

RETHINKING FOOD DIPLOMACY: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF INDONESIA'S RICE DIPLOMACY

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical literature review on Indonesia's rice surplus diplomacy within the framework of South–South Cooperation (SSC). Drawing from nine key studies, the literature review identifies three thematic clusters: food diplomacy in the Global South, critics of SSC solidarity discourse, and Indonesia's rice surplus as an instrument of foreign policy. While SSC emphasizes equality and mutual benefit, emerging literature reveals tensions between rhetorical commitments to solidarity and the strategic, state-centric practices of donor countries. Indonesia's case exemplifies how rice surplus has evolved from a symbol of domestic achievement to a soft power instrument, used to assert regional leadership amid global food crises. However, this transformation also exposes gaps in regional governance and risks reinforcing power asymmetries under the guise of humanitarianism. The review calls for a rethinking of SSC and food-based diplomacy, advocating for inclusive mechanisms that balance national interests with collective resilience.

Keywords: food diplomacy, rice surplus, Indonesia, South–South Cooperation

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Asia has experienced a growing rice crisis driven by a combination of climate change, geopolitical tensions, and tightening export policies. In February 2025, the Philippines declared a national food security emergency following a sharp spike in domestic rice prices and extreme weather disruptions. To stabilize the market, the country relied on imports to cover more than 20 percent of its domestic needs (Donnellon-May, 2025). A similar situation unfolded in Malaysia, where local production met only 40–50 percent of national demand (Annuar & Hisham, 2025). Meanwhile, in Japan, rice prices surged to as high as 100,000 Rupiah (approximately USD 6.30) per kilogram, reflecting instability in the supply of staple foods in the

region (Karyza, 2025). These developments signal a deepening structural vulnerability in Asia's food systems, even among traditionally stable economies.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, in the *Global Report on Food Crises* (2025), warned that food crises could escalate into hunger crises if global solidarity continues to wane. His statement reflects growing concerns as major rice-producing countries prioritize securing domestic supply over maintaining export flows. In recent years major rice-producing countries such as India, Vietnam, and Thailand have imposed export restrictions or outright bans (Nitta & Inoue, 2024). This inward turn underscores a broader trend of food nationalism, where self-sufficiency and political stability take precedence over market integration or humanitarian assistance.

In contrast to the inward-looking strategies of other rice-surplus countries, Indonesia has adopted a different approach. Since declaring rice self-sufficiency in 2023, the government has actively promoted its surplus as an instrument of regional solidarity and humanitarian diplomacy. Minister of Agriculture Andi Amran Sulaiman, for example, expressed Indonesia's readiness to export rice to Malaysia and share agricultural knowledge and technologies (Anggela, 2025). Official narratives frame this initiative as part of Indonesia's moral responsibility to assist fellow developing countries amid rising food insecurity. Such a shift signals a broader reorientation of Indonesia's foreign policy: from ensuring domestic food security to projecting soft power through food diplomacy. However, this strategy raises critical questions: How does the literature conceptualize the use of staple commodities—especially rice—as tools of diplomacy by a Global South country?

This paper contributes by synthesizing and critically reviewing literature on food diplomacy, South–South Cooperation, and Indonesia's food diplomacy strategy. Unlike descriptive or normative studies, this study focuses on the tensions between the rhetoric of solidarity and the political interests embedded in Indonesia's rice diplomacy. The paper is structured into five main sections: introduction, conceptual and methodological framework, literature review, thematic synthesis and critical discussion, and conclusions and recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on a critical literature review. This method enables a reflective and interpretative analysis of existing academic works to explore how food diplomacy and South–South Cooperation (SSC) are positioned within the context of Indonesia’s rice surplus strategy. Grounded in a constructivist epistemology, this approach emphasizes the need to critically reread literature in order to identify discursive shifts and power dynamics underlying food diplomacy practices (Wright & Michailova, 2022).

Relevant literature was selected through a systematic search using academic databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar, along with official institutional sources. Selection criteria included publications between 2010 and 2025, written in English or Indonesian, and containing key words such as “food diplomacy,” “South–South Cooperation,” “Indonesia rice,” and “food surplus.” This process yielded nine primary scholarly sources deemed highly relevant to the study’s objectives.

