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# Interpreting multilateral diplomacy in the Indonesian Parliament's debates on climate crisis and sustainability

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## ABSTRACT

Generally 'diplomacy' belongs to the tasks of the executive government, especially to the foreign affairs services. Nowadays, diplomacy includes everyone, including parliaments in a multilateral setting, especially when discussing global issues, such as climate change. This article discusses the parliamentary diplomacy practices of the Indonesian Parliament which are claimed to support multilateralism and foreign cooperation in international gatherings. The data is studied from the international events that this committee organized and Indonesian parliamentary meetings abroad in 2017–22, seen from the ideal parliamentary aspects of deliberation, representation, responsibility, and sovereignty. The data reveals that while the climate crisis is agreed to be more critical and awareness has been built among the members of parliament in this committee, the whole parliamentary members or the Indonesian Parliament as the institution does not fully acknowledge it yet. Legislation has not yet been enacted to tackle the climate crisis. Consequently, despite such sporadic efforts, the actions remain small, and inter-parliamentary diplomacy does not result in anything concrete. Multilateral diplomacy from parliament is still limited in this case.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

International politics have usually claimed to belong to the state government, including diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> For multilateralism or international collaboration, the task is usually orchestrated by the United Nations (henceforth, the UN) and here too diplomats from the countries' foreign affairs of the government's arms are the ones who are usually more active. The monopoly of government in international affairs changed due to the complexity of global tasks, such as terrorism, climate change, and internet governance; and the emergence of new actors, such as non-state agencies, civil societies, academics, individual celebrities, including parliaments.<sup>2</sup> A new phenomenon here lies in interparliamentary

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<sup>1</sup>P. W. Hare, *Making Diplomacy Work: Intelligent Innovation for the Modern World* (Thousand Oaks, California, 2015).

<sup>2</sup>S. Stavridis and D. Jančić, 'Introduction: The Rise of Parliamentary Diplomacy in International Politics', in S. Stavridis and D. Jančić (eds), *Parliamentary Diplomacy in European and Global Governance* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 1–15.

study and diplomacy, where parliamentary representatives and delegations are present in global summits and conferences, including at the UN and regional cooperation meetings. Parliaments are not only claiming their share to participate in discussing global issues, but they are also included as part of the government's delegations, notably from the countries whose government system is presidential (the parliamentary government system has government executive members elected from the parliamentary members).

Parliaments in countries with presidential systems, such as Indonesia, have found interparliamentary diplomacy a new field of activity, that the members can show not only their presence but also indirectly manifest their ambition to strengthen their powers notably at the international level. This trend has been shared in most Southeast Asian countries, as in meetings of ASEAN, the Association of South East Asian Nations, or the regional organization in Southeast Asia, where gatherings have also been set up for parliaments. Like Indonesia, for example, the Malaysian and Singaporean Parliaments have specific committees discussing sustainable development and related cases.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the global theme of sustainable development is an interesting policy-topic, around which the interparliamentary institutions have focused their activity. The topic is global and covers almost any aspect of development, including the environment so that parliament can elevate its status in discussing global issues. Yet, the topic is safe enough to manoeuvre, compared to, for example, issues of conflict and security.

The Indonesian Parliament, *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* (the House of People Representative), henceforth called the DPR, has been known to be a weak institution – it was notoriously known as a ‘rubber stamp’ to the president during the authoritarian regime of 1966-98, and after the reform period started in 1998 onwards, despite the constitutional amendment and parliamentary strengthening programme, the DPR continued to be an ineffective organization – due to the small number of enacted bills and laws annually.<sup>4</sup> These all are due to ineffective parliamentary procedure, retained from the authoritarian period, which weakens the role of plenary session (the decision is taken at the committee level and behind the scenes) and highlights the role of leadership (of committees, factions, and political party elites), meaning that the position among parliamentary members is not equal.<sup>5</sup>

In Indonesia, there is one committee in the DPR dedicated to its work on climate and sustainability issues, claiming to conduct parliamentary diplomacy and support multilateralism. The committee –Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation–, known in Indonesia as BKSAP or *Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen*, has discussed more sustainable issues in its agenda, especially when the DPR organized an event called the World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development/ WPFSD, since 2017. The committee introduced its work as conducting ‘parliamentary diplomacy’. In fact, the 2023 committee working visit report highlighted the idea of parliamentary diplomacy in order to seek

<sup>3</sup>R. Adiputri, ‘The Role of Parliament in Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of Southeast Asia in International Parliamentary Forums’, *Jurnal Perencanaan Pembangunan: The Indonesian Journal of Development Planning* 5, (2021), pp. 127-43, <https://doi.org/10.36574/jpp.v5i1.173>.

