

## Unravelling Indonesia's Foreign Aid Interest Towards Fiji From a Multi-Frame Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Indonesian official discourse often presents this aid as development cooperation and South-South partnership. However, these narratives do not fully explain the political logic of the relationship. Using van der Veen's seven-frame model of foreign aid, this study analyzes Indonesia's aid to Fiji as a multi-frame foreign-policy instrument. The article adopts a qualitative single-case study design. It uses desk review as the main data collection method and analyzes official Indonesian documents, embassy performance reports, strategic plans, gray literature and academic studies through thematic analysis. The findings show that Indonesia's aid to Fiji has evolved from episodic assistance into a more institutionalized package of grants, humanitarian relief, technical cooperation, scholarships, reconstruction support, health assistance and sectoral training. The analysis further shows that Indonesia's aid is driven by overlapping humanitarian, security, influence, economic, reputational, enlightened self-interest and obligation-based motives. In particular, aid helps Indonesia strengthen its diplomatic position in the Pacific, build a positive image, expand regional access, and manage Papua-related political pressures. The article contributes to foreign aid and South-South Cooperation scholarship by showing that solidarity and strategic interest can operate together in Global South aid diplomacy. In the Indonesia-Fiji case, solidarity provides the normative language that legitimizes aid, while strategic interests shape its direction as an instrument of national interest.

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## 1. Introduction

Indonesia's foreign aid to Fiji presents an important puzzle in contemporary foreign aid politics. In official discourse, Indonesia commonly frames its engagement with Fiji through the language of development cooperation, technical assistance, capacity building, humanitarian support and South-South partnership (Perwita et al., 2022; Wati et al., 2021). Pamasiwi and Arsyani (2019) thus also describe Indonesia's cooperation with Fiji as part of a broader South-South scheme that includes training, workshops, scholarships and pilot projects designed to make assistance more sustainable. Additionally, Alta and Mukhtarov (2022) similarly show that Indonesia has presented itself as an aspiring Southern donor whose aid rests on solidarity, demand orientation and recipient ownership.

At the same time, Indonesian official documents reveal a broader strategic vocabulary. The 2022 performance report of the Indonesian Embassy in Suva defines Fiji as a politically and economically influential hub in the Pacific (KBRI Suva, 2022). As cited, "Fiji's increasingly significant role as a hub in the region and becoming a politically and economically influential country." It also identifies the improvement of Indonesia's positive image as a formal institutional objective and links diplomatic performance to influence, bilateral agreements and the protection of Indonesian sovereignty in the Pacific (KBRI Suva, 2022). That being said, it suggests that Indonesia's aid to Fiji cannot be understood merely as a developmental presentation.

This broader context matters because Fiji is not simply another bilateral aid recipient. As a small island developing state, Fiji faces structural development constraints, climate vulnerability and recurring disaster exposure which make it an important recipient of external assistance (Goundar, 2023; Gounder, 2001). At the same time, Fiji occupies a wider regional role as a Pacific hub with diplomatic and logistical significance. Its relevance is strengthened by its political connectivity, its role in Pacific regional politics and its importance in wider island diplomacy.

On the other side, for Indonesia, the stakes are not only developmental. Indonesia's engagement with Fiji occurs within a broader Pacific context where development cooperation and sovereignty concerns intersect. Wangge and Lawson (2021) show that West Papua has become increasingly prominent in Pacific regional politics. In this setting, aid becomes politically important because it may support a wider strategy for Indonesia's national interest in the Pacific region rather than merely reflect a technical development agenda. Fiji, therefore, matters because of bilateral cooperation and also because of its significance for Indonesia's national interest in the Pacific.

However, despite this importance, the existing literature on Indonesia's foreign aid and the broader South-South Cooperation studies has not fully resolved this puzzle. Current studies tend to examine Indonesia-Fiji relations through separate themes. Some emphasize technical cooperation and South-South partnership (Alta &

Mukhtarov, 2022; Gounder, 2001; Leder et al., 2021; Pamasiwi & Arsyani, 2019; Rizqiah & Burhanuddin, 2024). Others focus on humanitarian assistance and defense diplomacy, especially disaster relief and its diplomatic effects (Perwita et al., 2022). Another body of work situates Indonesia's Pacific engagement within the politics of West Papua and regional diplomatic contestation (Firth, 2023; Lawson, 2015; Wangge & Lawson, 2021). These studies are important, but they do not yet provide a systematic donor-centered explanation of Indonesia's motives in giving foreign aid to Fiji.

This gap becomes clearer when placed in the wider yet specific field of foreign aid scholarship perspectives. One major perspective treats aid as a moral and developmental practice. Lumsdaine (1993) argues that the foreign aid regime was shaped significantly by humanitarian concern and the moral vision of donor countries. From this view, aid reflects responsibility toward poverty reduction, welfare improvement, and development support. A second perspective sees aid as an instrument of statecraft. Morgenthau (1962) argues that foreign aid is deeply political because it can serve national interest, diplomatic leverage, and prestige. Lancaster (2007) similarly shows that aid policy is shaped by the interaction of diplomacy, development objectives, and domestic politics. Alesina and Dollar (2000) further demonstrate that aid allocation is often influenced by political alliances and strategic considerations. A third strand of scholarship is more critical of aid's developmental claims. Bauer (1984), Hancock (1989), and Easterly (2007) question the gap between aid rhetoric and aid outcomes, especially when assistance strengthens donor interests, bureaucratic incentives, or ineffective development practices.

To make it clear, hence, from those strands of literature, the existing gap is that the literature on Indonesia's aid and SSC remains fragmented, and also, they mostly separate readings of aid that tend to isolate humanitarian, diplomatic, economic and security motives from one another, while what the author wants to show here, is that Indonesia's aid to Fiji shows that these motives are closely connected. If Indonesia's aid, especially toward Fiji, is read only as humanitarian solidarity, the analysis would overlook its role as a means to exercise Indonesia's national interest in influence-building, economic positioning and sovereignty defense. At the same time, if it is read only as political interest, the analysis misses how South-South solidarity and development cooperation provide the normative language through which Indonesia legitimizes its engagement. Thus, reading aid through only one motive would therefore oversimplify the layered reality of contemporary SSC politics. That is why, the main point that the authors wanted to show here is that the Indonesia-Fiji case shows that these principles can coexist.

