



STRENGTHENING SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION: INDONESIA'S GRANT TO AFGHANISTAN IN 2022

Muh. Zulhamdi Suhafid^{1*}, Nur Aliyah Zainal¹, Miftah Farid Darussalam¹

¹Department of International Relations; Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar; Indonesia

*email: muhzulhamdisuhafid@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis implementasi program hibah Indonesia untuk Afghanistan tahun 2022 sebagai manifestasi penguatan Kerja Sama Selatan-Selatan. Dengan mengeksplorasi menggunakan pendekatan konstruktivisme dalam hubungan internasional terkait identitas dan kepentingan kedua negara membentuk pola hubungan kerja sama bilateral. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui jurnal dan laporan mengenai penguatan Kerja Sama Selatan-Selatan melalui program hibah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa program hibah dialokasikan ke dalam tiga sektor prioritas yaitu penanganan krisis pangan, pelatihan peningkatan kapasitas di bidang kesehatan ibu dan anak, dan bantuan dukungan pendidikan untuk mahasiswa pascasarjana Afghanistan. Program ini berhasil melatih dan meningkatkan kemampuan akademik warga Afghanistan, meningkatkan produktivitas pertanian di wilayah target, dan meningkatkan akses layanan kesehatan dasar. Meskipun kerja sama ini menghadapi beberapa tantangan, pendekatan adaptif Indonesia melalui kerja sama dengan organisasi lokal dan penggunaan teknologi informasi untuk monitoring jarak jauh terbukti efektif. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa keberhasilan program hibah tidak hanya memperkuat hubungan bilateral, tetapi juga menunjukkan penguatan identitas solidaritas negara di kawasan Selatan-Selatan, yang mengedepankan kesetaraan, kepedulian, serta adanya dorongan identitas sesama negara muslim-berkembang.

Kata Kunci: *Afghanistan, hibah luar negeri, identitas negara muslim-berkembang, Indonesia, Kerja Sama Selatan-Selatan*

Abstract

This research aims to analyze the implementation of Indonesia's grant program for Afghanistan in 2022 as a manifestation of strengthening South-South cooperation. By exploring using the constructivism approach in international relations related to the identity and interests of the two countries, it forms a pattern of bilateral cooperation. The research used qualitative method with data collection techniques through journals and reports on strengthening South-South cooperation through grant programs. The results showed that the grant program was allocated into three priority sectors: Handling the Food Crisis, Capacity Building Training in Maternal and Child Health, and Educational Support Assistance for Afghan Postgraduate Students. The program successfully trained and improved the academic skills of Afghans, increased agricultural productivity in targeted areas and access to basic health services. While this cooperation has faced challenges, Indonesia's adaptive approach through cooperation with local organizations and the use of information technology for remote monitoring has proven effective. This study concludes that the success of the grant program not only strengthens bilateral relations but also shows the strengthening of state-identity solidarity in the south-south region, which emphasizes equality, care, and the encouragement of identity among Muslim-developing countries.

Keywords: Afghanistan, identity of muslim-developing countries, Indonesia, overseas grants, South-South Cooperation;

Introduction

South-South Cooperation (SSC) is a scheme of cooperation between developing countries in the world. It began in 1955, marked by the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. The conference became an important moment for countries that had experienced colonialism to unite and rebuild their respective civilizations and economies. The background to the emergence of the SSC was the solidarity among countries that had been colonized by Western countries during World War II. They realized that only by working together and helping each other they could rise from adversity and rebuild their countries. Therefore, SSC became a platform for developing countries to share experiences, knowledge, and resources to achieve sustainable development. Actually, South-South cooperation was mostly carried out in bilateral form, but later developed into multilateral cooperation covering various sectors, such as education, security, culture, and especially economy.

The economic sector is considered the most fundamental in promoting the development of developing countries that were once colonized. Through South-South cooperation, they can exchange information, technology, and best practices in various economic fields, such as trade, investment, and industrial development (Helson & Mitchell, 2020).

In the current era of globalization, efforts to strengthen South-South cooperation are very important. Given that the world has just emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic which has had a major impact on developing countries, South-South cooperation is expected to be one of the solutions to encourage domestic economic recovery and to achieve sustainable growth. Therefore, it requires commitment and joint efforts from developing countries to support each other and to strengthen cooperation within the framework of South-South cooperation.

One of the countries that has been very active in promoting South-South cooperation is Indonesia. As a developing country that once experienced colonialism, Indonesia views South-South cooperation as a strategic economic diplomacy to achieve its national interests and the 2030 sustainable development goals. Indonesia has taken a significant role in conducting economic diplomacy within the framework of SSC, so that

currently Indonesia has been considered as a “new emerging donor” even though the country is still in a position as a developing country. This is done by Indonesia as a form of solidarity and national interest to show the world that Indonesia is able to rise from adversity and rebuild solidarity with other developing countries, especially Muslim countries. Given that Indonesia is a country with the fourth-largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia considers it important to prioritize its South-South cooperation program to developing Muslim countries, one of which is Afghanistan (Rachmayani, 2015).

Based on the survey results by Virgianita from the Department of International Relations, University of Indonesia, Indonesia needs to focus the direction of its South-South cooperation on developing Muslim countries, such as Afghanistan. This is based on several considerations, among others: the existence of solidarity among Muslim countries, which is part of Indonesia's national identity and interests; Afghanistan is one of the developing Muslim countries included in the South-South country category; Afghanistan is currently facing various challenges, such as ongoing horizontal conflicts and food crisis that occurred in 2022, so it needs support from other developing countries.