<sup>4</sup>R. Adiputri, ‘Political Culture in the Indonesian Parliament: Analysing Parliamentary Debates on the Regional Parliaments 1999-2009’, (University of Jyväskylä, PhD thesis, 2015). <https://jyx.jyu.fi/handle/123456789/46557>; R. Adiputri, ‘The Empowerment of Parliament in the Transition from an Authoritarian to a Democratic Regime: Indonesian Experiences and Problems’, *Parliaments, Estates & Representation* 38, (2018), pp. 49-62, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02606755.2018.1427319>

<sup>5</sup>Adiputri, ‘The Empowerment’; Adiputri, *Political Culture*.

input for Indonesian international politics and to update the development of international issues<sup>6</sup> although the purpose of seeking input was not clear.

In interpreting parliamentary diplomacy in the Indonesian Parliament's debates on the climate crisis and sustainability, this study used data from documents collected from the international events that this international cooperation committee attended or organized and reports online<sup>7</sup> between 2017-22 (around 80 documents). Proceedings or meeting notes from the Inter-Parliamentary Union meetings were also studied to crosscheck the statement in the papers that the committee acknowledged.

Dimensions of a four-ideal-types of parliament according to Ihalainen, Ilie and Palonen,<sup>8</sup> which emphasized parliamentary aspects of '*deliberation* (between opposed points of view in parliament), *representation* (of the citizens in a parliament), *responsibility* (of the government to the parliament) and *sovereignty* (of a parliament within a polity)' are used. The terminology of 'parliamentary dimension' and its importance was often stated during such international gatherings and in many of this committee's meetings, i.e. *BKSAP Day*. When words of 'parliamentary diplomacy' were utilized, they were usually combined with aspects of parliamentary dimensions although the context would probably be different from the ideal types stated theoretically above. The ideal aspects stated above – deliberation, representation, responsibility and sovereignty – will be explored but the practices from Indonesia as the data shows will be also contrasted. Data showed discussions of, for example, tackling the climate crisis, protecting migrant labour, green economy or peace and humanitarian diplomacy – topics that are discussed in the meetings – were used often, but it does not mean anything if those topics are not turned into any legislation or any binding policy for both parliament and government. This article argues that the parliamentary diplomacy practices of the Indonesian Parliament, which are claimed to support multilateralism and foreign cooperation, are only seen from *organizing* or (parliamentary members) *participating* at international gatherings. They stop there and do not proceed to something concrete, mainly legislation. Usually, the public could not follow the events either as the events were usually closed to the public and were restricted to parliamentary members. Based on the data, this argument is justified because, due to lacking the constitutional link between the committee and the agenda-setting of the DPR, a parliamentary committee dealing with urgent global issues is still disconnected from parliamentary decision-making.

In showing this, this article will be divided into three sections. The next section will discuss the work of the committee in more detail by describing the work inside the DPR, defining diplomacy, multilateralism, and their practices. After that, findings will be shown in the section of the 'debate' or discussion on the climate crisis and sustainability from the data collection, showing proceedings and lists of programmes. The reports were good and descriptive, but since they were *not* discussed thoroughly in legislative chambers, but in the format of seminar and conference-type discussion, the good ideas dissolved and were not sustainable, and far

<sup>6</sup>DPR RI. Laporan Kunjungan Kerja- Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen ke Sentul. BKSAP, 2023, <https://berkas.dpr.go.id/akd/dokumen/BKSAP-16-fb08328050e3335c99dec030380304b7.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup>The list is available here <https://ksap.dpr.go.id/dokumen/print/id/16>

<sup>8</sup>P. Ihalainen et al., 'Parliament as a Conceptual Nexus', in P. Ihalainen, C. Ilie, and K. Palonen (eds), *Parliament and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (New York, 2016), pp. 1-16.

from the topic. The concluding section ends by showing that most events that the international cooperation committee organized had shown that climate crisis awareness has been built, but only within this small committee. This committee has around 50 members, less than 10 per cent of the total DPR members, thus its events with important issues to convey – tackling the climate crisis and sustainability – remain small. Parliamentary diplomacy without enacted legislation needs to be resharpener again. Diplomacy conducted by parliament should give impacts to citizens, as parliament is the representative of citizens, thus when efforts (of a committee on international cooperation) in tackling climate crisis are not seen, perhaps it is not diplomacy after all. This portrayal does not show the work of multilateral diplomacy from the parliamentary side.

