

FOOD SECURITY POLITICS AND ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY: KUNINGAN REGENCY'S SWEET POTATO PARADIPLOMACY IN THE GLOBAL NETWORK

Diah Apriliani, Tom Finaldin and Salsabila Aulia Emelda

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences

Al-Ghifari University, Bandung, Indonesia

E-mail: diahapril@unfari.ac.id

ABSTRACT. This study analyzes the role of economic diplomacy in strengthening the global sweet potato network in Kuningan Regency from a political economy perspective. As the largest sweet potato producer in West Java with production of 108,496 tons in 2023, Kuningan has enormous potential that has not been optimally utilized for global network development. The research objectives are to analyze political dynamics in economic diplomacy implementation, identify political actors' role in facilitating international market access, and formulate strategies for strengthening global networks. This research uses a qualitative approach with case study design, where data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with three key informants: Head of Kuningan Regency Food Security and Agriculture Agency, Head of Cilimus Technical Implementation Unit, and Head of Cilimus Agricultural Extension Center, supplemented by document analysis of regional planning documents, production statistics, and policy materials. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to economic diplomacy mechanisms and global network development. The study reveals weak global networks between Kuningan sweet potato producers and international markets, with only 2-3% of production absorbed by export markets despite significant price differentials (local market IDR 3,500-4,000/kg versus export IDR 15,000-20,000/kg). Indonesia has adequate economic diplomacy infrastructure with 19 Indonesian Trade Promotion Centers (ITPCs) and 24 trade attachés, but utilization for alternative food commodities remains limited with budget allocation below 5%. The findings demonstrate that successful sweet potato economic diplomacy requires a multi-level governance approach integrating regional political commitment, national policy coordination, and global strategic positioning. This study contributes to regional economic diplomacy theory development and provides strategic recommendations for local governments to leverage existing diplomatic infrastructure, strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration, and position sweet potatoes as strategic export commodities within Indonesia's broader agricultural diplomacy framework.

Keywords: economic diplomacy; global networks; sweet potatoes; food diversification; food security

ABSTRAK. Penelitian ini menganalisis peran diplomasi ekonomi dalam memperkuat jaringan ubi jalar global di Kabupaten Kuningan dari perspektif ekonomi politik. Sebagai produsen ubi jalar terbesar di Jawa Barat dengan produksi 108.496 ton pada tahun 2023, Kuningan memiliki potensi yang sangat besar namun belum dimanfaatkan secara optimal untuk pengembangan jaringan global. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menganalisis dinamika politik dalam implementasi diplomasi ekonomi, mengidentifikasi peran aktor politik dalam memfasilitasi akses pasar internasional, dan merumuskan strategi penguatan jaringan global. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, di mana pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan tiga informan kunci: Kepala Dinas Ketahanan Pangan dan Pertanian Kabupaten Kuningan, Kepala Unit Pelaksana Teknis Cilimus, dan Kepala Balai Penyuluhan Pertanian Cilimus, dilengkapi dengan analisis dokumen perencanaan daerah, statistik produksi, dan materi kebijakan. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan tema terkait mekanisme diplomasi ekonomi dan pengembangan jaringan global. Studi ini mengungkapkan lemahnya jaringan global antara produsen ubi jalar Kuningan dengan pasar internasional, di mana hanya 2-3% produksi terserap oleh pasar ekspor meskipun terdapat perbedaan harga yang signifikan (pasar lokal IDR 3.500-4.000/kg versus ekspor IDR 15.000-20.000/kg). Indonesia memiliki infrastruktur diplomasi ekonomi yang memadai dengan 19 Indonesian Trade Promotion Centers (ITPC) dan 24 atase perdagangan, namun pemanfaatan untuk komoditas pangan alternatif masih terbatas dengan alokasi anggaran di bawah 5%. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa diplomasi ekonomi ubi jalar yang sukses memerlukan pendekatan tata kelola multi-level yang mengintegrasikan komitmen politik daerah, koordinasi kebijakan nasional, dan positioning strategis global. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan teori diplomasi ekonomi daerah dan memberikan rekomendasi strategis bagi pemerintah daerah untuk memanfaatkan infrastruktur diplomatik yang ada, memperkuat kolaborasi multi-pemangku kepentingan, dan memposisikan ubi jalar sebagai komoditas ekspor strategis dalam kerangka diplomasi pertanian Indonesia yang lebih luas.