Indonesia, as the largest Muslim country in the world, has a significant moral responsibility to provide support to developing Muslim countries, such as Afghanistan. South-South cooperation program is a strategic instrument that can be used to show solidarity and build sustainable cooperation.

The focus on developing Muslim countries is not just a humanitarian act, but a systematic effort to strengthen economic diplomacy. Through this program, Indonesia can expand its diplomatic network, build a positive image in the international arena, and create opportunities for long-term economic cooperation. Countries like Afghanistan, which are undergoing a reconstruction and recovery process, are in dire need of assistance in infrastructure development, human resources, and institutional strengthening. The strategic advantages for Indonesia in implementing this South-South cooperation program are comprehensive. Besides expanding geopolitical influence, Indonesia can also open up investment opportunities, enhance international reputation, and build diplomatic capital. The program is designed not just to provide momentary assistance, but to encourage the economic independence of recipient countries through knowledge transfer and capacity building.

The implementation of the South-South cooperation program requires a careful and comprehensive approach. Indonesia needs to consider the complexity of the recipient country's internal conditions, adapt the program to the local context, and always evaluate the effectiveness of the assistance. Thus, this cooperation will be meaningful and have a sustainable positive impact.

Through this strategy, Indonesia positions itself no longer as a recipient of aid, but as an active and constructive development partner. This signifies the transformation of Indonesia's role in the landscape of international relations, where solidarity and economic cooperation become the main instruments in global diplomacy. The focus of South-South cooperation program in developing Muslim countries is not just a diplomatic act, but a long-term investment in creating a global ecosystem that is more equitable, mutually understanding, and developing together. Indonesia with this strategy demonstrates its leadership and commitment to support the development of developing countries, especially in regions with strong religious and historical ties.

Therefore, looking at the events experienced by the country of Afghanistan, Indonesia took an important role to help overcome its domestic problems through the provision of grants. However, the question is why Indonesia is providing grants to Afghanistan while Indonesia is also experiencing problems to recover economically after the Covid-19 pandemic. Is it just an effort of solidarity between South-South countries, or is it the encouragement of fellow developing Muslim countries, or is there a political interest being built by the Indonesian government in providing the grant? This will be elaborated further in this research as an effort to add to the repertoire of knowledge for further research.

Literature Review

The theory of constructivism in international relations developed by Wendt provides a comprehensive analytical framework to understand the dynamics of South-South cooperation, especially in the context of Indonesia's grant to Afghanistan. Wendt argues that the structure of the international system is essentially a social construction formed through interactions between states and the shared understanding that emerges from these interactions (Wendt, 1992).

Based on constructivism, state identity and interests are not given or fixed, but are formed through the process of social interaction and intersubjective understanding. This

understanding is very relevant in analyzing the motivations and patterns of Indonesia-Afghanistan cooperation where Indonesia constructs its identity as a developing country that has a moral responsibility to help other developing countries.

Wendt identifies three cultures of anarchy in international relations: Hobbesian (hostility), Lockean (competition), and Kantian (friendship) (Wendt, 1999). In the context of South-South cooperation, Indonesia and Afghanistan operate within a Kantian cultural framework, where both countries view each other as partners who can work together to achieve common goals. This is reflected in patterns of interaction that emphasize solidarity and mutual benefit over competition or conflict.

Constructivism also emphasizes the importance of shared norms and values in shaping state behavior. In this case, the principles of South-South cooperation such as solidarity, mutual respect for sovereignty, and non-interference become binding norms and shape the pattern of Indonesia-Afghanistan interaction. As stated by Acharya, these norms not only guide behavior, but also contribute to the formation of the collective identity of Southern countries (Acharya, 2016). The concept of “collective identity formation” introduced by Wendt is also relevant in analyzing how Indonesia and Afghanistan, as part of the South, developed a collective identity that encouraged closer cooperation (Wendt, 1994). This collective identity is manifested in multilateral forums such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the G77, which serve as a forum for the articulation of the common interests of the South.

In the context of Indonesia's grantmaking to Afghanistan in 2022, the constructivist approach helps explain how the decision was not solely based on material calculations, but was also influenced by social constructions of Indonesia's roles and responsibilities in the international community. As Sukma explains, Indonesia's foreign policy toward Afghanistan reflects a strong ideational aspect, where Indonesia positions itself as a “bridge builder” between the Islamic world and the West (Sukma, 2021).

A constructivism perspective also helps explain how Indonesia's historical experience in post-conflict development influenced the form of assistance provided to Afghanistan. Indonesia's experience in managing internal conflict and building democracy shaped its particular understanding of the challenges facing post-conflict countries. This is in line with Wendt's argument on how historical experiences shape state identities and interests. The practice of technical cooperation which is the focus of

Indonesia's grant to Afghanistan can be understood through the concept of “social learning” proposed by Wendt. Through intensive interaction in training programs and exchange of expertise, the two countries not only transfer technical knowledge but also develop a shared understanding of development and progress. This process, as explained by Hamid, contributed to the strengthening of the collective identity of the Southern countries (Hamid, 2022).

The normative aspect of Indonesia-Afghanistan cooperation is a fundamental dimension that goes beyond mere material considerations. The selection of priority aid sectors such as human resource capacity building, agriculture, and health is not a random decision, but it reflects a deep philosophy of sustainable development. Through this approach, the two countries are substantively redefining the nature of international cooperation in a more meaningful and transformative way.

The focus on human resource capacity building shows a commitment to transform Afghanistan's structural potential. Rather than simply providing physical assistance, Indonesia chose a strategy of strengthening individual and institutional capabilities. This means building the fundamental foundations that enable Afghans to be self-reliant, creative, and responsive to their own development challenges.