### **The DPR and the work of the parliamentary committee for international cooperation**

The Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation, *Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parliamen/ BKSAP*, henceforth written as a committee for international cooperation, is a permanent parliamentary body in the DPR whose work is related to international cooperation and participation in international gatherings. It is known in the DPR as a committee to travel abroad. However, legislatively, it is Commission I – not this committee – that deals more with politics and foreign affairs (thus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is one of the partners).

We should differentiate first the terminologies of a commission (*komisi*) and a committee (*badan*) here. In the DPR, a commission is likely to possess better legitimacy in legislative works. Divided into 11 commissions, each DPR commission has partnered with ministries and associated ministerial tasks. Yet, due to Indonesia's patriarchal – or patron-and-client – society, highlighting status, rank and symbols, it is common to differentiate, for example: elites against commoners, city against the village, university teachers against schoolteachers, men against women, etc., which entails the former is better than the latter. Consequently, inside the DPR, it is also common that leaders (DPR speakers, heads of commission/committees, heads of factions or political parties) are considered to have better bargaining power compared to the common DPR members, without any title or position. This also means that the position of DPR members is better than that of the secretariat employees (in which inside the secretariat institution also has the differentiation of positions between seniors, regular staff and hourly staff).

Each commission is also divided into 'wet' and 'dry' commissions, depending on the discussed issues and ministry partnership. Finance and banking (Commission XI) and state-owned enterprises and investment including mining, oil and gas industry (Commission VI) have high profiles or are considered as 'wet' commissions but are prone to corruption. The 'dry' commissions, such as religion and social (Commission VIII) and library, history or archive (Commission X), on the contrary, have a low profile and humble appearance, although arguably they are still important.

Such commissions have more legitimacy rather than a *committee (badan)* as the committee, such as the international cooperation committee – the committee that we study. There are six committees or bodies in the DPR:

- (1) The deliberation committee (*Badan Musyawarah*) deals with schedules of meetings for the upcoming working year;
- (2) The legislation committee (*Badan Legislasi*) deals with the bills to be discussed and it coordinates to which commissions the bill will be discussed;
- (3) The budget committee (*Badan Anggaran*) deals with the allocation of the state budget, fiscal policy and budget priority after synchronizing data with other commissions;
- (4) The home/internal committee (*Badan Urusan Rumah Tangga*) deals with the internal households of the DPR, such as procuring laptops or certain furniture or facilities for members, or renovating certain rooms/building in the parliament compound, etc.
- (5) The financial accountability committee (*Badan Akuntabilitas Keuangan Negara*) deals with ensuring transparency in state financial implementation and studies the report of The State Auditory Board.
- (6) The international cooperation committee (*Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen*) cooperates with other parliaments or international organizations in parliament.

Therefore, an individual DPR member should belong to or be a member of one commission (Commission I-XI) and one committee (of six above) in the DPR. The legislative tasks are mostly conducted at the commission level. The commission is indeed a place for thorough debate, not possible in the Plenum. However, in the DPR, the Plenary Session served merely for ceremonial purposes, including enacting the laws anonymously without voting. The DPR Speaker ‘led’ the floor and could even turn off the microphones and ignored interruptions from the members.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, there is no ‘debate’ in the DPR, especially not at the plenary assembly where the opposition had a chance to speak. Most parliamentary works – legislative, budgeting, and oversight – are conducted at its commissions, and lack minutes or summaries of the meetings.