This approach seeks to offer both a conceptual contribution and a constructive critique of dominant narratives in the existing literature (Fernandez, 2019). Thematic synthesis is used to identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps across the selected works, while comparing their findings and assessing the tensions between rhetoric and practice. The analysis follows the thematic synthesis method proposed by Snyder (2019), whereby the literature is categorized into key thematic clusters: food diplomacy in the Global South, Indonesia’s role in regional food cooperation, and critiques of SSC’s solidarity discourse.

Conceptual Background

South–South Cooperation (SSC) has emerged as an alternative development framework that emphasizes solidarity, equality, and mutual benefit among developing countries (Engel, 2019). Within this paradigm, Global South states are no longer passive recipients of aid, but active agents capable of shaping global governance and asserting their developmental models (Achcar, 2023)

Nonetheless, SSC is not free from contradictions. Scholars have noted tensions between the discourse of solidarity and the strategic pursuit of national interests. Rising powers such as China, India, and Indonesia often deploy SSC rhetoric to expand geopolitical influence, blending post-colonial ideals with *realpolitik* (Gray & Gills, 2016).

This study adopts SSC as a conceptual lens to critically examine Indonesia's use of rice surplus as an instrument of food diplomacy. It argues that such practices reflect a strategic recalibration of SSC which from a discourse of mutual assistance to a tool of soft power, where food aid serves not only humanitarian or developmental goals but also advances Indonesia's foreign policy interests within the Global South (Wei & Zhou, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on food diplomacy, South–South Cooperation (SSC), and Indonesia's surplus strategy reflect a broad but fragmented body of scholarship. For the purpose of this analysis, nine key academic works have been thematically grouped into three clusters: (1) food diplomacy in the Global South, (2) critiques of SSC solidarity discourse, and (3) Indonesia's rice surplus as a tool of regional diplomacy.

Food Diplomacy in the Global South

Food diplomacy has evolved from post-war humanitarian aid into an instrument of foreign policy. Shaw (2007) traces how food was historically mobilized by powerful nations to project influence and consolidate geopolitical dominance. Clapp in Clark (2013) also reveals how deep rooted structural inequalities within global food systems continue to marginalize developing countries, especially in the trade of staple commodities like rice. Within this global context, food—particularly staples like rice—has transformed into both a necessity and a site of power negotiation.

Within the Global South, food diplomacy has taken on new strategic dimensions as emerging powers begin to reposition themselves in the international order. Countries like Brazil, China, and India are increasingly using food surplus not merely as a form of aid, but as a tool for advancing their national interest. Warner (2015) illustrates how Brazil's "soy diplomacy" intertwines South–South solidarity with domestic agribusiness agendas, reflecting a shift from humanitarian aid to pragmatic statecraft. Similarly, Zhang and Zhou (2024) highlight how China use rice diplomacy as a soft power strategy, often framing exports as humanitarian gestures while simultaneously pursuing geopolitical objectives.

Critics of South–South Solidarity Discourse

South–South Cooperation (SSC) is founded on principles of equality, mutual benefit, and non-conditionality. (Engel, 2019). . However, growing scholarship has questioned the idealism of these principles as emerging powers take on the role of donors. Mawdsley (2021) argues that SSC has entered a new phase, which she terms “SSC 3.0”: where national interest increasingly overrides ideological solidarity. Drawing on cases such as Chinese and Indian aid, Mawdsley shows how these relationships tend to favor the donor, calling into question the sincerity of solidarity claims. As a result, SSC often replicates the same strategic asymmetries once associated with North–South aid dynamics.

Despite these critiques, some scholars remain cautiously optimistic about the transformative potential of food diplomacy within the SSC framework. Ojong and Ndlovu (2013) argue that food-based cooperation can enhance the political autonomy of Global South countries. Drawing on Nye’s (1990) concept of soft power, they suggest that economic capacity and surplus production—particularly of culturally significant commodities like rice—can serve as non-coercive tools of influence. When rooted in shared identities and regional needs, such cooperation may strengthen mutual legitimacy and solidarity.

However, the same authors also caution that food aid framed as solidarity often masks more strategic intentions. Their study of India–Africa relations shows how development assistance, while rhetorically positioned as partnership, is frequently aligned with the donor’s economic and geopolitical interests. Similarly, Wei and Zhou (2025) find that structural inequalities in South–South food trade persist and may even create new forms of dependency. Together, these findings highlight an enduring contradiction: although SSC continues to promote ideals of equality, its practice often reproduces power asymmetries in subtler ways.