The selection of agriculture as a priority area indicates a comprehensive understanding of economic and food security. In the context of Afghanistan, which has complex geographical and social challenges, intervention in the agricultural sector is not just an economic endeavor, but also a strategy to create social stability. Through farmer empowerment and the development of sustainable agricultural systems, Indonesia is helping Afghanistan build food security and open up new economic opportunities.

The prioritization of the health sector demonstrates a holistic concern for human well-being. This focus reflects the understanding that true development cannot be separated from the quality of life of individuals. By providing interventions in health sector, Indonesia is not only helping to address medical issues, but also supporting the process of social recovery and humanitarian reconstruction in Afghanistan. The constructivist perspective in this cooperation is very relevant to understand. The argument that material interests cannot be separated from intersubjective understandings of value and purpose becomes very real in this context. Any intervention is not only determined

by economic calculations, but also by a shared normative framework that includes solidarity, humanity, and a vision of sustainable development.

The significance of normative aspects in Indonesia-Afghanistan cooperation essentially represents a more humanitarian and constructive model of diplomacy. It is not just an aid transaction, but an interactive dialog process that builds a shared understanding of development. Through this approach, the two countries not only transform material conditions, but also create a new narrative of international cooperation based on mutual understanding, respect, and a shared commitment to humanitarian development.

Indonesia-Afghanistan cooperation transcends the traditional paradigm of international relations. It is a mirror of how developing countries can empower each other, not through coercive power, but through constructive power which is built on human values and global solidarity.

The constructivist approach also helps explain how Indonesia and Afghanistan overcame challenges in implementing the grant program. Instead of seeing the obstacles solely as technical issues, both countries developed solutions based on a shared understanding of the local context and cultural values. This confirms Wendt's argument that interactions between countries are not only shaped by material factors but also by cultural and social understandings. Furthermore, constructivism helps explain how South-South cooperation contributes to the transformation of the structure of the international system. Through intensive cooperation practices, Southern countries such as Indonesia and Afghanistan not only reproduce but also transform understandings of development and international cooperation. This is in line with Wendt's argument about the transformative nature of social interaction in international relations.

In a broader context, a constructivist analysis of Indonesia-Afghanistan cooperation provides a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of contemporary South-South relations. As Rahman points out, this cooperation reflects not only a change in the distribution of material capabilities but also a transformation in the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of developing countries in global governance (Rahman, 2023).

As such, Wendt's theory of constructivism provides a rich analytical framework for understanding the complexities of South-South cooperation, particularly in the context of Indonesia's grant to Afghanistan. This approach helps explain how shared identities,

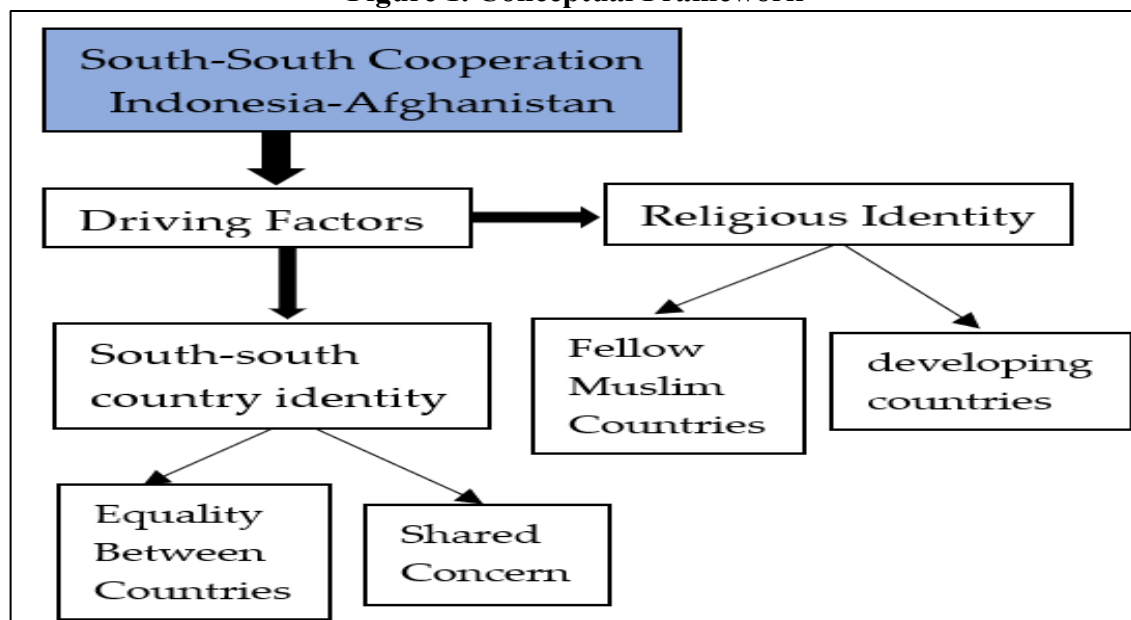
norms, and understandings shape the patterns of interaction and outcomes of cooperation between developing countries.

Research Method

This research uses a literature study by examining data taken from reports and journals that discuss South-South cooperation between Indonesia and Afghanistan. The theoretical framework by Alexander in his constructivist thought shows that a country's actions are formed by the urge to strengthen its identity, as well as an effort to strengthen South-South cooperation which is oriented toward solidarity among developing countries. The author will begin by looking at the dynamics of cooperation between Indonesia and Afghanistan within the South-South framework.