Kata Kunci: diplomasi ekonomi; jaringan global; ubi jalar; diversifikasi pangan; ketahanan pangan

INTRODUCTION

Food security has become a strategic issue in global politics, involving not only the technical dimensions of production and distribution but also

aspects of political legitimacy and governance stability (Sen, 2014). In the Indonesian context, diversification of alternative foods has become an increasingly urgent political agenda in line with the challenges of climate change and dependence on

staple food commodities. Economic diplomacy, as a non-traditional foreign policy instrument, plays a crucial role in building global networks for local agricultural commodities with strategic potential (Keohane & Nye, 2011). Sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) is one alternative food commodity that has high strategic value in the context of national food security. This plant contains complex carbohydrates, beta-carotene, fiber, and high levels of vitamins A and C, making it a potential substitute for staple foods (Bovell-Benjamin, 2007). The adaptability of sweet potatoes to various climate and soil conditions makes it a suitable commodity for development in the era of global climate change.

Kuningan Regency, West Java, holds a strategic position as the largest sweet potato production center in the province. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that in 2023, sweet potato production in Kuningan Regency reached 108,496 tons from an area of 18,903 hectares, an increase from 100,009 tons the previous year (BPS Kuningan Regency, 2024). This figure places Kuningan as the largest contributor to sweet potato production in West Java, accounting for approximately 15% of total national production.

Despite its significant production potential, the utilization of Kuningan sweet potatoes remains limited to the domestic market, with low added value. Data shows that more than 85% of Kuningan sweet potato production is still marketed fresh at an average price of IDR 3,500-4,000 per kilogram at the farm level (Wulandari & Nauliy, 2022). This contrasts with the potential of the international sweet potato market, which shows a trend of increasing demand, particularly in East Asian and European countries, which are increasingly aware of the nutritional value and health benefits of sweet potatoes. From an economic diplomacy perspective, Indonesia already has an institutional infrastructure through the Indonesian Trade Promotion Center (ITPC) network in 19 countries and the presence of trade attachés in various embassies (Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). However, the utilization of this economic diplomacy infrastructure to promote alternative food commodities such as sweet potatoes remains very limited. The majority of Indonesia's economic diplomacy focuses on traditional commodities such as palm oil, rubber, and manufactured industrial products.

Research on Indonesian economic diplomacy generally focuses on macro-policy levels and key strategic commodities (Sabaruddin, 2016). Apriliani et al.'s (2022) study on Indonesia's commercial diplomacy with Japan through the ITPC (Indonesian

Trade and Investment Coordinating Board) demonstrates the importance of economic diplomacy in developing MSMEs, but has not specifically examined alternative food commodities. Similarly, studies on paradiplomacy, or regional diplomacy in Indonesia, are still limited to the formal aspects of sister city cooperation without analyzing the substantive economic dimensions (Mukti, 2013). Globally, there are several successful examples of economic diplomacy for agricultural commodities. Peru successfully increased quinoa exports through intensive economic diplomacy, from USD 3 million in 2005 to USD 196 million in 2014 (Trade Map, 2015). Thailand also successfully built a global network for premium rice through a combination of economic diplomacy and national branding, reaching an export value of USD 9.8 billion in 2019 (Thai Rice Exporters Association, 2020).

However, Indonesia has yet to maximize the potential of economic diplomacy for alternative food commodities. Export data shows that the contribution of Indonesian processed food products to total exports is still relatively small, at around 8.2%, or USD 15.4 billion, of total exports of USD 188.7 billion in 2023 (BPS, 2024). This figure is significantly lower than that of neighboring countries such as Thailand (22.3%) and Vietnam (18.7%), which have successfully integrated their agricultural products into global networks through effective economic diplomacy.