Indeed, practicing parliamentary works at the commission level and leaving the Plenary Session as a ceremonial place, arguably, weaken the performance of the DPR, as the work is ‘balkanized’ in the smaller room and only by 10 per cent of members rather than all and not at the public venue as the Plenum participating by all DPR members.<sup>10</sup> The commission (I-XI) is where the DPR members practice their tasks of legislating, budgeting, and overseeing the government institution related to the commission’s tasks. Moreover, the idea that the DPR has been empowered by the constitutional amendment during 1999-2003 has been false, because the DPR’s legislative power is still shared with the executive arm of the government and thus legislation is not authorized fully and solely by the DPR.<sup>11</sup> This is a hybrid regime framework, showing that politically Indonesia is moving from authoritarianism towards democratization, yet it is still caught up in a dilemma of keeping old habits or a hybrid regime

<sup>9</sup>The DPR Speaker, Puan Maharani, often cut off the microphones of DPR members to speak, <https://voi.id/kr/bernas/102536>, accessed on 3 May 2024.

<sup>10</sup>Adiputri, *Political Culture*.

<sup>11</sup>S. Sherlock, ‘The Parliament in Indonesia’s Decade of Democracy: People’s Forum or Chamber of Cronies?’, in E. Aspinall and M. Mietzner (eds), *Problems of Democratization in Indonesia: Election, Institutions and Society* (Singapore, 2010), pp. 160-78, p. 160.



framework.<sup>12</sup> As seen above, the DPR cannot stand by itself to act as a legislative body, but still keep the company of the government, as it used to in the authoritarian regime.

These listed committees also do not propose or discuss a bill. The members convey their views in a discussion format of meetings or reading speeches.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the minutes (if any) will be in the form of summary notes. The data used for studying the committee were collected from speeches, presentations, or documents during the meetings, with agreement and resolutions if available.

With this DPR background, the committee in the DPR whose work relates to international cooperation and participation in international gatherings, develops bilateral and multilateral relations. This committee also organizes tasks or events – spending the budget to participate in international events or establishing events for parliaments to gather. It is quite challenging, in reality, to select members of this committee for international parliamentary events whose themes are not relevant. However, since this committee is not legislating nor overseeing the works of the government (related to international organizations, for example), accountability relies on the budget spending, instead of its legislative works. After the ratification of the Agenda 2020, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2016, the DPR has been active in promoting sustainable development issues, by organizing international forums, among others, the parliamentary forum on sustainable development/WPFSD (started in 2017). This international cooperation committee also deals with issues of environment and climate change, digitalization and industry revolution, gender and female participation, humanitarian issues, Good Governance, democracy, regional security, international politics, bilateral cooperation, and public participation. This committee is not only known as a committee to travel abroad but the members – if they are not senior – are also expected to speak English fluently as members regularly participate in the events of the International Parliament Union (IPU), Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA), Asian Pacific Parliament Forum (APPF), ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), including P20 (parliamentary gathering of G20 states), to name a few. This is where diplomacy comes from, suggesting activities that are relevant to the international world.

Diplomacy in a general view is an art of handling others, and in the discipline of international relations, it has been ‘transformed from a primarily states-oriented business to a multi-oriented activity focused on global governance’.<sup>14</sup> This means one can act as a representative of other humans in order to be a diplomat. In this sense, naturally, parliamentary members are already ‘diplomats’ in their roles as citizens’ representatives. In fact, parliament has more flexibility compared to the ‘diplomat as an envoy of the executive branch and represents the positions of the state’ as it brings a moral dimension to international politics and may discuss innovative solutions.<sup>15</sup> Here, it must be noted that diplomacy must bring solutions, such as opening dialogues, resolving conflicts, or reaching cooperation or further collaboration.

Quoted from Jančić, parliamentary diplomacy can be defined as ‘individual or collective action by parliamentarians aimed at catalyzing, facilitating and strengthening the

<sup>12</sup>I thank the anonymous reviewer who pointed out the importance of stating the hybrid regime framework in Indonesia’s transition towards democracy.

<sup>13</sup>See Adiputri, *Political Culture*.

<sup>14</sup>I.B. Neumann, *Diplomatic Tenses: A Social Evolutionary Perspective on Diplomacy* (Manchester, 2020), p. 1

<sup>15</sup>D. Beetham, *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century: A Guide to Good Practice* (Geneva, 2006), pp. 172-3.



existing constitutional functions of parliaments through dialogues between peers on countless open policy questions across continents and levels of governance<sup>16</sup> with the aim of conflict resolution and confidence building as well as exchanging information.<sup>17</sup>

From those definitions, there are two important aspects. They are: the (existing) *constitutional function of parliament* and the scope of works *across continents and levels of governance*. The first, the constitutional function of parliament, leads us to the ideal of parliamentary aspects of deliberation, representation, responsibility, and sovereignty, and whether the committee for international cooperation would also portray such ideals. However, such an ideal type of parliament will only serve as a bar or a set tool to study the documents and not to judge, meaning not to evaluate/devalue on how the committee of international cooperation acted. This also applies in explaining the DPR's parliamentary diplomacy.