To sharpen the focus, this article hence, asks a straightforward question: What motives drive Indonesia's foreign aid to Fiji? It argues that Indonesia's foreign aid to Fiji should be understood as a multi-frame instrument. Although it is officially presented as development cooperation, capacity building, goodwill, and South-South

partnership, it also serves to build influence, strengthen Indonesia's image, expand bilateral cooperation and defend Indonesian sovereignty especially by managing Papua-related diplomatic pressures in the Pacific region.

Table 1. Seven Frames in Aid Policy

Frame	Explanation
Security	Aid is used to protect the donor's physical security and support strategic allies.
Power/Influence	Aid is used to expand the donor's leverage, alliances, and influence in international politics.
Wealth/Economic Self-Interest	Aid is used to support the donor's economic interests, including trade and exports.
Enlightened Self-Interest	Aid is used to promote broader collective goods, such as peace, stability, and environmental well-being.
Reputation/Self-Affirmation	Aid is used to build the donor's image, identity, and international reputation.
Obligation/Duty	Aid is used to fulfill moral, historical, or systemic responsibilities.
Humanitarianism	Aid is used to improve welfare and provide relief to vulnerable populations.

Source: Adopted from Veen (2011) & Andrini et al. (2022)

To address this problem, this article adopts van der Veen's seven-frame model as its main analytical framework (see Table 1). Van der Veen (2011) argues that aid is a flexible foreign-policy instrument whose meaning varies across donor states and over time. In his view, policymakers do not attach a single stable purpose to aid. Instead, they frame it in different ways and those frames shape policy choices. The framework identifies seven broad motives that may shape foreign aid policy: security, power and influence, wealth or economic self-interest, enlightened self-interest, reputation or self-affirmation, obligation or duty, and humanitarianism (Veen, 2011). Its main advantage is that it does not force the analysis into a binary between altruism and self-interest (Andrini et al., 2022). Instead, it allows aid to be understood as a multi-frame instrument in which several motives may coexist, overlap, or compete within the same donor strategy.

Furthermore, In this article, foreign aid refers to state-supported transfers of financial resources, material goods, technical expertise, training, scholarships, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction support, and institutional capacity-building provided by Indonesia to Fiji for development, relief, or public-sector strengthening

purposes. This definition includes grants, disaster relief, educational assistance, technical cooperation, and capacity-building programs because they involve direct or indirect resource transfer from the donor state to the recipient. At the same time, the article distinguishes foreign aid from broader diplomatic activities. Cultural diplomacy, defense agreements, business forums, public diplomacy, and high-level political engagement are not treated as foreign aid in themselves. They are analyzed only when they accompany, facilitate, or amplify aid-related activities.

## 2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach and adopts a single-case study design (Yin, 2018). This design fits the article's aim of explaining what motives drive Indonesia's foreign aid to Fiji? A single case makes it possible to connect aid discourse, diplomatic planning and policy objectives within one bounded empirical setting. This approach is also appropriate because the study examines a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context rather than through experimental control or cross-case comparison. In this article, Fiji is treated as the single case through which Indonesia's aid motives can be examined in depth.

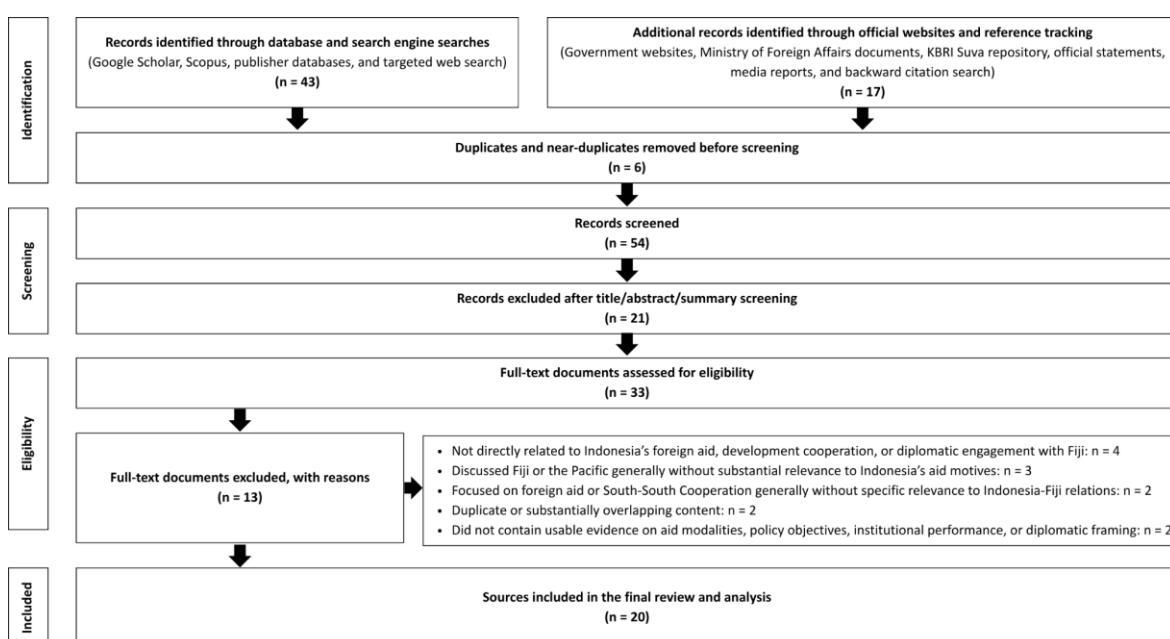


Figure 1. Desk Review Process for Data Collection

Source: Processed by Author

The main data collection method is desk review (Barbieri et al., 2025). This approach is suitable because evidence on Indonesia's aid to Fiji is dispersed across embassy reports, strategic plans, performance agreements, ministerial and institutional publications, official statements, gray literature and academic studies. The document corpus therefore includes five categories of material: policy and legal documents, official institutional records, gray literature, secondary academic literature and supporting documentary materials such as speeches, official

statements and public institutional publications. The document screening process, including the number of records identified, screened, excluded and retained, is summarized in Figure 1.