Indonesia’s Rice Surplus Strategy

While much of the literature on food diplomacy focuses on global perspective, relatively few studies look closely at Indonesia’s specific approach. Kusumawardani, Nugroho, and Wibowo (2021) argue that Indonesia’s claim of rice self-sufficiency is often more symbolic than grounded in actual food security outcomes. Instead of reflecting a structurally resilient system, the surplus is frequently the result of short-term political pressure. Since 2023, Indonesia’s food

diplomacy has been presented in the language of humanitarian solidarity, yet in practice it reflects strategic efforts to boost regional influence and project leadership (Saa, 2024). In this context, rice surplus serves less as evidence of systemic agricultural resilience and more as a rhetorical tool shaped by short-term political imperatives. In this way, rice becomes less a measure of systemic agricultural resilience and more as a rhetorical tool shaped by short-term political agendas.

At the regional level, Indonesia's surplus strategy remains loosely connected to ASEAN's collective food security mechanisms like APTERR (ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve) and AIFS (ASEAN Integrated Food Security Framework). Sundram (2023) notes that ASEAN still lacks a strong, integrated framework for managing regional food crises. This gap has led many member states, including Indonesia, to pursue individual or bilateral strategies instead. In Indonesia's case, this vacuum has provided space to assert its leadership by leveraging surplus rice as a diplomatic tool. Taken together, these studies suggest that Indonesia's rice diplomacy operates at the intersection of domestic political signaling, soft power projection, and the structural limitations of regional cooperation.

Table 1. Literature Mapping on Food Diplomacy, SSC, and Food Surplus

No	Literature	Main Topic	Key Findings	Relevance	Critique
1	Saa (2024)	food security; international cooperation; food diplomacy	Cooperation with FAO and ASEAN, and surplus exports	A key case study of Indonesia's policy	Lacks in-depth discussion of strategic motives and SSC
2	Mawdsley (2021)	South-South Cooperation; global political economy; China; India; Brazil	The new generation of SSC is increasingly shaped by national interests	Provides a critical framework to examine Indonesia's rhetoric of solidarity	Theoretical in nature, with limited focus on food-related issues
3	Warner (2015)	Oligopoly in Soybean	Brazil's food diplomacy (soy) illustrates how SSC rhetoric can obscure political and corporate interests	Compares other developing countries that use food surplus as a strategic tool	Focuses on Brazil and soybeans, rather than rice
4	(Achcar, 2023.)	Focuses on recipient perceptions of SSC	Highlights asymmetries in the notion of "mutual benefit"	Raises questions about power relations in Indonesia's rice exports	Does not directly address the Indonesian context

No	Literature	Main Topic	Key Findings	Relevance	Critique
5	Sundram (2023)	ASEAN food security	APTERR, regional food reserves, and collective frameworks	Questions whether Indonesia's exports align with or diverge from regional cooperation	Does not explore national motivations behind Indonesia's actions
6	Kusumawardani et al. (2021)	Rice sovereignty and Indonesia's rice policy	Rice policy is framed as a domestic political project, with questions over its sustainability	Critiques the notion of 'surplus' being used for diplomacy	Does not engage with the diplomatic dimension
7	Ojong & Ndlovu (2013)	Food diplomacy India–Afrika	Food as a symbol of South–South friendship	Offers a 'soft' and symbolic perspective on food diplomacy	Does not address underlying economic or political strategies
8	Wei & Zhou (2025)	International food supply network; Food security; Network resilience;	Global food trade networks and rice system resilience	Places Indonesia's rice exports within the broader context of global food system vulnerabilities	Highly technical and quantitative; lacks discussion on political or diplomatic implications
9	Zhang & Zhou (2022)	Evolution of global food trade structures	Dominance and inequality within trade networks	Helps question Indonesia's position: a central actor or a marginal one?	Focuses on global macro-level data; lacks country-specific or policy-level analysis

Source: Compiled by Author

The three clusters reviewed in this chapter demonstrate a shift in the literature on food diplomacy in the Global South from normative narratives to more critical approaches. Recent studies no longer focus solely on ideals of solidarity, but increasingly explore how strategic interests, power imbalances, and domestic symbolism shape the practice of food diplomacy. While countries such as Brazil, China, and India have received considerable attention, there remains a gap in the literature concerning Indonesia's specific role. As a developing country and emerging donor, Indonesia's use of rice surplus as a tool of regional diplomacy has yet to be examined in depth. This study seeks to fill that gap through a thematic synthesis and critical review of the existing scholarship.