Based on the analysis of existing conditions, this study identifies three main issues requiring in-depth study. First, there is a gap between Kuningan's high sweet potato production potential and its limited utilization within global networks. Second, Indonesia's economic diplomacy infrastructure has not been optimized to build a global network for alternative food commodities such as sweet potatoes. Third, there is no comprehensive model for integrating regional economic diplomacy with a global network development strategy for local commodities.

In a theoretical context, studies on economic diplomacy for agricultural commodities from a political economy perspective are still limited, particularly those examining the subnational level. Most economic diplomacy research focuses on the national level and traditional strategic commodities (Van Bergeijk et al., 2011). Meanwhile, studies on global agricultural commodity networks generally use a purely economic approach without integrating the political and governance dimensions that influence their effectiveness. This study aims to analyze the role of economic diplomacy in strengthening the global

network of sweet potatoes in Kuningan Regency as an alternative food commodity. Specifically, this study will:

1. Analyzing the role of economic diplomacy in building and strengthening the global sweet potato network in Kuningan Regency in the context of national food security.
2. Formulate strategies that can be implemented to increase the exposure of Kuningan sweet potatoes in the international market through economic diplomacy, both at the regional and national levels.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the development of economic diplomacy literature, focusing on alternative agricultural commodities and the role of subnational paradiplomacy. The findings are expected to enrich academic discussions on the integration of local interests and global strategies in food security politics. Practically, the research findings provide policy recommendations for regional and national governments in optimizing economic diplomacy instruments to expand international market access for superior local commodities.

The significance of this research also lies in its contribution to the national food security political agenda through food source diversification. By strengthening the global sweet potato network, Indonesia has the potential to reduce dependence on staple food imports while increasing foreign exchange earnings through exports of high-value-added products. In the long term, the formulated strategy can be replicated for other regions' leading commodities, thereby contributing to strengthening Indonesia's political-economic competitiveness in the global market.

Economic diplomacy as a concept in international political science has undergone significant evolution, defined by Keohane and Nye (2011) as the use of economic instruments to achieve foreign policy goals, including trade, investment, and technological cooperation. Rana (2007) expanded this concept by emphasizing the role of non-state actors in the diplomatic process, where modern economic diplomacy involves collaboration between government, private sector, and civil society in building global economic networks. This perspective is highly relevant to the Indonesian context in the decentralization era, where regional governments and local economic actors have increasingly important roles in economic diplomacy.

Okano-Heijmans (2011) introduced the concept of "economic diplomacy 2.0" which emphasizes the importance of economic diplomacy at the subnational

level, where local governments can become independent actors in economic diplomacy. This aligns with the concept of paradiplomacy defined by Duchacek (1986) as the direct involvement of subnational governments in international relations through contacts with foreign entities. Kuznetsov (2015) argued that paradiplomacy developed as a response to the central government's limitations in accommodating specific regional interests in the globalization era.

In the context of global networks, Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark (2016) define global value chains (GVCs) as the series of activities required to bring a product from conception to final consumption. Ponte and Sturgeon (2014) emphasize the importance of upgrading and value addition to improve the position of developing countries in global value chains, encompassing process upgrading, product upgrading, functional upgrading, and chain upgrading. Neilson et al. (2018) demonstrate that integration into agrifood GVCs provides significant opportunities for local farmers, but also identify various barriers such as international quality standards, certification, and access to market information.

Successful case studies of agricultural commodity economic diplomacy provide valuable lessons. Peruvian quinoa successfully increased exports from US\$3 million (2005) to US\$196 million (2014) through a combination of government promotion, national branding, and diaspora networking (Winkel et al., 2012). Thailand demonstrated success through the "Thai Hom Mali Rice" program that integrated quality certification, geographic indication, and diplomatic promotion (Suwanmaneepong et al., 2020). This theoretical framework provides the foundation for analyzing the dynamics of Kuningan sweet potato economic diplomacy and strategies for strengthening its global networks.

Therefore, this study formulates the following research questions:

1. What is the role of economic diplomacy in strengthening the global network of sweet potatoes in Kuningan Regency as an alternative food?
2. What strategies need to be implemented to increase sweet potato exposure in international markets through economic diplomacy?