Materials were included when they met at least one of three conditions. First, they addressed Indonesia's foreign aid, development cooperation, or diplomatic engagement with Fiji. Second, they discussed Indonesia's role in the Pacific in relation to aid, bilateral cooperation, image-building, sovereignty, or Papua-related pressures. Third, they contained direct evidence on aid modalities, policy objectives, implementation practices, or institutional performance. The desk review followed three iterative stages adapted from Barbieri et al. (2025): exploratory search, targeted search, and review and screening. Each relevant document was then recorded in a document matrix that noted the author or institution, year, document type, and substantive relevance to the study.

For analysis, the study uses thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), operationalized through Byrne's (2021) worked example of reflexive thematic analysis. This method is appropriate because the article seeks to identify recurring patterns of meaning across documentary materials rather than test formal hypotheses statistically (Ahmed et al., 2025). The analysis followed six recursive steps: familiarization with the dataset, generation of initial codes, clustering of codes into candidate themes, review of themes against the dataset, refinement and naming of themes, and development of the final interpretive narrative.

The coding process was primarily theory-informed. Van der Veen's seven aid frames were used as guiding analytical categories during coding, while the analysis remained open to new patterns emerging from the documents. References to disaster relief, welfare improvement, reconstruction, scholarships, training, and capacity building were coded under humanitarianism. References to sovereignty, territorial integrity, Papua-related pressures, separatism, and regional security were coded under security. References to regional leadership, leverage, Fiji's hub position, diplomatic access, and influence in Pacific forums were coded as power/influence. References to trade, investment, tourism, market access, export promotion, and economic diplomacy were coded as wealth or economic self-interest.

The same process was applied to the remaining frames. References to regional stability, resilience, disaster preparedness, climate vulnerability, maritime cooperation, and broader shared benefits were coded as enlightened self-interest. References to positive image, public diplomacy, status, identity, and Indonesia's self-presentation as a responsible Southern donor were coded as reputation or self-affirmation. References to South-South solidarity, shared developing-country identity, regional belonging, partnership, and mutual support were coded as obligation or duty. In this way, the thematic analysis moved beyond a procedural

description and treated the seven frames as operational tools for interpreting how Indonesia's aid motives were articulated across documents.

To strengthen credibility, the study compares evidence across official documents, gray literature, and academic studies. Even so, several limitations should be acknowledged. This study relies on documentary interpretation and does not include interviews or other primary field data. Accordingly, the article does not claim to reconstruct the full internal decision-making process behind Indonesia's aid policy toward Fiji. Instead, it interprets documented policy frames, stated objectives, and recurring patterns found in the available sources. The findings should therefore be read as an evidence-based interpretation of publicly traceable aid motives rather than as a complete account of all internal state intentions.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **Indonesia's Aid Trajectory Toward Fiji**

Indonesia's aid trajectory toward Fiji developed in a gradual but clear pattern. What began as limited and episodic assistance later became more formal, wider in sectoral scope, and more institutionalized in delivery (Pramono et al., 2024). In the earlier period, aid appeared mainly through targeted relief and small-scale support. Over time, it expanded into technical cooperation, direct grants, reconstruction assistance, training, scholarships, humanitarian missions, and sector-specific capacity-building programs (see Figure 2). This broader trajectory is consistent with studies that describe Indonesia's cooperation with Fiji as part of a more structured South-South engagement that moved beyond ad hoc exchanges toward longer-term programs and pilot projects (Alta & Mukhtarov, 2022; Pamasiji & Arsyani, 2019).

The earliest phase can be traced to the 1980s. In 1985, Indonesia provided small grants for training in fisheries, agriculture, village development, shipping, and manpower planning for Pacific participants, including Fiji (Wangge & Lawson, 2021). The relationship became more visible after Fiji's 1987 coup. When traditional partners imposed sanctions and suspended aid, Indonesia sent a delegation to Suva, offered special financial facilities, and supplied 25,000 tons of rice on credit (Fadhilah, 2019). At this stage, Indonesian assistance was still limited in form, but it had already begun to combine material support with politically significant gestures of engagement. The trajectory, therefore, started from relatively modest assistance, yet it did so in moments that mattered diplomatically.

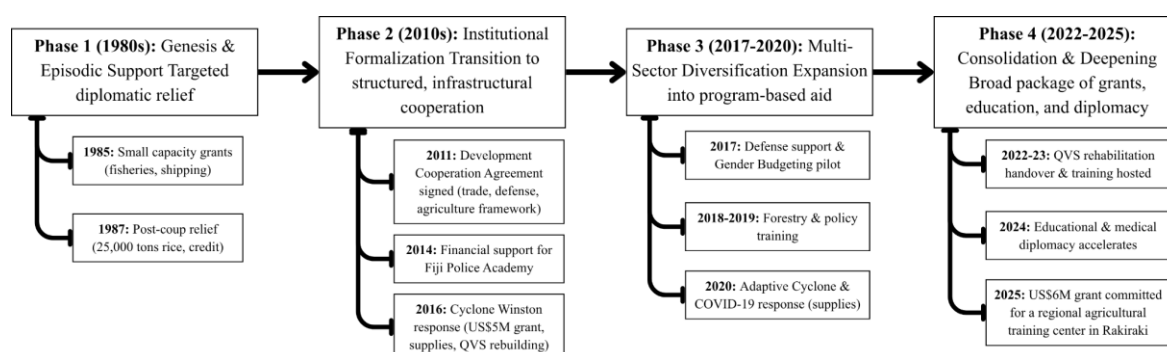


Figure 2. Indonesia's Aid Trajectory in Fiji (1980-2025)

Source: Author's Creation

A more formal phase emerged in the 2010s. In 2011, Indonesia and Fiji signed a Development Cooperation Agreement that created a framework for capacity building in sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, trade, and defense (Perwita et al., 2022). This was followed in 2014 by Indonesian financial support for the establishment of a police academy in Fiji. The aid relationship then widened significantly after Cyclone Winston in 2016, when Indonesia provided a US\$5 million grant, sent humanitarian supplies, and deployed personnel to rebuild Queen Victoria School under Fiji's school reconstruction program (Seva et al., 2020). This period marked the transition from occasional support to structured cooperation with institutional and infrastructural dimensions.