The cooperation has shown a form of solidarity through the provision of grants by Indonesia to Afghanistan in 2022. Where the cooperation is built on the basis of an urge to show identity as a South-South country, then this cooperation will strengthen the identity of the two countries as South-South countries as well as Muslim-developing countries. Therefore, the grant is given by paying attention to the needs of Afghanistan's domestic crises, such as the food, education, and health sectors.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Results

The results show that Indonesia's grant program for Afghanistan in 2022 has had a significant impact on strengthening South-South cooperation between the two countries. Based on the author's research, it was found that Indonesia's grant to Afghanistan was effectively allocated into three priority sectors, namely handling the food crisis, capacity-building training programs in maternal and child health, and educational support assistance for Afghan postgraduate students. The success of this program not only resulted in strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries, but also showed identity in the form of solidarity among countries in the South-South region. Not only that, this cooperation has shown an identity that leads to strengthening cooperation within the South-South framework, as well as showing an identity that is supported by fellow Muslim-developing countries without any encouragement of domestic political interests.

Discussion

Dynamics of South-South Cooperation between Indonesia and Afghanistan

Bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Indonesia have long and complex historical roots, which are not simply built on conventional diplomatic considerations, but are based on deep bonds that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. The two countries have been in communication and interaction for decades, with the dynamics of the relationship evolving according to the geopolitical context and global challenges they face.

In addition to solidarity with fellow South-South countries, religious solidarity is a fundamental foundation that strengthens relations between Indonesia and Afghanistan. As the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has significant spiritual and cultural affinities with Afghanistan, where the majority of the population is Muslim. This commonality is not merely symbolic, but forms the basis of deep understanding and empathy between the two peoples.

This religious dimension in bilateral relations provides a unique perspective in international diplomacy. It is not just a common belief, but a shared understanding of the humanitarian values, solidarity, and spirit of brotherhood upheld in Islamic teachings. This allows the two countries to build deeper cooperation, beyond conventional diplomatic interests.

Indonesia-Afghanistan relations have undergone various phases, from Afghanistan's internal conflict to reconstruction and development efforts. Indonesia, with its experience of democracy and post-conflict development, has played an active role in providing support and assistance to Afghanistan, both through bilateral and multilateral channels.

Religious solidarity is not only about shared beliefs, but also includes a shared commitment to support humanitarian development. Indonesia has contributed significantly to helping Afghanistan through various programs, such as human resource capacity building, health assistance, and education support. This shows that religious ties can be a positive force in international diplomacy. Although they tend to be based on religious solidarity, Indonesia-Afghanistan relations are not exclusive or narrow. Both countries also prioritize their South-South identities. Their bilateral relationship reflects a model of diplomacy that emphasizes mutual understanding, respect for diversity, and a shared commitment to global development.

In a complex geopolitical context, Indonesia-Afghanistan relations show that religious solidarity can be a powerful and constructive instrument of diplomacy. Not just rhetoric, but real practice in building bridges of communication, mutual understanding, and meaningful cooperation between countries with different backgrounds but a shared vision for humanity.

Indonesia has expressed its commitment to support and assist the rebuilding of post-Taliban Afghanistan in a variety of sectors, including technical training, infrastructure, women's empowerment, higher education, and diplomat training. Indonesia has an embassy in Kabul, while Afghanistan has an embassy in Jakarta. Both countries are full members of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In addition, both are South-South countries that continue to promote cooperative relations among the global south (Winanti, 2019).

Historically, Afghanistan was one of the earliest countries to recognize the Republic of Indonesia after the revolution ended in 1949. Afghanistan and Indonesia officially opened diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1954, the same year Afghanistan established its embassy in Jakarta. The first friendship treaty between Afghanistan and Indonesia was signed on April 24, 1955. Most Indonesians condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 as a form of solidarity and concern.

Indonesia participated in the 1980 Summer Olympics Boycott protesting Moscow for its military actions in the country (Stekom, 2018).

On November 10, 2012, a new friendship agreement was signed between the two countries to promote cooperation in the fields of politics, economy and trade, academics and education, and culture. To assist Afghanistan in the education and capacity-building sectors, Indonesia agreed to recruit more Afghan students to study at Indonesian universities, train Afghan teachers and lecturers, and train Afghan national police for public order, traffic management, and crime investigation. Therefore, to this day the two countries are still strengthening their bilateral relations, especially since Indonesia in the period of Mr. Joko Widodo. He has prioritized economic diplomacy in the South-South framework, which in fact Afghanistan is one of the Global South countries.

In 2020, the international world is facing the Covid-19 pandemic which resulted in millions of human deaths, as well as a significant impact on the state and global economy due to lockdown and restrictions on activities and mobility. At the end of 2021 to early 2022, almost all countries in the world smelled a breath of fresh air again because all forms of restrictions on community mobility have been opened. However, there are still many challenges and obstacles that need to be answered by the government and the community, namely working for the country's economic recovery. Indonesia, which is trying to recover from the post-Covid-19 economic crisis, must carry out various strategies to return to normal, likewise with Afghanistan, where the Muslim-majority developing country is trying to recover its economy amidst the conflicts that are present, as well as the humanitarian crisis and famine that has hit the country (Hakim & Sugiono, 2021).

Thus, data released by the World Food Programme states that the people of Afghanistan are continuing to grapple with the consequences of four decades of conflict, with entrenched poverty further exacerbated by the economic crisis, frequent environmental disasters and worsening climate impacts, and gender inequality. After reaching peak hunger levels in 2021 and 2022, food security in Afghanistan has improved slightly, thanks in large part to massive food and nutrition assistance supporting up to half of the Afghan population. Despite this, more than a quarter of the Afghan population is still hungry, including 2.4 million people facing emergency levels of food insecurity.