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the dynamics of economic diplomacy in building a global sweet potato network in Kuningan Regency. The qualitative

approach was chosen because of its ability to deeply explore the perceptions, experiences, and strategies used by various stakeholders in the implementation of economic diplomacy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The selection of Kuningan Regency as the research locus is based on its position as the largest sweet potato producer in West Java with a production of 108,496 tons in 2023, making it a representative case for analyzing the potential for economic diplomacy of local agricultural commodities.

This study integrates three main theoretical frameworks: paradiplomacy theory (Duchacek, 1986) to understand the capacity of subnational governments in diplomatic activities, the concept of global value chains (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2016) to analyze the position of sweet potatoes in global networks, and the economic diplomacy framework (Rana, 2007) to identify instruments and strategies that can be optimized in building global networks.

Research data was collected through two main methods. First, in-depth interviews with three key informants purposively selected based on their strategic positions within the agricultural and food security ecosystem in Kuningan Regency: the Head of the Kuningan Regency Food Security and Agriculture Agency (DKPP), the Head of the Cilimus Regency Technical Implementation Unit of the Food Security and Agriculture Agency, and the Head of the Cilimus Kuningan Agricultural Extension Center (BPP). These informants were selected based on their central roles in policy, implementation, and technical guidance for sweet potato development in the region, which is a major production center.

Research data was collected through two main qualitative methods:

First, in-depth interviews were conducted with three key informants purposively selected based on their strategic positions within the agricultural and food security ecosystem in Kuningan Regency: the Head of the Kuningan Regency Food Security and Agriculture Agency (DKPP), the Head of the Cilimus Regency Technical Implementation Unit of the Food Security and Agriculture Agency, and the Head of the Cilimus Kuningan Agricultural Extension Center (BPP). These informants were selected based on their central roles in policy, implementation, and technical guidance for sweet potato development in the region.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide that covered perceptions of sweet potato potential in the global market, experiences and challenges in commodity development, understanding economic diplomacy opportunities, identifying existing networks, and recommending

strategies for strengthening sweet potato's position within the context of food security and alternative food diversification.

Second, document analysis was conducted of regional planning documents, production and trade statistics reports, international cooperation documents, promotional materials for superior products, national economic diplomacy reports, and academic publications related to sweet potatoes to triangulate and enrich the interview data.

Data analysis used a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is appropriate for qualitative research, carried out in six stages:

1. Data familiarization through repeated reading of all interview transcripts and documents
2. Initial code generation using an inductive-deductive approach to identify meaningful patterns in the data
3. Theme search through grouping codes that have similar patterns and conceptual relationships
4. Theme review to ensure coherence and suitability with the qualitative dataset
5. Definition and naming of representative themes that capture the essence of stakeholder experiences
6. Production of an analytical report that integrates themes with supporting quotations from interviews and document analysis

The validity of the qualitative study was strengthened through triangulation of data sources (interviews and documents), member checking with key informants to verify interpretations, and peer debriefing with fellow researchers who have expertise in political economy and international relations.

Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

Data validity was ensured through four criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) specifically for qualitative research:

Credibility through triangulation of sources (interviews and documents) and methods, adequate researcher involvement in the field, and verification of interpretations with informants through member checking. Transferability through detailed descriptions of research context and systematic documentation of the research process to enable readers to assess applicability. Dependability through consistent application of interview protocols and maintenance of audit trail documentation. Confirmability through researcher reflexivity, acknowledgment of potential biases, and ensuring adequate data support of interpretations. This qualitative study adhered to

ethical research principles, including informed consent from all interview participants, assurance of confidentiality, transparency of research objectives, and a commitment to do no harm to informants and to share results with the research community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Potential of Kuningan Sweet Potato Economic Diplomacy in the Context of Global Networks

Based on in-depth interviews with three key informants and qualitative analysis of policy documents, this study identifies significant untapped potential for sweet potato economic diplomacy in Kuningan Regency. The Head of the Kuningan Regency DKPP Office emphasized that sweet potato production, which reached 108,496 tons in 2023, makes Kuningan the largest producer in West Java. However, its utilization for international market penetration remains very limited.