Moreover, from 2017 to 2020, Indonesian assistance became increasingly diversified. In 2017, aid expanded into defense support, including military equipment and training, while Indonesia also launched the Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting pilot project for Fijian officials (Francis et al., 2023; Perwita et al., 2022). In 2018 and 2019, Indonesia provided direct grants, forestry and land rehabilitation training, wood-carving assistance, and internship programs for policy development (Alifano, 2025). In 2020, the aid relationship adapted again to emergency needs when Indonesia responded to Cyclone Harold and the COVID-19 pandemic with humanitarian cargo, medical supplies, and amendments to the humanitarian grant agreement. By this stage, the trajectory had clearly moved into a multi-sector and program-based pattern of assistance (KBRI Suva, 2022).

The most recent phase shows further consolidation and expansion. Between 2022 and 2023, Indonesia completed and handed over the rehabilitation of Queen Victoria School, supported law-enforcement cooperation, and hosted fisheries training for Pacific participants, including Fiji (Hengki, 2023; Musmar, 2017). Educational assistance also became more visible, with 88 Fijian students recorded as graduates of Indonesian scholarship schemes by 2024. In the same period, Indonesia added cultural and medical diplomacy through artisan exchange programs and a naval hospital ship mission to Suva (Kompas, 2024; Redaksi, 2025). The trajectory continued in 2025 with a US\$6 million grant for a regional agricultural training center in Rakiraki (Sihombing, 2025). Overall, Indonesia's aid to Fiji evolved from

episodic support into a broader package of grants, training, scholarships, reconstruction, and sectoral cooperation.

### **Indonesia's Aid Multiframe Interest Towards Fiji**

#### *Humanitarianism*

The humanitarian frame is clearly visible in Indonesia's official aid discourse toward Fiji. Indonesian assistance is commonly presented as development cooperation, capacity building, and goodwill within the broader language of South-South and triangular cooperation. Alta and Mukhtarov (2022) show that Indonesia portrays itself as an active Southern donor guided by solidarity, demand orientation, and recipient ownership. In this framing, aid is not described as charity from a superior donor, but as cooperation among developing countries facing shared challenges.

This framing is also reflected in the content of Indonesia's assistance. After Cyclone Winston in 2016, Indonesia provided a US\$5 million disaster relief grant. In 2020, when Fiji faced both Cyclone Harold and the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia sent humanitarian cargo that included tents, food, and medical supplies. Beyond emergency relief, humanitarianism also appeared through scholarships, technical training, agricultural cooperation, and educational support, which were presented as welfare-oriented and development-focused forms of assistance.

Pamasiwi and Arsyani (2019) also show that Indonesia's cooperation with Fiji has increasingly moved toward more sustainable and program-based forms of support. This strengthens the humanitarian reading of the relationship, because aid is framed not only as emergency relief but also as long-term capacity enhancement. In this sense, humanitarianism forms the most visible public face of Indonesia's aid to Fiji. It is the language through which assistance is most openly justified, especially in official narratives of solidarity, shared vulnerability, and mutual development.

#### *Security*

The security frame is one of the strongest in Indonesia's aid relationship with Fiji. In official terms, Indonesian diplomacy in the Pacific is closely tied to the protection of territorial integrity and sovereignty, especially in relation to Papua-related diplomatic pressures. KBRI Suva (2022) states explicitly that the embassy functions as the front line for safeguarding the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia from the agitation and propaganda of Papuan separatist sympathizers in Fiji and other accredited Pacific states. This makes clear that Indonesia's presence in Fiji is not interpreted only as a matter of development cooperation. It is also part of a wider security-oriented diplomatic strategy.

Within this logic, aid becomes a practical instrument for reducing diplomatic pressure on Indonesia in the Pacific. The embassy report explains that grants, humanitarian aid, scholarships, and capacity-building programs are among the

measures used to limit the spread of Papua-related criticism and to maintain a favorable political environment for Indonesia (KBRI Suva, 2022). The security value of aid, therefore, lies not only in material assistance itself, but also in its role in helping Indonesia manage a sensitive external sovereignty issue through non-coercive means. In this case, aid supports diplomacy by lowering political friction and strengthening Indonesia's position in a region where the Papua issue carries symbolic and institutional weight.

This security dimension also helps explain why Fiji occupies such an important place in Indonesia's Pacific policy. As Indonesian diplomatic materials indicate, Fiji is not treated as an ordinary bilateral partner. It is treated as a strategically important state whose political stance matters for Indonesia's sovereignty concerns in the broader Pacific arena. For that reason, aid to Fiji should be understood partly as a security-oriented foreign-policy instrument. Although it is publicly framed in the language of cooperation and partnership, it also serves a defensive diplomatic purpose by helping Indonesia protect its territorial integrity and secure support, or at least reduce resistance, in relation to Papua-related regional politics (KBRI Suva, 2022).

### *Power/Influence*

The power and influence frame is strongly visible in Indonesia's aid relationship with Fiji. Fiji matters to Indonesia as a bilateral partner and as a strategic platform in Pacific regional politics. KBRI Suva describes Fiji as a politically and economically influential state, a hub that connects Pacific islands through air and sea routes, and the location of many regional and international organizations in the Pacific. It also places one of the embassy's core missions in strengthening Indonesia's leadership and influence in the accredited region (KBRI Suva, 2022).