These figures unfortunately place the country among other severe global hunger crises (Programme, 2022).

Increasingly erratic weather patterns became the norm. Devastating flash floods across the country followed years of drought that forced families to starve and flee their villages, increasing the number of urban poor. As the climate crisis worsens, flood losses are expected to increase every year. This is what led the Indonesian government to provide grants to Afghanistan, because it saw the various turbulent problems that were happening in a country dubbed the Graveyard of Empire.

Implementation of Indonesia's Grant Program to Afghanistan

The Indonesian government has provided grants to Afghanistan several times, including for handling the food crisis. It should be understood that Indonesia has shown a concrete commitment in supporting Afghanistan's development and recovery through a series of grant programs that are implemented in a strategic and planned manner. In this context, one of the most significant initiatives is the food crisis management program which was implemented in 2022. This program stems from deep concerns about the food insecurity situation faced by the Afghan people, especially after the changes in the political situation that occurred in the country (Malale & Sutikno, 2014).

Through a strategic partnership with the Aga Khan Foundation, the government of Indonesia managed to distribute food aid to 500 families spread across various priority areas of Afghanistan. The assistance provided included essential basic needs such as rice, flour, cooking oil, and sugar, which were selected based on careful consideration of basic needs and suitability to the local cultural context. The distribution period, which ran from March to June 2022, allowed for a planned distribution process and effective monitoring, despite the logistical and security challenges on the ground. The significance of this grant program goes beyond the humanitarian dimension alone, reflecting Indonesia's effective implementation of multi-track diplomacy. As a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia's assistance to Afghanistan has strategic significance in the context of relations between developing Muslim countries. Moreover, this program strengthens Indonesia's position in the architecture of South-South cooperation, demonstrating Indonesia's capacity and commitment to support global development.

The selection of the Aga Khan Foundation as an implementation partner is a strategic move that enables more effective penetration of aid into hard-to-reach areas. The

partnership also ensures accountability in aid delivery and a deep understanding of local socio-political dynamics. This experience provides valuable lessons for Indonesia in managing foreign aid programs in regions that are facing complex challenges while opening up opportunities for the development of similar programs in the future. The grant program resulted in a cascading positive impact. In the short term, food aid has succeeded in easing the burden on beneficiary families in facing the crisis. While in a long-term perspective, this program strengthens the foundation of Indonesia-Afghanistan bilateral cooperation and opens opportunities for other capacity-building programs, including in the fields of maternal and child health and higher education. The successful implementation of this program also encourages the development of similar initiatives with a wider and more diverse scope.

The challenges faced in the program implementation, ranging from logistical aspects to coordination with various stakeholders, have provided valuable lessons for Indonesia's foreign aid management. This experience demonstrates the importance of an adaptive and context-sensitive approach, as well as the strategic value of engaging local partners who have a deep understanding of the local situation. This learning is an important asset for Indonesia in developing future foreign aid programs.

The successful implementation of Indonesia's grant program to Afghanistan confirms Indonesia's capacity as an emerging middle power that plays an active role in global development. The program not only reflects solidarity with developing countries facing crisis, but also demonstrates the effectiveness of Indonesia's approach in using foreign aid as an instrument of diplomacy. This experience enriches the repertoire of Indonesia's diplomatic practices and provides a strong foundation for the development of more comprehensive similar programs in the future (Keuangan, 2022).

In addition, Indonesia also provides capacity-building training programs in the field of maternal and child health. Indonesia has taken a strategic step in supporting health development in Afghanistan through a capacity-building training program in maternal and child health. This program is a concrete manifestation of Indonesia's commitment to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the third goal on good health and well-being. The implementation of this program is becoming increasingly relevant given the maternal and child health conditions in Afghanistan that still require serious attention.

Based on World Health Organization data for 2022, Afghanistan recorded a maternal mortality rate of 620 per 100,000 live births, well above the global average of 211. The fertility rate of 5.3 children per woman of childbearing age is faced with limited access to adequate maternal health services (VOA, 2023). The situation is exacerbated by prolonged conflict that has damaged health infrastructure and hampered community access to basic health services. The training program, held from 4-11 November 2022 in Yogyakarta, is the result of a strategic collaboration between the International Development Cooperation Fund (LDKPI) and Indonesia's National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) with the Aga Khan Foundation. The selection of Yogyakarta as the training location was due to its success in developing an integrated maternal and child health system, as reported in the Performance Report of the Yogyakarta Health Office (Antaranews, 2022).

The training curriculum is designed to comprehensively cover both theoretical and practical aspects. The in-class training component includes essential materials such as maternal health management, integrated referral systems, and strategies to reduce maternal and child mortality. The program is enriched with field visits to various health facilities and non-governmental organizations that have demonstrated success in maternal and child health management and family economic empowerment.

LDKPI's program evaluation showed that the trainees experienced significant improvement in their understanding and skills in maternal and child health management. The participants not only gained technical knowledge but also gained exposure to best practices in the development of sustainable community health systems. The family economic empowerment model introduced in this program also opened insights into the linkages between economic well-being and family health. The significance of this program lies in the holistic approach applied, integrating aspects of health with family economic empowerment. This is in line with Ahmadi's research findings showing that maternal health interventions accompanied by economic empowerment have a higher success rate in conflict areas (Ahmadi, 2023). The program is also an effective model of South-South cooperation in transferring knowledge and experience in the field of public health.