SYNTHESIS AND CRITICAL DISCUSSION

The existing literature offers a range of perspectives on the evolution of food diplomacy and SSC. However, these discussions often remain fragmented, where some focus primarily on SSC's normative ideals, while others examine national strategies in particular. A critical synthesis is therefore needed to bridge these approaches and assess how Indonesia's rice diplomacy reflects broader shifts in development cooperation, power relations, and regional food governance. This section explores key tensions and contradictions in the literature, particularly how solidarity is framed, how food surplus is deployed diplomatically, and how SSC must be rethought in light of changing geopolitical dynamics.

Framing the Food Diplomacy

Food insecurity is no longer a temporary emergency limited to disaster areas, but has become a structural crisis. As noted in the *2025 Global Report on Food Crises* (2025), hunger today is shaped by conflict, geopolitical tension, climate chaos, environmental degradation, and economic instability. In Asia, several countries have felt the burden of this crisis. Japan, a resource-poor nation with limited agricultural land and frequent natural disasters, struggles to meet its domestic food demand, leading to a sharp increase in rice prices in 2025 (Wei & Zhou, 2025). In the same year, a major rice producer, the Philippines declared a food security emergency as domestic rice prices soared due to production shortfalls, extreme weather, and rising costs (Donnellon-May, 2025).

These pressures were further intensified by protectionist measures from major rice-exporting countries. According to WTO trade data, the top ten global exporters of rice in 2023 include India, Thailand, Vietnam, Pakistan, China, the United States, Myanmar, Cambodia, Italy, and Uruguay, and (Figure. 1). Among them, India dominates the market, accounting for more than 40 percent of global rice exports. But, through its Ministry of Consumer Affairs, the Indian government announced a ban on the export of non-basmati white rice, citing the need to stabilize domestic prices and ensure sufficient internal supply (Dash, 2023).

India's rice export ban could ripple across global rice markets, with Asian and African consumers set to bear the biggest brunt. Malaysia faced acute concerns over supply shocks as Malaysia's minister for plantation and commodities, Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani, expressed a desire for "friendly ties" with India and proposed an arrangement to secure rice supplies

(Economic Times, 2024). Singapore is likely to be affected as well, with the report showing that India makes up around 30 per cent of the state's rice imports (Lee, 2023) These developments exposed the fragility of global rice trade and highlighted a broader shift: surplus-producing countries are increasingly prioritizing domestic food sovereignty over global market stability. This pattern reflects the rise of food nationalism, where national interests take precedence amid crisis-era governance.

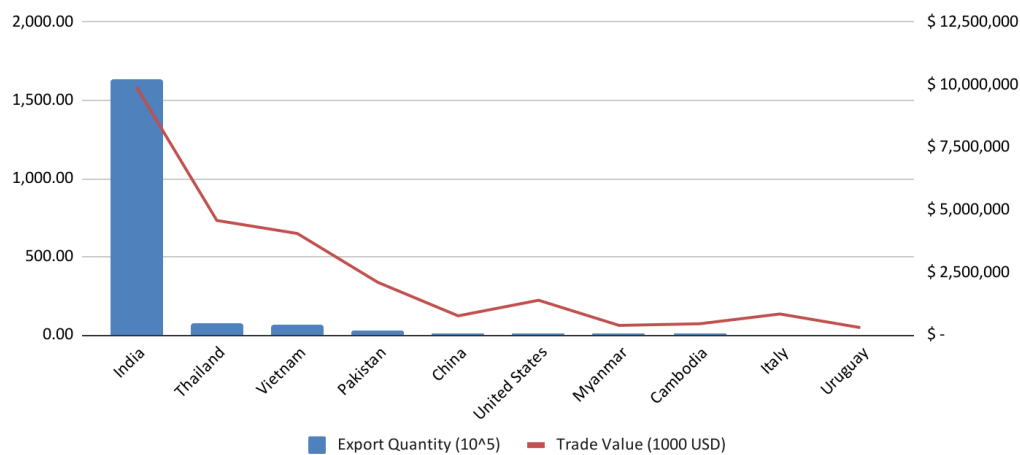


Figure 1. Major Rice Exporter Countries 2023

Source: World Trade Organization (2025)