This influence-building logic is supported by Indonesia's economic diplomacy. KBRI Suva's 2022 performance framework explicitly measured diplomatic success through the strategic target of "Optimal Economic Diplomacy Benefits." The indicators included 10 trade commitments, a total trade value target of USD 22,830,568, four investment commitments, an investment value target of USD 10,000, and 100 tourist visits from accredited countries to Indonesia. These indicators show that Indonesia's diplomatic influence in Fiji is institutionally connected to economic engagement, market access, investment promotion, and tourism mobility (KBRI Suva, 2022).

The actual trade performance in 2022 further strengthens this interpretation. From January to October 2022, Indonesia-Fiji trade reached USD 36.4 million, representing a 57.3 percent increase compared with the same period in 2021.

Indonesian exports to Fiji were also entirely non-oil and gas products. This matters because it shows that Indonesia's presence in Fiji is supported by a diverse commercial relationship, rather than by a narrow commodity base. Economic interaction therefore gives Indonesia a more concrete foundation for sustaining diplomatic visibility and influence in Fiji (KBRI Suva, 2022).

The composition of Indonesian exports also shows the depth of this commercial presence. Major exports included tobacco products, soap and washing preparations, electrical machinery, cereal and milk preparations, vehicles, vegetable oils, paper products, cement-related materials, edible preparations, and plastics. These goods enter both everyday consumer markets and industrial sectors in Fiji. In this sense, economic diplomacy supports influence by embedding Indonesian products and business actors into Fijian commercial life. Aid and technical cooperation then operate alongside trade, creating wider channels for Indonesia to maintain practical relevance in Fiji (KBRI Suva, 2022).

Table 2. Indonesia's Top Ten Export Products to Fiji

HS Code	Export Product
HS 24	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes
HS 34	Soap, organic surface-active agents, washing preparations, and lubricating preparations
HS 85	Electrical machinery and equipment and parts thereof, including sound recorders, sound reproducers, and television equipment
HS 19	Preparations of cereals, flour, starch, or milk, including pastry products
HS 87	Vehicles other than railway or tramway rolling stock, including parts and accessories
HS 15	Animal, vegetable, or microbial fats and oils, including edible fats
HS 48	Paper and paperboard, including articles of paper pulp, paper, or paperboard
HS 25	Salt, sulfur, earths and stone, plastering materials, lime, and cement
HS 21	Miscellaneous edible preparations
HS 39	Plastics and articles thereof

Source: KBRI Suva, 2022

This pattern is also visible in trade commitment data. In 2022, KBRI Suva achieved 10 trade commitments, meeting 100% of its target. The realized value of these commitments reached USD 33,736,300, exceeding the target with 120 percent realization. These commitments were largely secured through the Indonesia-Fiji Business Forum in September 2022. They included Pacific Cements' purchase of silica from PT Semen Indonesia and commitments by major Fijian supermarket chains such

as RB Patel, MHCC, NewWorld, and Extra to buy Indonesian consumer goods, including Indomie, Kopiko, Good Day coffee, Listerine, and Omo detergent (KBRI Suva, 2022).

This logic is also reflected in the wider literature. Pamasiwi and Arsyani (2019) argue that Fiji offers Indonesia strategic advantages because it can facilitate entry into the Pacific and serve as a hub to other Pacific countries. Historical trade data supports this claim. In 2017, Indonesia-Fiji trade reached USD 23.5 million, with a surplus on the Indonesian side. Although Fiji is a relatively small market, Indonesia sees it as a potential gate to the broader South Pacific. In this sense, aid expands Indonesia's diplomatic reach while economic engagement strengthens the practical basis of that influence.

The need for diplomacy becomes clearer when structural constraints are considered. KBRI Suva notes that geographical distance, limited direct connectivity, high shipping costs, Fiji's small market size, and competition from cheaper Chinese products make commercial expansion difficult. These constraints explain why economic influence cannot rely on market forces alone. Indonesia uses aid, technical assistance, business forums, and embassy-led facilitation to reduce barriers and sustain engagement. Therefore, aid functions as part of a broader influence strategy that combines development cooperation, economic diplomacy, and political relationship-building (KBRI Suva, 2022).

The influence dimension becomes even clearer when aid opens the way for broader institutional cooperation. Perwita et al. (2022) show that Indonesia's humanitarian response after Cyclone Winston was followed by deeper defense relations, culminating in the 2017 defense cooperation agreement and the provision of training and equipment. This sequence suggests that aid can operate as an entry point for wider strategic engagement. It allows Indonesia to translate humanitarian and technical assistance into stronger political presence, closer institutional ties, wider economic reach, and greater influence in a Pacific region shaped by competition from Australia, New Zealand, China, and other external actors.

#### *Wealth/Economic Self-Interest*

The wealth or economic self-interest frame appears in the way Indonesia links aid and development cooperation with wider economic diplomacy in Fiji. As an example, KBRI Suva's 2022 performance framework makes this economic orientation explicit. The embassy used "Optimal Economic Diplomacy Benefits" as one of its strategic targets. This target was measured through several indicators, including 10 trade commitments, a total trade value target of USD 22,830,568, four investment commitments, an investment value target of USD 10,000, and 100 tourist visits from accredited countries to Indonesia. These indicators show that Indonesia's presence in Fiji is not evaluated only through political or development outcomes. It is also

measured through concrete economic outputs related to trade, investment, and tourism (KBRI Suva, 2022).

The actual trade performance in 2022 further supports this reading. From January to October 2022, Indonesia-Fiji trade reached USD 36.4 million, representing a 57.3% increase compared with the same period in 2021. Indonesian exports to Fiji were also entirely non-oil and gas products. This matters because it shows that Indonesia's commercial relationship with Fiji is not concentrated in one narrow commodity sector. Instead, it reflects a wider export presence that includes consumer goods, industrial products, and development-related materials. In this context, aid and technical cooperation help sustain the broader relationship within which trade promotion becomes easier to pursue (KBRI Suva, 2022).