As one informant noted: *“We have enormous production potential, but our networks to international markets are still very weak. Most of our sweet potatoes are still sold locally without value addition.”* (Interview with Secretary of DKPP, 2025)

The qualitative analysis reveals that Indonesia’s overall sweet potato exports have fluctuated significantly, with export value reaching USD 2.8 million in 2023. This figure indicates substantial untapped potential, considering that Indonesia is one of the world’s largest sweet potato producers, with total national production reaching 2.4 million tons per year.

Table 1. Indonesian Sweet Potato Exports by Destination Country in 2023

No	Country of destination	Value (USD)	Percentage (%)	Market Characteristics
1	Japan	1,180,000	42.0	Premium market, processed foods
2	South Korea	784,000	28.0	Fresh and frozen products
3	Singapore	504,000	18.0	ASEAN regional distribution hub
4	Malaysia	336,000	12.0	Indonesian Community

Source: BPS, Indonesian Foreign Trade Statistics 2024

The geographic analysis in Table 1 shows a high concentration of exports in four main destination countries, with Japan as the largest market, absorbing nearly half of Indonesia’s total sweet potato exports. This dominance of East and Southeast Asian markets demonstrates the potential for developing regional networks that can be optimized through more intensive economic diplomacy.

The Head of the Cilimus Tax Office explained that only about 2-3% of Kuningan’s total sweet potato production is used for export, with the remainder being marketed locally. This contrasts with the potential for significant value-added increases through effective economic diplomacy.

Table 2. Comparison of Prices and Utilization of Kuningan Sweet Potatoes in 2023

Category	Volume (%)	Price (Rp/kg)	Value-added	Characteristics
Local Market	85	3,500-4,000	Low	Fresh form, without processing
National Market	12	6,000-8,000	Currently	Inter-island distribution
Export Market	3	15,000-20,000	Tall	International standards
Maximum Potential	100	15,000-20,000	Optimal	With economic diplomacy

Source: Results of an interview with the Head of the Cilimus Tax Office UPT, 2024

The data in Table 2 shows a significant value gap between domestic utilization and international potential. The price gap between local and export markets is four to five times greater, demonstrating the potential for improving farmer welfare through optimizing global networks and effective economic diplomacy.

Global Network Infrastructure and Economic Diplomacy Capacity

An analysis of Indonesia’s economic diplomacy infrastructure indicates a relatively adequate global network, but it has not yet been optimized for alternative food commodities such as sweet potatoes. Indonesia has an economic diplomacy infrastructure strategically located in various potential countries (Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024).

Table 3. Global Network of Indonesia’s Economic Diplomacy Infrastructure in 2024

Region	Number of ITPC	Country/Location	Number of Trade Attachés
Asia Pacific	6	Japan, South Korea, China, India, Australia, Singapore	8
Europe	5	Germany, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Netherlands	7
American	4	United States, Canada, Brazil, Mexico	5
Africa & Middle East	4	Nigeria, South Africa, Dubai, Egypt	4
Global Total	19	19 Countries	24

Source: Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia, Economic Diplomacy Performance Report 2024

The ITPC distribution in Table 2 demonstrates a strategic concentration in potential markets for sweet potatoes, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, which is the primary consumer of this product. However, data shows that promotional allocations for alternative food commodities within the ITPC program remain very limited, at less than 5% of the total trade promotion budget, while the majority of the focus remains on traditional commodities (Directorate General of National Export Development, 2024).

However, according to the Head of the Cilimus Kuningan BPP, coordination between local producers and the national economic diplomacy infrastructure remains very weak. There is no systematic mechanism connecting sweet potato farmers and businesses in Kuningan with ITPC programs or trade attachés. This situation prevents the potential of economic diplomacy from being fully realized, despite the availability of the global infrastructure.

Data from the Directorate General of National Export Development shows an imbalance in resource allocation in the national economic diplomacy program that needs to be reoriented to accommodate alternative food commodities (Directorate General of National Export Development, 2024).

The imbalance in allocations in Table 4 demonstrates the need for a more inclusive reorientation of economic diplomacy policies toward alternative food commodities. The very limited allocation for alternative foods is disproportionate to their potential contribution to national food security and export diversification.