In sum, the global rice crisis has revealed how staple commodities are increasingly entangled in the politics of scarcity, nationalism, and diplomacy. Within this shifting landscape, food (particularly rice) has emerged as both a symbol of solidarity and a strategic asset in international relations. The framing of food diplomacy is no longer confined to humanitarian narratives; instead, it reflects a complex negotiation between domestic imperatives and foreign policy aspirations. This tension is especially significant in the practices of emerging Global South donors, who, while invoking the rhetoric of South–South solidarity, also engage in calculated statecraft. As the next section will demonstrate, Indonesia's rice diplomacy exemplifies these dynamics, where positioning itself as a humanitarian actor while simultaneously advancing national interest and regional leadership.

Indonesia's Rice Diplomacy: From Symbol to Soft Power

Indonesia officially declared rice self-sufficiency in 2023, a status that has been sustained through mid-2025. By April 2025, the Ministry of Agriculture reported that national milled rice production had reached an estimated 34.6 million tonnes (Kementerian Pertanian, 2025). Those numbers make Indonesia the highest output in Southeast Asia and surpassing regional leaders such as Vietnam and Thailand (Figure 1) (Kementerian Pertanian, 2025). Minister of Agriculture Andi Amran Sulaiman attributed this achievement to key national policies, stating this is the result of Former President Jokowi's program continuation and President Prabowo's full support for production acceleration (Rizky, 2025). Amid climate disruptions and export restrictions by major producers like India, Indonesia's surplus positioned the country as an outlier in the regional food landscape and transformed it from a net importer into a potential supplier.

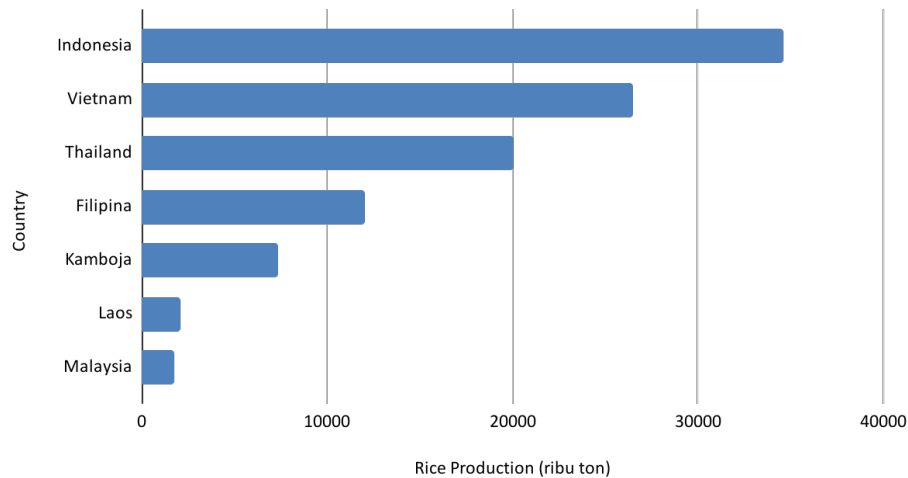


Figure 2. Rice Production of ASEAN Countries

Source: (Kementerian Pertanian, 2025)

Building on the image of self-sufficiency, Indonesia began to attract regional attention through diplomatic engagements. In early 2025, countries such as Malaysia and Timor-Leste expressed formal interest in Indonesian rice. Minister of Agriculture Andi Amran Sulaiman stated that Malaysia is interested in importing rice from Indonesia, following his meeting with Malaysia's Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu, at the Ministry of Agriculture office in Jakarta on April 22 (Zuhdi, 2025). Meanwhile, Timor-Leste requested Indonesia's technical assistance in managing rice fields, signaling an interest not only in commodity access but also in knowledge transfer.

However, despite growing interest from neighboring countries, Minister of Agriculture Andi Amran Sulaiman emphasized the need to prioritize domestic food security. Minister Amran Sulaiman emphasized the need for caution in responding to rice export requests. He noted that food is a matter of sovereignty and should not be released without careful consideration (Harianto, 2025). This cautious approach underscores the tension between national obligation and regional aspiration particularly when food becomes both a strategic asset and a political symbol.