This economic strategy is also visible in embassy-facilitated trade commitments. In 2022, KBRI Suva achieved 10 trade commitments, fulfilling its target. The realized value of these commitments reached USD 33,736,300, exceeding the target with 120% realization. Many of these commitments were secured through the Indonesia-Fiji Business Forum in September 2022. They included Pacific Cements' purchase of silica from PT Semen Indonesia and commitments by major Fijian supermarket chains, such as RB Patel, MHCC, NewWorld, and Extra, to buy Indonesian consumer goods, including Indomie, Kopiko, Good Day coffee, Listerine, and Omo detergent (KBRI Suva, 2022).

Pamasiwi and Arsyani (2019) provide further support for this interpretation by arguing that Fiji is valuable for Indonesia because it can function as a gateway to the South Pacific market. Historical trade data also strengthens this point. In 2017, Indonesia-Fiji trade reached USD 23.5 million, with a surplus on the Indonesian side. This suggests that Fiji's economic importance lies not only in the size of its domestic market, but also in its regional function. For Indonesia, engagement with Fiji can support access to wider Pacific networks, including business channels, institutional partnerships, and future market opportunities.

At the same time, the economic self-interest frame must be read carefully because Indonesia faces several structural constraints in Fiji. KBRI Suva identifies geographical distance, limited direct connectivity, high shipping costs, Fiji's small market size, and competition from cheaper Chinese products as major obstacles for Indonesian business expansion. These barriers explain why economic diplomacy cannot rely only on market mechanisms. Aid, technical cooperation, business forums and embassy-led facilitation become important because they help Indonesia maintain visibility, build trust, and reduce practical barriers to economic engagement.

### *Enlightened Self-Interest*

The enlightened self-interest frame appears when Indonesia's aid to Fiji supports broader collective goods that also benefit Indonesia's own long-term

regional interests. In this case, enlightened self-interest refers to Indonesia's effort to support resilience, stability, disaster preparedness, health security, climate adaptation, and maritime cooperation in the Pacific. These goals benefit Fiji, but they also help create a more stable and cooperative regional environment around Indonesia.

This logic is visible in Indonesia's disaster-related assistance to Fiji. After Cyclone Winston in 2016, Indonesia provided USD 5 million in disaster relief and sent personnel to support the reconstruction of Queen Victoria School in Tailevu. In 2020, after Tropical Cyclone Harold and during the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia deployed an Air Force C-130 Hercules to deliver 13 tons of humanitarian aid to Kadavu Island, including tents, food, and beverages. These programs were humanitarian in immediate form, but they also supported Fiji's recovery capacity and strengthened disaster resilience in a region where natural hazards can have wider regional consequences (Perwita et al., 2022).

The same logic can be seen in longer-term disaster cooperation. Indonesia and Fiji signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Disaster Management in 2016, which focused on disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, joint training, and long-term resilience. This matters because enlightened self-interest is about strengthening capacity before future crises emerge. For Indonesia, supporting Fiji's preparedness is consistent with the wider interest of maintaining a Pacific region that is less vulnerable to repeated humanitarian shocks and emergency dependence.

Health security also strengthens this frame. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia provided protective suits and masks produced domestically to support the safety of Fijian communities. In November 2024, Indonesia deployed the naval hospital ship KRI Wahidin Sudirohusodo-991 to Suva. The mission provided free health services and formally handed over medical equipment and medicines to the Fijian government. These activities show that Indonesia's aid addresses health vulnerability as part of a wider regional resilience agenda. In this sense, health assistance becomes both a humanitarian intervention and a contribution to a safer regional environment (Perwita et al., 2022).

Environmental and climate-related cooperation further demonstrates the enlightened self-interest frame. In 2018, Indonesia and Fiji signed a Memorandum of Understanding on forestry cooperation that included technical guidance on land rehabilitation to prevent landslides, sustainable forest management, illegal logging prevention, and bamboo cultivation suitable for island environments. These activities respond to shared vulnerability because Indonesia and Fiji are both tropical archipelagic states exposed to climate change, cyclones, rising sea levels and environmental hazards. Supporting Fiji's environmental capacity therefore also reflects Indonesia's interest in strengthening adaptation and resilience across the wider Pacific.

Capacity-building programs also strengthen the same frame. The 2011 Development Cooperation Agreement formalized cooperation in agriculture, fisheries, trade, education, and defense. More recently, Indonesia funded the Regional Agriculture Training Center near Rakiraki to support food security and provide agricultural and livestock training for Fijian youth. Indonesia has also supported Fijian students through scholarships such as the Developing Countries Partnership program, Darmasiswa, and Indonesian AID scholarships. These programs build long-term social and institutional capacity, which supports Fiji's resilience while strengthening Indonesia's image as a reliable partner in the Pacific.

### *Reputation/Self-Affirmation*

The reputation frame is highly visible in Indonesia's aid relationship with Fiji. KBRI Suva's 2022 performance report makes the improvement of Indonesia's positive image in the accredited countries a formal strategic objective and measures it through an image index. The report also treats image as part of Indonesia's diplomatic mission in Fiji and links it to trust, recognition, and Indonesia's broader standing in the region. This shows that aid is not only expected to produce material outcomes. It is also expected to strengthen how Indonesia is perceived by external audiences, especially in a Pacific setting where diplomacy and public perception are closely connected (KBRI Suva, 2022).

This logic is reflected in the embassy's public outreach practices. KBRI Suva's report explains that the embassy promotes people-to-people links, community outreach, cultural events, media engagement, and regular press releases in order to improve positive perceptions of Indonesia in Fiji. It also states that these efforts are important for minimizing misperceptions linked to sovereignty issues and for countering narratives promoted by groups sympathetic to Papuan separatism. In this sense, aid and outreach work together. Assistance helps generate goodwill, while public diplomacy helps translate that goodwill into a more favorable image of Indonesia as a constructive and reliable partner in the Pacific (KBRI Suva, 2022).