The ideal type of parliament, as stated by Ihalainen, Ilie and Palonen,<sup>18</sup> is '*representation, deliberation, responsibility and sovereignty*'. The *representation* dimension is quite clear that parliament is a state assembly representing the citizens and the members are selected from the regular election, usually from political parties' *deliberation*. For the deliberation dimension, parliament is associated with the 'basic principle of a debating assembly' and not merely as a ratifying assembly.<sup>19</sup> This dimension is important in (European) democratic culture. Political debates in the parliament, showing different political opinions between government supporters and opponents, according to formal procedure (i.e. fair time distribution of parliamentary speaking), is important for public display: 'every speech is persuasively structured and every vote is a challenge to existing political configuration'.<sup>20</sup> In the *responsibility* dimension, the government shows accountability to the people, in front of the parliament as the representative institution, for example delivering budget proposals or annual speeches. Finally, in the *sovereignty* dimension, a parliament has legitimacy in doing its roles and has been elected through regular elections. The separation of power is also guaranteed, strengthening the *trias politica* between the executive, legislative and judicative.

The second aspect of parliamentary diplomacy, based on Jančić quotation above, also highlighted the terms *across continents and levels of governance*. This means that the activities are performed beyond domestic regions. On the committee of international cooperation website,<sup>21</sup> it is stated that the DPR has to support Indonesian efforts to practice foreign affairs through diplomacy as part of citizens' representation. This gave a foundation for the committee to participate in the international gathering. In fact, the committee also conducted 'parliamentary diplomacy' at the local level too, like coming to universities or certain seminars domestically, through the annual event as BKSAP Day since 2017.<sup>22</sup> Such events at universities and high schools and gathering with students, usually not with local governments were actually not a diplomatic practice but were similar to constituency or working visits. Moreover, there was practically nothing to mediate or to solve from such parliamentary diplomacy. Here, portraying the

<sup>16</sup>Stavridis and Jančić. 'Introduction', p. 6.

<sup>17</sup>Stavridis and Jančić. 'Introduction'.

<sup>18</sup>Ihalainen, et al., 'Parliament as a Conceptual Nexus', p. 6-8.

<sup>19</sup>Ihalainen et al., 'Parliament as a Conceptual Nexus', p. 7.

<sup>20</sup>Ihalainen et al. 'Parliament as a Conceptual Nexus', p. 7.

<sup>21</sup>See <https://ksap.dpr.go.id/index/tentang-diplomasi>, accessed 29 January 2024.

<sup>22</sup><https://ksap.dpr.go.id/fokus/publik>, accessed 29 January 2024.

committee of international cooperation's works as parliamentary diplomacy actually was not entirely correct.

From 2017-22 – apart from the international participation abroad –, the DPR through the committee of international organization organized many important international parliamentary meetings, from the World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development 2017-19; the First Global Parliamentary Meeting on Achieving the SDGs, 28-30 September 2021; to three times hosting IPU Assembly meetings (in 2000, 2007, and 2022), and in 2022, the DPR, again hosted the IPU's 144th Assembly in Nusa Dua, Bali.<sup>23</sup> Despite these events, such international movements had been criticized by many scholars and media in Indonesia that these events did not impact to Indonesian public in general. One latest study even stated, that the DPR's activity of organizing global events, as the world parliamentary forum was only conducted for DPR to be seen as a modern parliament so that the international community can see how Indonesia has developed through its parliament.<sup>24</sup> In short, they were mainly for *showing off*. Holding politics of grand image or branding – including organizing expensive global-level forums – was common in Indonesia, added with massive media reports including individual social media, although this act was unsuitable for a middle-income country, as Indonesia, especially at that time, the country was struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic.