Political Dynamics in the Implementation of Regional Economic Diplomacy

The research identified political complexities in the implementation of economic diplomacy at the subnational level, involving multiple stakeholders with diverse interests. The Head of the Kuningan Regency DKPP Office acknowledged the fragmentation of authority between the central and regional governments in international trade affairs,

creating ambiguity in strategic decision-making. From a regional policy perspective, Kuningan Regency does not yet have a specific policy document that integrates sweet potato development with economic diplomacy strategies. The Kuningan Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) for 2019-2024 lists sweet potatoes as a leading commodity, but its development strategy remains limited to increasing productivity and quality without an explicit economic diplomacy dimension.

A more in-depth analysis shows that the main obstacle lies in the limited political capacity of local governments to understand and implement economic diplomacy instruments. Most local officials still maintain a domestic perspective on commodity development, ignoring the global dimensions and complex international networks. This situation is exacerbated by the relatively rapid turnover of officials, often disrupting the continuity of commodity development programs.

The Head of the Cilimus Tax Office (KPP) emphasized the importance of horizontal coordination between various regional government agencies (OPD) in developing sweet potato economic diplomacy. Currently, coordination remains fragmented between the Food Security and Agriculture Office (focused on production), the Trade and Industry Office (focused on marketing), the Regional Secretariat's Economic Division (focused on policy), and the Communication and Informatics Office (focused on promotion). This fragmentation results in inefficient resource utilization and a lack of synergy in program duplication.

Structural Challenges and Strategic Opportunities

Identification of structural challenges in developing sweet potato economic diplomacy in Kuningan reveals three main categories: institutional, technical, and market access. Institutional challenges include limited human resource capacity to understand export procedures, international regulations, and global quality standards. Most sweet potato farmers and businesses remain focused on the

Table 4. Indonesia's Trade Promotion Budget Allocation by Commodity in 2024

Commodity Category	Allocation (%)	Value (Billion Rp)	Focus Program	ITPC Priorities
Palm oil	35	87.5	Traditional exports	Tall
Rubber & Industry	20	50.0	Manufacturing	Tall
Industrial Products	20	50.0	Value-added	Tall
Coal & Minerals	15	37.5	Extractive	Currently
Fishery Products	5	12.5	staple food	Low
Alternative Food	<5	<12.5	Diversification	Very Low
Total	100	250.0	All sectors	Various

Source: Directorate General of National Export Development, 2024 Promotion Budget Allocation Report

domestic market without adequate understanding of international market requirements.

Technical challenges relate to product standardization, certification, and post-harvest technology that does not yet meet export standards. The Head of the Cilimus Food and BPP explained that the majority of Kuningan sweet potatoes are still marketed fresh without further processing, even though the international market demands product diversification, such as dried sweet potatoes, sweet potato flour, or processed products with high added value.

Market access challenges relate to limited market information, international business networks, and access to global distribution channels. The majority of sweet potato entrepreneurs in Kuningan lack networks with international importers or retailers, so market access remains largely limited to local or regional traders.

However, this research also identified strategic opportunities that can be optimized through effective economic diplomacy. First, global trends indicate increasing demand for superfoods and functional foods, in which sweet potatoes have a strong position due to their high beta-carotene and antioxidant content. Second, food diversification policies in various Asian countries provide opportunities for sweet potatoes as an alternative carbohydrate source. Third, the growth of the organic food and healthy lifestyle markets has created a niche market for premium sweet potatoes, which Kuningan's production can fulfill.

Global Network Optimization Strategy through Economic Diplomacy

Based on research findings, a strategy to optimize the Kuningan sweet potato global network can be developed through a multi-level governance approach that integrates local, national, and international actors. At the local level, production capacity and quality standardization are required through the formation of sweet potato clusters, the development of processing facilities, and product certification according to international standards.

