo Subianto, being elected and starting a new administration, one of the challenges is the continuity of the project. The challenge concerns the level of support by the new government towards SSC and SSTC, especially as part of Indonesian foreign policy. During the presidential debate, Prabowo Subianto and the other two presidential candidates overlooked the presence of Indonesian AID ([Tasya, 2024](#)). This means that development cooperation is not yet a priority for Indonesian foreign policy under the new administration. Therefore, the challenge is to increase the level of urgency for

development cooperation to be a key part of Indonesian foreign policy and diplomacy so that, hopefully, the presence of LDKPI will be better valued.

Moreover, the Indonesian Government must pay attention to the strategy of Indonesian development cooperation and foreign aid. If development cooperation and foreign aid are considered a part of Indonesian foreign policy, then it needs clear direction. Indonesian foreign policy requires more clarity regarding the developments on matters of international cooperation. As such, objectives and purposes need to be clearly stated in government documents, such as the terms and conditions, expectations, and vision of Indonesian aid. Such policies will create a better understanding towards Indonesian development cooperation on essential issues like Papua or Indonesia's potential export commodities; a clear strategy will also increase domestic support domestically in Indonesia ([Helmys, 2023](#)).

Apart from internal challenges, the Indonesian Government must also focus on the international dimensions of development cooperation. Nowadays, there is a rise of new issues in international affairs especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Issues such as global health, climate change, and protectionism have become more apparent. In the United States, President Trump expressed the possibility of more protectionist policies over China ([Pakpahan, 2024](#)). It is also expected that Trump will withdraw from global initiatives on climate change as well as renounce the U.S.' engagement with the Global South ([Brookings, 2024](#)). These possibilities create controversies and uncertainties all around the world. With growing global uncertainty, it is challenging for countries like Indonesia, to promote SSC on their own. Thus, the Indonesian Government must determine their priorities and adopt a creative approach to issues, topics, and mechanisms in its development cooperation initiatives.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia has a long history with SSC. It is utilised by the Indonesian Government to increase its global presence and improve its image. Scholars and practitioners have underlined the importance of SSC as a tool to achieve Indonesia's national interests, however, there are limited articles that underline the link of SSC with Indonesia's specific national interests. Throughout the discussions, it is evident that SSC aligns with Indonesia's economic interests as well as its pursuit to become a barometer of economic growth and the centre of technology, through the promotion of Indonesian products, and the political aspect of becoming an influential country in the Asia-Pacific region.

Looking into the development of the SSC in Indonesia's foreign policy and the dynamics of the new administration as well as the global situation, the country's involvement in the SSC is poised to experience some challenges. The challenges can be seen from an internal and external perspective, ranging from continuity in terms of commitment to global uncertainties. Nevertheless, SSC still offers numerous possibilities for Indonesia to achieve its development, and economic interests, and build upon its international image.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article was first presented at the 15th Convention of the Indonesian Association for International Relations (VENNAS AIHII) at Universitas Cenderawasih, Jayapura, from October 8 to 11, 2024. The manuscript was then expanded based on feedback from VENNAS and submitted to PJDIR for a blind peer review before publication.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Triwibowo, A., Pakpahan, A.K., & Apresian, S.R. (2025). South-South Cooperation and Indonesia's National Interests. *Papua Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, 5(1), 33-49. DOI: 10.31957/pjdir.v5i1.4308