Alta and Mukhtarov (2022) reinforce this interpretation by showing that Indonesia's aid discourse emphasizes solidarity, recipient ownership, and a contrast with traditional Northern donors. They argue that Indonesia projects itself as an altruistic Southern donor and often places strong emphasis on visible donor activity and on its own efforts as a partner. This is important because it reveals a self-affirming dimension in the aid relationship. Through assistance to Fiji, Indonesia does not only seek developmental or diplomatic results. It also seeks to confirm and display an identity as a benevolent, non-coercive, and respected actor within South-South cooperation and Pacific regional politics.

### *Obligation/Duty*

The obligation or duty frame appears in the way Indonesia presents its aid to Fiji as a responsibility derived from identity, history and regional belonging. This obligation frame is visible in Indonesia's South-South Cooperation rhetoric. Indonesia often presents its assistance as solidarity among developing countries rather than as a hierarchical donor-recipient relationship. In triangular cooperation projects in Fiji, Indonesia has positioned itself as an altruistic and non-political partner whose aid is guided by demand orientation and recipient ownership (Alta & Mukhtarov, 2022). This language matters because it gives aid a normative basis. Indonesia does not frame its support as charity from a superior donor. Instead, it frames assistance as horizontal cooperation among countries that share development challenges and postcolonial experiences.

Indonesia's historical identity strengthens this sense of responsibility. The country often draws on its legacy of anti-colonial internationalism rooted in the 1955 Bandung Conference. This legacy emphasizes self-determination, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-interference, and cooperation among developing countries. The same logic is consistent with Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy, which requires Indonesia to contribute to world peace while maintaining autonomy from major power blocs (Wangge & Lawson, 2021). Through this historical identity, aid to Fiji becomes more than a technical development activity. It becomes a way for Indonesia to perform its role as a responsible Southern actor.

This frame also appears in Indonesia's self-image as an emerging Southern donor (Azis, 2025). By providing training, grants, scholarships, technical assistance and disaster-related support, Indonesia presents itself as a country that has development experience to share with other developing states. In this sense, the obligation frame is closely tied to Indonesia's middle-power ambition. Aid allows Indonesia to show that it is also a provider capable of leading regional initiatives and sharing policy practices. The duty to assist, therefore, also becomes a way to affirm Indonesia's changing status in development cooperation.

Regional and cultural belonging add another layer to the obligation frame. Indonesian diplomacy toward the Pacific often stresses that Indonesia is part of the Pacific and that the Pacific is a strategic space for Indonesia. President Joko Widodo has referred to Fiji as a brother and important partner because both countries are connected to the Pacific (Susanto, 2024). This language is important because it turns assistance into a form of regional responsibility. Fiji is not only treated as an external recipient of Indonesian aid. It is represented as part of a broader regional community to which Indonesia claims to belong (Wangge & Lawson, 2021).

Indonesia also strengthens this claim through Melanesian and archipelagic links. Indonesian officials often highlight the presence of Melanesian populations in eastern Indonesia, including Papua, Maluku, North Maluku and East Nusa Tenggara. They also stress Indonesia's identity as a tropical archipelagic state facing similar

maritime, environmental, and development challenges as Pacific island countries (Wangge & Lawson, 2021). These claims help Indonesia naturalize its presence in Oceania. Through this logic, aid to Fiji is framed as support for a culturally and geographically connected partner rather than as distant external intervention.

At the same time, this obligation frame is not purely altruistic. Indonesian policy documents also show that responsibility is tied to reciprocity and strategic calculation. Pacific countries are described as important partners, but Indonesian officials also warn that cooperation should remain mutually beneficial and should not place Indonesia as a “cash cow” for South Pacific partners (Direktorat Pasifik dan Oseania, 2024). This qualification is analytically important. It shows that Indonesia’s sense of duty is practical rather than sacrificial. Indonesia presents assistance as a responsibility, but the responsibility is expected to generate reciprocal trust, recognition, and political support.

### **What It Means For The Study of Foreign Aid in the Global South?**

The findings contribute to the wider debate on South-South Cooperation by showing that Indonesia’s aid to Fiji operates through a layered relationship between solidarity and strategic interest. SSC is commonly associated with mutual benefit, horizontal partnership, recipient ownership, and non-conditional cooperation. These principles are clearly present in Indonesia’s official discourse. Alta and Mukhtarov (2022) show that Indonesia presents itself as an emerging Southern donor that emphasizes solidarity and demand orientation. However, the Fiji case shows that these principles do not remove strategic calculation from aid. Instead, they provide the normative language through which strategic engagement becomes diplomatically acceptable.

This matters because contemporary SSC should not be read through a single moral or strategic category. In the Indonesia-Fiji case, solidarity gives aid legitimacy, while strategic interest gives it direction. Development cooperation allows Indonesia to present itself as a cooperative partner. At the same time, this partnership supports influence-building, reputation management, economic positioning and sovereignty-related diplomacy. The theoretical implication is that solidarity and interest are mutually reinforcing in SSC practice. Solidarity is, therefore, not only an ethical claim. It also becomes a diplomatic resource that helps Indonesia pursue its foreign-policy objectives in a more acceptable form.

This argument also refines the way emerging donors are understood. Indonesia’s aid to Fiji shows how an emerging Southern donor uses aid to perform a changing international role. Indonesia is no longer positioned only as a recipient of development assistance. Through grants, training, scholarships, reconstruction support and capacity-building programs, it presents itself as a provider of knowledge, resources, and policy experience. This role performance matters for Indonesia’s status as a middle power and as a state seeking recognition in Pacific affairs. In this

sense, aid becomes a means through which Indonesia claims authority to participate in shaping regional development agendas.

The findings also show that emerging donors do not simply imitate traditional donors. Indonesia uses a different diplomatic vocabulary, especially the language of South-South solidarity, shared development and horizontal partnership. Yet the case also shows that emerging donors can still use aid to pursue interests that resemble broader patterns in global aid politics, such as influence, reputation, market access and security. This combination is important for international relations scholarship because it shows that emerging donor behavior cannot be explained only through altruism or strategic realism. A multi-frame reading is needed to capture how identity, status, and interest work together.