Program sustainability is a key focus through the development of post-training monitoring and mentoring mechanisms. LDKPI and the Aga Khan Foundation have

developed a digital platform to facilitate information exchange and ongoing consultation between program alumni and Indonesian experts. This initiative ensures that the knowledge gained can be effectively implemented in Afghanistan (Maghfur, 2022).

Indonesia continues to make efforts to strengthen cooperation with Afghanistan, where in the education sector itself, Indonesia provides educational support assistance for Afghan postgraduate students. This step is a strategic effort to support the development of Afghanistan's human resources through a postgraduate scholarship program implemented through cooperation between the International Development Cooperation Fund Institute (LDKPI) and the International Islamic University of Indonesia (UIII). This initiative is a concrete manifestation of Indonesia's commitment to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the fourth target on quality education, which is set to be achieved by 2030. This scholarship program is of particular significance given the state of higher education in Afghanistan, which is facing structural and systemic challenges. According to a UNESCO report, only about 9.7% of the 18-24-year-old population in Afghanistan has access to higher education, with a very significant gender gap where female participation is even lower. The situation is exacerbated by the prolonged conflict that has damaged education infrastructure and hindered access to quality education (UNESCO, 2023).

The strategic partnership between LDKPI and UIII, which was formalized through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on October 14, 2022, by LDKPI President Director Tormarbulang Lumbantobing and UIII Rector Prof. Dr. Komaruddin Hidayat, reflects a comprehensive approach to supporting Afghan higher education. The program applies an integrated financing model where LDKPI is responsible for travel costs, while UIII provides full scholarships covering tuition and living costs for Afghan graduate students (UIII, 2022). According to a study by The World Bank, investment in higher education has a significant multiplier effect on socio-economic development in post-conflict countries. Indonesia's scholarship program for Afghanistan is in line with these findings, providing opportunities for young Afghans to develop the academic and professional capacities necessary for the development of their country (Bank, 2023). The study conducted by Ahmad & Rahman shows that international scholarship program alumni from Afghanistan have a high level of contribution in institutional capacity building in their country after returning (Ahmad, 2023).

This program also reflects the effective implementation of Indonesia's education diplomacy. As analyzed in his research, international scholarships are a strategic soft power instrument in strengthening Indonesia's position in global forums (Zahra, 2023). The selection of UII as the host institution has strategic value given its reputation for developing moderate and inclusive Islamic studies, which is highly relevant to the Afghan context. Program implementation involves a rigorous and comprehensive selection mechanism to ensure optimal input quality and impact. The selection process considers not only academic achievement but also the leadership potential and commitment of the candidates to contribute to Afghanistan's development. The program is also equipped with soft skills and leadership development components that are essential for their role as agents of change in the future.

Program monitoring and evaluation is conducted on an ongoing basis through collaboration between LDKPI, UIII, and partners in Afghanistan. The alumni platform developed facilitates continuous networking and collaboration among alumni, creating a multiplier effect in knowledge transfer and capacity building. LDKPI reports indicate a high level of satisfaction among scholarship recipients and a 95% completion rate. The program's significance also lies in its contribution to strengthening South-South cooperation in education. As noted in the ASEAN report, Indonesia's initiative in supporting Afghan higher education serves as a model for the development of similar programs in the region. The program also supports the global agenda of building the resilience of education systems in conflict-affected countries.

Table 1. Indonesia Grants for Afghanistan in 2022

Grant Aid Orientation	Amount of Assistance	Budget Year
Food Crisis Management in Afghanistan	Rp. 2,190,000,000	2022
Capacity Building Training for Maternal and Child Health Stakeholders	Rp. 2,113,523,280	2022
Educational Support Grant for Afghan Graduate Students	Rp. 316,948,523	2022

Source: Ministry of Finance (International Development Cooperation Fund)

According to the table above, Indonesia is quite serious in strengthening its bilateral cooperation with Afghanistan, which is a Muslim-majority developing country. This is a

clear manifestation that Indonesia has begun to prioritize its grant aid to South-South countries, especially Muslim countries, where Indonesia is a New Emerging Donor. Therefore, the Indonesian government needs to accelerate cooperation with Muslim-developing countries in order to strengthen its position as a strong country in the midst of the Global South countries that are having difficulty driving their economic growth.

Solidarity or Political Interests

Efforts to strengthen South-South Cooperation are a strategic step for Indonesia to conduct economic diplomacy. As a form of realization of the South-South country, significant steps are needed to show the world and the international community that developing countries such as Indonesia are able to compete and become a solid country in providing grant assistance to fellow developing countries, even though they are still in the middle-income country position. Therefore, the provision of Indonesian grants to Afghanistan is a form of Indonesian diplomacy to strengthen its South-South cooperation (Sasongkojati & Subono, 2023).

Historically, South-South cooperation was based on a sense of solidarity between developing countries. But the concern in this research is whether Indonesia's grant to Afghanistan was solely based on humanitarian concern for fellow southern countries? Or is there an identity factor that encourages Indonesia to provide these grants, or are there political interests that are then built by the Indonesian government to achieve its national interests? This then becomes one of the variables that need to be thoroughly explored in this research (Wicaksana & Karim, 2022).

It can be said that the provision of grants by Indonesia to Afghanistan is a form of Indonesia's solidarity in the South-South framework or The Global South, where Indonesia since its independence has continued to take part in the creation of world welfare, because this is the order of the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution and the 1945 Indonesian Constitution. Therefore, if we look at this event, Indonesia is realizing what has been agreed upon since the Asian-African Conference, where at that time all colonized countries had to help each other and care about all forms of shortcomings and domestic needs of their countries (Nauli, 2021).