Yet not long after Minister Amran's cautious remarks, President Prabowo Subianto adopted a more assertive diplomatic stance. During the National Coordination Meeting on Food Resilience in May 2025, he declared Indonesia's intention to send rice to Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste as a form of humanitarian support (Anggela, 2025). He framed this initiative as a demonstration of regional solidarity, emphasizing Indonesia's willingness to assist friendly nations facing shortages and reinforcing the country's growing role on the international stage (Ibid).

This presidential signal was reinforced by Minister of Trade Zulkifli Hasan, who confirmed Indonesia's capacity to assist neighboring countries as long as the national stock remained sufficient (Estherina, 2025). In a statement delivered on 8 May 2025, he emphasized that food diplomacy serves not only as humanitarian support but also as a means to assert Indonesia's leadership in the region (Nugraheny & Djumena, 2025). These developments marked a clear transformation in Indonesia's rice surplus strategy to outward projection, where rice became both a tool of diplomacy and a symbol of regional influence.

However, this narrative of strength and generosity often masks underlying vulnerabilities. What appears externally as humanitarian assistance may internally function as political symbolism that used to maintain domestic legitimacy and project resilience. As noted by Kusumawardani, Nugroho, and Wibowo (2021), Indonesia's rice surplus is not necessarily the result of sustainable agricultural productivity, but rather short-term political decisions and fluctuating policy cycles. Thus, Indonesia's rice diplomacy reflects a strategic balancing act: it positions surplus rice as both a soft power instrument abroad and a symbolic asset at home, even as structural weaknesses in the food system persist beneath the surface.

Indonesia's use of rice surplus as a diplomatic instrument places it within the evolving landscape of South–South Cooperation (SSC) where solidarity narratives increasingly overlap with national interest. As Mawdsley (2021) notes, SSC's shift into its third phase has seen solidarity repurposed as strategic language, blurring the boundaries between humanitarian and ambition. These actions, often detached from ASEAN's collective mechanisms, suggest that Indonesia's rice diplomacy is more symbolic than integrative, aimed at projecting soft power rather than fostering long-term regional cooperation.

In this context, Indonesia's rice diplomacy functions not only as material assistance but as a carefully crafted discourse of leadership. Through government statements and media framing, rice surplus becomes a symbol of generosity and capability. However, beneath this narrative lies a more complex reality. Zhang and Zhou (2024) argue that Indonesia's approach closely mirrors that of other rising powers, where food exports serve dual functions as addressing regional needs while reinforcing geopolitical standing. These strategies risk reproducing inequalities among developing nations, prompting calls for more critical reflection on whether Indonesia's foreign food policy still aligns with the foundational ideals of SSC, or if it is drifting toward a model shaped primarily by soft power calculations and domestic political goals.

The Literature Gaps: Rethinking Food Diplomacy in the Global South

As developing countries like Indonesia begin to position themselves as an emerging food donor, the politics behind surplus strategies deserve a critical examination. On one hand, such strategies can be seen as meaningful contributions to regional food security. On the other, they may function as tools for nation branding, market expansion, or subtle instruments of foreign policy influence. As Carmody in Ouma (2012) notes, new powers often operate through existing institutions without advancing a strong ideological message—frequently reinforcing, rather than challenging, established power structures. Much of the existing literature tends to accept official narratives of solidarity and humanitarianism at face value. However, from a postcolonial and discourse-analytic perspective, it is essential to interrogate how food surplus is deployed to construct international legitimacy and assert regional influence. This gap highlights the need for methodological approaches grounded in postcolonial critique and discourse analysis to unpack the strategic narratives embedded in surplus-based diplomacy, especially as performed by emerging powers like Indonesia.

Building on this critique, food diplomacy in the Global South should be understood not merely as a reflection of production capacity, but as a projection of political positioning, moral legitimacy, and aspirations for regional leadership. Yet, academic literature that critically examines these dynamics among Southern states remains limited, often staying within descriptive accounts that overlook the political and discursive forces at play. Emerging critiques of solidarity rhetoric expose a growing disconnect between the ideals of South–South Cooperation and the national interests shaping state behavior. In practice, SSC has evolved into a more pragmatic model, where geopolitical strategy and domestic priorities increasingly influence cooperation. The language of solidarity continues to be invoked, but frequently functions to reframe interest-driven actions as “moral assistance” or “global responsibility.”