The Fiji case also contributes to the study of symbolic diplomacy. Indonesia's aid works materially through grants, reconstruction, training, scholarships, health assistance, and capacity building. At the same time, it communicates political meaning. It signals that Indonesia is a reliable partner, a capable Southern donor, and a Pacific-linked state. Perwita et al. (2022) show that Indonesia's disaster relief to Fiji helped generate a positive image and supported wider diplomatic objectives, including defense cooperation. Aid therefore functions as a symbolic act that builds recognition and trust, while also producing practical benefits for the recipient.

The case also speaks to the literature on regional influence-building. Fiji's position as a Pacific hub makes it valuable for Indonesia's wider regional diplomacy. Pamasiwi and Arsyani (2019) argue that Fiji can function as a gateway to the South Pacific and that Indonesian technical assistance can serve as political investment and diplomacy. This means that aid helps Indonesia create durable access to a region where influence is increasingly contested. Through Fiji, Indonesia can strengthen bilateral trust, expand institutional contact, and increase its visibility in Pacific regional politics.

This regional dimension becomes more significant when the Papua issue is considered. Wangge and Lawson (2021) show that West Papua has become increasingly prominent in Pacific regional politics. KBRI Suva's 2022 report also links grants, humanitarian assistance, scholarships, and capacity-building programs to the effort to reduce Papua-related pressure and maintain support for Indonesia's territorial integrity. This does not reduce all aid to sovereignty politics. Rather, it shows how aid gives Indonesia a non-coercive channel for managing a sensitive regional issue. Development cooperation becomes one way to create political goodwill and reduce diplomatic friction.

The findings therefore also support van der Veen's argument that foreign aid should be understood as a multi-frame policy instrument. In the Indonesia-Fiji case, humanitarianism and obligation provide legitimacy. Reputation builds Indonesia's image as a responsible partner. Power and influence expand access to the Pacific.

Wealth links aid to economic positioning. Enlightened self-interest connects aid to regional resilience. Security links aid to sovereignty protection. These frames do not operate in isolation. They interact within the same aid relationship and make Indonesia's foreign aid to Fiji politically complex (Veen, 2011).

Overall, the article contributes to international relations and foreign aid study by showing how SSC works as both a normative and strategic practice. Indonesia's aid to Fiji demonstrates that Global South donors can use solidarity as a language of legitimacy while also pursuing status, influence, regional access, and national interest. This does not weaken the relevance of SSC. It shows that SSC is a political field where identity, morality and strategy are closely connected. For this reason, foreign aid among Global South countries should be analyzed through its overlapping frames, rather than through a single assumption about solidarity or self-interest.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This article examined the motives behind Indonesia's foreign aid to Fiji. It argued that Indonesia's aid should be understood as a multi-frame foreign-policy instrument. Although official discourse presents the aid through development cooperation, capacity building, goodwill and South-South partnership, the analysis shows that it also advances influence-building, image projection, economic positioning, regional access, and sovereignty defense. Through van der Veen's framework, the article demonstrates that Indonesia's aid to Fiji is shaped by overlapping motives rather than by a single dominant logic.

The main empirical finding is that Indonesia's aid trajectory toward Fiji has moved from episodic support to a more institutionalized pattern of grants, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, scholarships, technical cooperation, health support and sectoral capacity building. These activities carry humanitarian and developmental value, yet they also operate inside a wider diplomatic architecture. Indonesian official documents connect aid-related engagement with image-building, economic diplomacy, bilateral cooperation, regional influence and the management of Papua-related pressures in the Pacific.

The article's theoretical contribution, therefore, lies in showing how solidarity and strategic interest can operate together in South-South Cooperation. In the Indonesia-Fiji case, solidarity does not function only as a moral principle. It also provides the normative language that makes Indonesia's strategic engagement appear cooperative, horizontal and legitimate. At the same time, strategic interests give direction to aid by linking it to reputation, influence, economic access, regional resilience, and sovereignty protection. This finding shows that South-South aid should be analyzed as a field where identity, morality and interest interact together, and not see it as a separate dimension.

This argument also contributes to the study of emerging donors study. Indonesia's aid to Fiji illustrates how an emerging Southern donor uses aid to perform a changing international role. Indonesia presents itself as a fellow developing country, a responsible Southern partner, and a Pacific-linked actor. Through this role, aid becomes both a material instrument and a symbolic practice. It provides resources and technical support, while also projecting Indonesia's identity, status, and legitimacy in Pacific regional politics.

Nonetheless, the case also has critical implications for Indonesia's Pacific diplomacy. Aid enables Indonesia to engage Fiji through non-coercive means and to build goodwill in a region where geopolitical competition and Papua-related debates remain sensitive. This strategy can strengthen Indonesia's presence in the Pacific, yet it also shows that South-South Cooperation is not free from power relations. Development cooperation may be presented as solidarity, while simultaneously serving diplomatic, economic, and security-oriented goals. Recognizing this dual character is necessary for understanding the political function of aid in contemporary international relations.

Lastly, the author of course acknowledges that this article has several limitations. It relies on documentary analysis and does not include interviews with Indonesian or Fijian officials. Therefore, it interprets documented policy frames, stated objectives, and publicly traceable patterns, rather than claiming to fully reconstruct internal decision-making processes. The study also focuses on Indonesia's motives and does not examine Fiji's reception, negotiation, or assessment of Indonesian aid. Future research can address these limitations by studying Fiji's perspective, evaluating aid outcomes, and comparing Indonesia's aid diplomacy across other Pacific states such as Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Nauru.

## 5. Declarations

### 5.1. *Ethical considerations*

Not applicable

### 5.2. *Use of artificial intelligence (AI)*

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool Grammarly was used exclusively for language editing and/or grammatical improvement. The use of AI did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or conclusions of the manuscript. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors.

### 5.3. *Conflict of Interest*

The authors declare no conflicts of interest

### 5.4. *Funding*

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### 5.5. *Data Availability Statement*

No data were generated in this paper.

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