Apart from the form of solidarity built by Indonesia to Afghanistan, it is necessary to look at the efforts to show identity as a South-South country, which in fact this step is a form of solidarity to strengthen cooperation within the South-South framework. In

addition, the author finds that the provision of grants by Indonesia to Afghanistan is an encouragement to show the identity of fellow Muslim-developing countries. Therefore, this second cooperation in the future will be stronger and more massive because it is driven by two identity variables, namely fellow South-South countries and Muslim-developing countries.

Not only that, the Indonesian government is carrying out its mission of strengthening economic diplomacy with developing countries so that the image of the Golden Indonesia 2045 vision in the eyes of the international community can be achieved (Margiansyah, 2020).

Therefore, the author considers that the Indonesian government's strategic move to strengthen its political-economic power in the international arena is a manifestation of deep geopolitical awareness. It is not just an effort to increase influence, but a comprehensive strategy to reposition Indonesia in the architecture of contemporary international relations. Through this approach, Indonesia seeks to transform itself from a passive player to a key actor in the dynamics of global cooperation, especially in the context of South-South cooperation.

The Indonesian government's motivations go beyond mere pragmatic interests. The concept of solidarity among southern nations is a fundamental philosophical foundation in every diplomatic initiative. This reflects a commitment to building an international relations ecosystem based on the principles of equality, mutual understanding, and care. It is not just about economic exchange, but a systematic effort to create a new narrative in international relations that is more equitable and inclusive.

Grants and cooperation cannot be simplified as instruments of narrow political interests. Rather, it is a concrete manifestation of global solidarity, especially among developing countries and Muslim countries. This approach demonstrates that international cooperation can be built on a foundation of empathy, shared understanding, and commitment to collective development that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries.

The principle of care is the essence of every cooperation initiative. The government of Indonesia understands that true power lies not in the ability to dominate, but in the capacity to empower. Every grant and cooperation program is designed with the aim of transforming the structural potential of partner countries, opening space for independent

growth, and creating a sustainable development ecosystem. In the context of developing Muslim countries, solidarity has a much deeper dimension than mere religious ties. It includes a shared commitment to addressing development challenges, sharing knowledge, and creating a model of cooperation that can be an alternative to the existing paradigm of international relations. Indonesia is thus not just a donor, but a true partner in the global development process.

The government's efforts demonstrate the sophistication of Indonesian diplomacy that goes beyond conventional approaches. Rather than simply imposing its will or seeking short-term gains, it builds the foundations of international relations based on mutual respect, understanding, and a shared commitment to achieving global prosperity. Every diplomatic step is an investment to create a more equitable international order.

Therefore, the cooperation built by Indonesia with southern countries, especially developing Muslim countries, is a concrete manifestation of the vision of humanist and constructive diplomacy. It reflects Indonesia's transformation from a mere recipient of aid to a positive force in the architecture of international relations, capable of bringing about change through solidarity, cooperation, and empowerment. The direction of this approach lies in its ability to dismantle the old paradigm of hegemonic and hierarchical international relations.

Indonesia, with this strategy, proves that international cooperation can be built on a foundation of equality, mutual understanding, and a shared commitment to sustainable humanitarian development (Pusat Strategi Kebijakan Multilateral, 2023).

Conclusion

The South-South cooperation relationship between Indonesia and Afghanistan reflects an interesting dynamic in the context of international diplomacy and humanitarian assistance. This cooperation is built on a solid foundation, based on three main pillars: solidarity, equality, and mutual concern. This became even more relevant in 2022 when Afghanistan faced a multidimensional crisis covering aspects of food, education, and health.

Indonesia, as one of the influential countries in the South-South region, took a proactive step by providing grant assistance to Afghanistan. This action not only reflects Indonesia's commitment to South-South cooperation, but also shows the concrete

implementation of mutually agreed values. This assistance has special significance because it is done without any hidden political agenda, but purely as a manifestation of solidarity between developing countries. An interesting aspect of this cooperation is the religious dimension that strengthens bilateral ties. Both Indonesia and Afghanistan are Muslim-majority countries, which creates a common cultural and spiritual ground. This factor catalyzes Indonesia's motivation to provide assistance, creating a unique blend of South-South solidarity and Islamic brotherhood.

The realized grant assistance program has comprehensive and structured characteristics. Its effectiveness can be seen from the massive scale of implementation and the benefits that can be felt by both countries. For Afghanistan, this assistance provides concrete support in dealing with domestic crises. Meanwhile, for Indonesia, this program strengthens its position as an important actor in South-South cooperation and Islamic diplomacy.

This framework of cooperation also has a broader impact in the context of international relations. Indonesia succeeded in showing the world that Southern countries are able to make a significant contribution in handling the global crisis. This also proves that solidarity between developing countries is not just rhetoric, but can be demonstrated in real action.

What should be emphasized is that this assistance was provided without the involvement of domestic political interests. This is concrete evidence that South-South cooperation can work purely on the basis of concern and solidarity. The initial agreements and treaties that have been made between the Southern countries, coupled with the bonds as fellow Muslim-developing countries, provide a strong foundation for the implementation of this aid program. Therefore, the Indonesia-Afghanistan cooperative relationship in a South-South context is a good model of how developing countries can support and help each other. This program proves that international solidarity is still relevant and can have a real positive impact, especially when it is based on humanitarian values and genuine brotherhood.