The evolving nature of food diplomacy in the Global South, especially among emerging donors like Indonesia, calls for a reexamination of how cooperation is framed and practiced. While the principles of SSC emphasize equality, mutual benefit, and non-conditionality, many scholars have questioned the extent to which these ideals are consistently upheld. Wei and Zhou (2025), for instance, argue that food trade among Southern countries often reproduces long-standing hierarchies and economic dependencies, thereby undermining the spirit of solidarity that SSC was designed to promote. Similarly, Mawdsley’s (2021) notion of “SSC 3.0” exposes how emerging donors increasingly deploy the rhetoric of solidarity while advancing strategic, state-centric agendas. This gap between rhetoric and reality underscores the need for more critical, discourse-aware approaches to analyzing food diplomacy in the Global South.

To further clarify the analytical contribution of this study, the Table 2 synthesizes key academic works reviewed in this paper by mapping their thematic focus, main arguments, and the gaps they leave unaddressed. This visual summary highlights how much of the existing literature tends to emphasize either normative commitments to South–South solidarity or descriptive accounts of state-led food diplomacy, while critical engagement with the power-laden narratives and strategic uses of surplus remains limited. By identifying where current discussions fall short, the table provides a conceptual bridge to the methodological and theoretical repositioning proposed in this study.

Rethinking food cooperation requires more than aligning with the rhetoric of SSC principles. It calls for mechanisms that prioritize recipient needs, foster long-term resilience, and

move beyond symbolic state-to-state gestures. With its growing influence and rice surplus capacity, Indonesia is well positioned to lead this shift. However, meaningful leadership must be rooted not in visibility alone, but in inclusive and redistributive practices that address the structural drivers of food insecurity and empower communities across the region. Crucially, food diplomacy must be understood not as a neutral act, but as a space where power, narratives, and legitimacy are continuously negotiated.

Table 2. Research Gap

N o.	Literature	Thematic Area	Main Argument	Identified Gap
1	Warner (2015), Zhang and Zhou (2024)	Food Diplomacy in the Global South	In the Global South, food diplomacy has gained new strategic meaning as emerging countries work to strengthen their role in the international order.	Studies on India emphasize symbolic gestures; studies on Brazil highlight corporate and political agendas. Do not address the balance of power and reciprocity in South–South relations
2	Mawdsley (2021), Ojong dan Ndlovu (2013), Achcar (2023) and Wei dan Zhou (2025)	Critics of South–South Solidarity Discourse	While SSC upholds the rhetoric of equality, its implementation often reproduces hierarchical relations in more subtle forms.	Offers theoretical critiques of SSC rhetoric and power asymmetries not directly applied to food or agricultural diplomacy
3	Kusumawardani, et al. (2021), Saa (2024), dan Sundram (2023)	Indonesia’s Rice Surplus Strategy	Indonesia’s rice diplomacy operates at the intersection of political signaling, soft power, and regional limitations.	Does not unpack the geopolitical and domestic motives, or the risk of aid politicization and fails to assess whether Indonesia’s surplus is structurally and politically sustainable

Source: Compiled by Author

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This critical literature review has revealed how Indonesia’s rice surplus diplomacy reflects the shifting dynamics of food cooperation within the Global South. While South–South Cooperation (SSC) promotes ideals of equality, mutual benefit, and solidarity, the literature shows that in practice, these principles are often diluted by strategic interests and nationalistic

agendas. Through a synthesis of key scholarly works, this study identified a recurring dissonance between rhetorical commitments to humanitarianism and the pragmatic use of food surplus as a tool for soft power projection. Indonesia's case illustrates how surplus diplomacy can simultaneously function as a symbol of national progress, an instrument of geopolitical repositioning, and a site of power negotiation, thereby raising important questions about the authenticity and equity of SSC in contemporary global politics.

In light of these findings, future research and policy approaches to food diplomacy in the Global South should adopt a more critical lens: one that interrogates the underlying power relations, discursive framings, and strategic calculations embedded in surplus-based cooperation. Indonesia, in particular, should not only align its food diplomacy with inclusive regional mechanisms but also ensure transparency, recipient agency, and long-term sustainability. Scholars are encouraged to move beyond descriptive accounts and further develop analytical frameworks that capture the contradictions between solidarity narratives and geopolitical ambitions. A rethinking of SSC is essential—not to abandon its ideals, but to hold its practices accountable to them.

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