The national level requires the integration of sweet potato commodities into ITPC and trade attaché programs, a dedicated budget allocation for alternative food promotion, and the development of bilateral trade agreements that include tariff facilities for sweet potato products. Coordination mechanisms between the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Agriculture, and local governments need to be strengthened to ensure synchronized policies and programs. The international level requires developing partnerships with target export countries,

participation in international food exhibitions, and building brand recognition for Indonesian sweet potato products. Country-specific strategies need to be developed considering the differing market characteristics of export destination countries.

Implementing this strategy requires political commitment from various levels of government and sustained coordination between relevant stakeholders. Successful sweet potato economic diplomacy will not only improve the welfare of Kuningan farmers but also contribute to national food diversification and strengthen Indonesia's long-term food security.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the complex dynamics of economic diplomacy in building a global sweet potato network in Kuningan Regency, reflecting the structural challenges of paradiplomacy in Indonesia. Although Kuningan has a comparative advantage as the largest sweet potato producer in West Java, with an annual production of 108,496 tons, the utilization of this potential for economic diplomacy remains very limited. Only 2-3% of production is absorbed by the export market, even though the price differential between the local market (Rp 3,500-4,000/kg) and exports (Rp 15,000-20,000/kg) indicates the potential for significant value-added increases.

An analysis of Indonesia's economic diplomacy infrastructure reveals a paradox between the availability of adequate global networks and the underutilization of alternative food commodities. Indonesia has 19 ITPCs and 24 trade attachés strategically located in potential sweet potato markets, primarily Japan (42% export share), South Korea (28%), Singapore (18%), and Malaysia (12%). However, the promotional budget allocation for alternative foods remains below 5% of the total economic diplomacy budget, indicating a policy bias toward traditional commodities.

From a governance perspective, this study identifies three levels of challenges in implementing subnational economic diplomacy. The local level faces limitations in human resource capacity, product standardization, and access to international market information. The national level is characterized by fragmented authority between ministries and disproportionate resource allocation for alternative food commodities. The global level reveals gaps in capitalizing on the trend in demand for superfoods and food diversification, which actually benefits sweet potato products.

The key finding of this research is that successful sweet potato economic diplomacy requires a multi-

level governance approach that integrates political will at the regional level, policy coordination at the national level, and strategic positioning at the global level. An effective economic diplomacy model must address institutional fragmentation through stronger coordination mechanisms between regional governments, technical ministries, and economic diplomacy infrastructure abroad.

The theoretical implications of this research contribute to the development of the concept of paradiplomacy in the context of developing countries by demonstrating that the capacity of subnational economic diplomacy is determined not only by the resources and political will of local governments, but also by vertical coordination with national policies and horizontal coordination with existing global networks. These findings enrich the academic discussion on multi-level governance in economic diplomacy, which has been dominated by studies of developed countries.

Practically, this study recommends three main strategies for optimizing Kuningan's sweet potato economic diplomacy. First, establish a sweet potato cluster integrated with international certification and standardization programs to enhance product competitiveness. Second, reorient the national economic diplomacy budget allocation, allocating a larger portion to alternative food commodities in the ITPC (Indonesian Food and Drug Authority) and trade attaché programs. Third, develop a systematic coordination mechanism between local governments and the national economic diplomacy infrastructure through digital platforms and regular consultations. This research's contribution to the Indonesian political economy literature lies in demonstrating that alternative food diversification is not merely a technical agricultural agenda but also a political instrument that can strengthen local government legitimacy and national food security. The success of local commodity economic diplomacy can serve as a replicable model for other regions in optimizing their comparative advantages through global networks.