Declaration

During the preparation of this work, the authors used a little AI to help obtain valid academic content and enrich the literature review in our article and Mendeley to organize

citations. After using these tools/services, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

References

- Acharya, A. (2016). *Why Govern? Rethinking Demand and Progress in Global Governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ahmad. (2023). Impact Assessment of International Scholarships on Institutional Capacity Building in Afghanistan. *International Journal of Educational Development*.
- Ahmadi. (2023). Integrated Maternal Health Interventions in Conflict Zones: Lessons from Afghanistan. *Journal of Global Health*, 13(2), 1–15.
- Antaranews. (2022). *BKKBN berikan pelatihan kepada delegasi dari Afghanistan*. Antaranews. <https://jambi.antaranews.com/rilis-pers/3225561/bkkbn-berikan-pelatihan-kepada-delegasi-dari-afghanistan>
- Aisyah, A. A., Ardiawan, A., & Bachtiar, F. R. (2021). Menilik Tantangan dan Potensi Kerja Sama Selatan-Selatan dalam Meningkatkan Pertumbuhan Ekonomi di Indonesia Era (Pasca) Covid-19. *Review of International Relations 2021*. 3(2), 162–178.
- Global Education Monitoring Report Team. (2023). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023: Technology in Education: A Tool on Whose Terms?* UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385723>
- Hakim, L., Sugiono, M., Mas'ood, M. (Eds.). (2021). *The Global South: Refleksi dan Visi Hubungan Internasional*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Helson, R. M., & Mitchell, V. (2020). *Women on the River of Life. A Fifty-Year Study of Adult Development*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv17hm9vs.21>
- Kementerian Keuangan (2022). *Afghanistan. Lembaga Dana Kerja Sama Pembangunan Internasional*. <https://ldkpi.kemenkeu.go.id/page/profile-afghanistan>
- Kementerian Keuangan. (2022). *Bantu Afghanistan dalam Bidang Kesehatan, LDKPI dan BKKBN Berikan Pelatihan Peningkatan Kapasitas Kesehatan Ibu dan Anak*. <https://ldkpi.kemenkeu.go.id/post/bantu-afghanistan-dalam-bidang-kesehatan,-ldkpi-dan-bkkbn-berikan-pelatihan-peningkatan-kapasitas-kesehatan-ibu-dan-anak>
- Malale, A. W., & Sutikno, M. A. (2014). Implementasi Pemberian Hibah Pemerintah Indonesia Kepada Pemerintah/Lembaga Asing Sebagai Stimulus *Soft Diplomacy*. *Jurnal BPPK*, 7, 91–110.
- Margiansyah, D. (2020). Revisiting Indonesia's Economic Diplomacy in the Age of Disruption: Towards Digital Economy and Innovation Diplomacy. *Journal of ASEAN Studies*, 8(1), 15–39. <https://doi.org/10.21512/jas.v8i1.6433>
- Nauli, B. P. (2021). *Masa Depan Kerja Sama Selatan-Selatan: Diantara Solidaritas dan Kepentingan*. 3(12).
- Pusat Strategi Kebijakan Multilateral, B. (2023). *Perjalanan Satu Dekade KSS Indonesia: Kontribusi Bagi Tercapainya Pembangunan Berkelanjutan*. <http://repository.uki.ac.id/11612/>
- Rahman, K. (2023). *The Evolution of South-South Cooperation: From Bandung to Contemporary Global South*. *International Studies Quarterly*.
- Sasongkojati, R. M. H. D. R., & Subono, N. I. (2023). Strategic Culture, South-South Cooperation, and Soft Power Politics: Explaining Brazilian Foreign Aid. *Jurnal*

- Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik*, 27(2), 176–191. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.81267>
- Stekom. (2018). *Hubungan Afghanistan dengan Indonesia*. Universitas Stekom. https://p2k.stekom.ac.id/ensiklopedia/Hubungan_Afganistan_dengan_Indonesia
- Sukma, R. (Mar., 1995). The Evolution of Indonesia's Foreign Policy: An Indonesian View. *Asian Survey*. 35(3), pp. 304-315. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i325278>
- UIII. (2022). *LDKPI Siap Dukung UIII*. Studiislam.ID UIII.
- VOA. (2023). *Tingkat Kematian Ibu Melahirkan di Afghanistan Tertinggi di Asia*. VOA. <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/tingkat-kematian-ibu-melahirkan-di-afghanistan-tertinggi-di-asia/6976992.html>
- Wendt, A. (Spring 1992). Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics. *International Organization*. Vol. 46, No. 2, pp. 391-425. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i327219>
- Wendt, A. (June 1994). Collective Identity Formation and the International State. *American Political Science Review*. Vol. 88, Issue 2, pp. 384-396. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2944711>
- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wicaksana, I. G. W., & Karim, M. F. (2022). Approaches to Indonesia's Foreign Policy: Area Studies, FPA Theory, and Global IR. *Journal of ASEAN Studies*, 10(2), 161-180. <https://doi.org/10.21512/jas.v10i2.9059>
- Winanti, P. S., & Alvian, R. A. (2020). *Kebangkitan "The Global South": Strategi, Implementasi dan Implikasinya bagi Tata Kelola Politik Global*. Graha Ilmu.
- World Bank. (2023). *Higher Education in Post-Conflict Countries: Investment Returns and Development Impact*. World Bank.
- World Food Programme. (2022). *Afghanistan*. https://www-wfp-org.translate.google/countries/afghanistan?_x_tr_sl=en&_x_tr_tl=id&_x_tr_hl=id&_x_tr_pto=tc
- Zahra, K. H. (2023). South-South Cooperation in Higher Education: Analysis of Indonesia-Afghanistan Scholarship Program. *Asian Journal of Education*, 412–430.