REFERENCE

- Apriliani, D., et al. (2022). Indonesia's commercial diplomacy to Japan through ITPC. [Scientific article].
- Central Statistics Agency (BPS). (2024). Indonesian foreign trade statistics. Jakarta: BPS.
- Bovell-Benjamin, A.C. (2007). Sweet potato: A review of its past, present, and future role in human nutrition. *Advances in Food and Nutrition Research*, 52, 1–59. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1043-4526\(06\)52001-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1043-4526(06)52001-7)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Clapp, J. (2017). Food self-sufficiency: Making sense of it, and when it makes sense. *Food Policy*, 66, 88–96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2016.12.001>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Duchacek, I.D. (1986). *The territorial dimension of politics: Within, among, and across nations*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). (2021). *The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2021*. Rome: FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb4474en>
- Gereffi, G., & Fernandez-Stark, K. (2016). *Global value chain analysis: A primer* (2nd ed.). Durham, NC: Duke CGGC.
- Humphrey, J., & Schmitz, H. (2002). How does insertion in global value chains affect upgrading in industrial clusters? *Regional Studies*, 36(9), 1017–1027. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0034340022000022198>
- Keohane, R.O., & Nye, J.S. (2011). *Power and interdependence* (4th ed.). Boston: Longman.
- Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia. (2023). *Economic diplomacy performance report*. Jakarta: Ministry of Trade.
- Kuznetsov, A. (2015). *Theory and practice of paradiplomacy: Subnational governments in international affairs*. London: Routledge.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Low, J. W., Mwanga, R. O. M., Andrade, M., Carey, E., & Ball, A. M. (2017). Tackling vitamin A deficiency with biofortified sweet potato in sub-Saharan Africa. *Global Food Security*, 14, 23–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2017.01.004>
- McMichael, P. (2013). *Food regimes and agrarian questions*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

- Mukti, TA (2013). Paradiplomacy: International cooperation between local governments in Indonesia. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 17(1), 65–80.
- Neilson, J., Pritchard, B., & Yeung, H. W. C. (2018). Global value chains and global production networks in the changing international political economy. *Review of International Political Economy*, 25(1), 1–26.
- Okano-Heijmans, M. (2011). Conceptualizing economic diplomacy: The crossroads of international relations, economics, IPE and diplomatic studies. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 6(1–2), 7–36. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187119111X566742>
- Pingali, P. (2015). Agricultural policy and nutrition outcomes – Getting beyond the preoccupation with staple grains. *Food Security*, 7, 583–591. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-015-0461-x>
- Ponte, S., & Sturgeon, T. (2014). Explaining governance in global value chains: A modular theory-building effort. *Review of International Political Economy*, 21(1), 195–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2013.809596>
- Rahmat, T., & Apriliani, D. (2023). Model of Global HR Development and Green Economy Diplomacy: Strengthening Global Environmental Governance in Indonesia. *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*, 11 (11), e404–e404.
- Rahmawati, R., & Aryanti, T. (2020). West Java's paradiplomacy in the investment sector: Opportunities and challenges. *Journal of International Relations*, 8(2), 145–160.
- Rana, K.S. (2007). *Economic diplomacy: The experience of developing countries*. London: Routledge.
- Sabaruddin, M. (2016). Indonesia's economic diplomacy: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of International Relations*, 5(1), 13–28.
- Sen, A. (1981). *Poverty and famines: An essay on entitlement and deprivation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sen, A. (2014). The political economy of hunger. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 66(1), 1–29.
- Soldatos, P. (1990). An explanatory framework for the study of federated states as foreign-policy actors. In H. J. Michelmann & P. Soldatos (Eds.), *Federalism and international relations: The role of subnational units* (pp. 34–53). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Suwanmaneepong, S., et al. (2020). Strategies for enhancing Thai Hom Mali Rice's competitiveness in the global market. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 41(1), 79–85. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2018.05.008>
- Thai Rice Exporters Association. (2020). *Annual report 2019*. Bangkok: TREA.
- Trade Map. (2015). *International trade statistics: Peruvian quinoa exports*. Geneva: International Trade Centre.
- Van Bergeijk, PAG, Okano-Heijmans, M., & Melissen, J. (2011). *Economic diplomacy: Economic and political perspectives*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Winkel, T., Bertero, H.D., Bommel, P., Tizón, F., & Cortés, A. (2012). The quinoa boom in Peru: Farmers' livelihood strategies and innovation dynamics in Andean valleys. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 12(4), 1–25.
- Woolcock, S. (2012). *European Union economic diplomacy: The role of the EU in external economic relations*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Wulandari, P., & Naully, D. (2022). Analysis of the sweet potato value chain in Indonesia: Challenges and opportunities. *Indonesian Agribusiness Journal*, 10(2), 101–114.