These international events, too often, were not reported publicly in the DPR Plenary (only reports on the internal committee website), nor have legislative action as a follow-up. There is no direct impact on national legislation or on the citizenry.<sup>25</sup> For example, the bill of the New Energy and Renewable Energy discussed at the DPR's Commission VII, was proposed in 2022. This bill was promoted at many international events, including at the IPU showing off how the Indonesian Parliament supported sustainability efforts. The bill is far from being finished, and it will not be finished soon. The priority of the government is not clear in this sustainability issue yet.

## Debates on climate crisis and sustainability

In the Handbook of Sustainable Development,<sup>26</sup> sustainable development was described as having a connection more to the environment (such as the green economy and renewable energy). Indeed, in Southeast Asia, sustainable development has always been connected to environmental issues, such as climate change. Terminologies like ethics and ecology, justice, accountability, and well-being, are seen in most references in Southeast Asia about sustainable development, yet unlikely discussed further. In this region, sustainability or sustainable development revolves mostly around the environmental issue if not only on climate change, although actually, SDG consists of 17 goals, beyond an environmental issue.

The previous parliamentary handbook about SDG, produced by the Global Organization of Parliamentarian Against Corruption (GOPAC), United Nations Development

<sup>23</sup>Programs and videos can be accessed at <https://www.ipu.org/event/144th-assembly-and-related-meetings>, accessed 20 March 2022.

<sup>24</sup>P. P. Nainggolan and R. Katharina, *DPR dan Defisit Demokrasi* (Jakarta, 2022), p. 452.

<sup>25</sup>Adiputri, 'The role of parliament in SDG'.

<sup>26</sup>G. Atkinson et al., 'Introduction', in G. Atkinson, S. Dietz, and E. Neumayer (eds), *Handbook of Sustainable Development* (Cheltenham, 2007), pp. 1-23.

Programme (UNDP), and Islamic Development Bank (IDB)<sup>27</sup> had listed the tasks that the parliaments can do to support the implementation of SDG in their document. These lists claimed to provide the resources for the parliament, yet the contents remained normative – what the parliamentary institution ought to do –, like the parliamentary tasks of legislation or law-making, budgeting, and overseeing, equipped with questions for reflections. They lacked real examples of parliamentary activities, gatherings, and forums of action to implement these resources' info. The parliament also did not discuss, for example, how the climate crisis affects citizens' daily activities or in everyday life. Parliamentary members must comprehend this, regarding at least their own constituents.

Previous research on SDG and Southeast Asia and ASEAN listed the apparent challenges: (1) the work connection and coordination between international and national; (2) programme implementation between states and across regions; and (3) actors involvement, like stakeholders, civil society and citizen.<sup>28</sup> Thus, SDG issues in Southeast Asia still revolved around 'decision-making ministries', and 'lack of representation in SDG mechanisms'.<sup>29</sup> Such challenges still exist, and there are no innovative actions or differences in conducting meetings related to SDG, especially not happening within the parliaments. The representation aspect, which characterizes parliaments, is definitely needed and may tackle these challenges, however, parliamentary activities are not yet seen. Looking at the committee for international cooperation programmes, they are far from sustainable, for example, five chairpersons are all men<sup>30</sup> so this is not acknowledging the sustainable idea of gender balance. The meetings of this committee were usually participated in by elites only, both from national and international levels, either parliamentary members or invited spokespersons. This clearly did not portray the idea of 'no one leaves behind', the tagline of SDG and in overall showing practices of 'all talk, but with little action' for the public.<sup>31</sup>

Around 80 documents served as data and studied. Documents were collected from the international events that the committee of international cooperation attended or organized, available online between 2017-22, including the proceedings from the IPU. Most of the documents reiterated actions of the committee's diplomacy, although conducted locally. There were also workshop or seminar events with civil society organizations, such as with Westminster Foundation for Democracy (July 2020). The issue of health and the COVID-19 pandemic was discussed more from April 2020 to April 2021, and the documents were actually good for reflection on what the government did amidst the pandemic, but still lacked citizens' perspectives. During international gatherings, MPs would highlight the achievements of their countries' governments, rather than show the challenges their constituents faced related to the issues. Topics of

<sup>27</sup> *Parliament's Role in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: A Parliamentary Handbook*, produced by Global Organization of Parliamentarian Against Corruption (GOPAC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Islamic Development Bank (IDB), (New York, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> R. Holzhaacker, 'Introduction: Sustainable Development Goals in Southeast Asia and ASEAN', in R. Holzhaacker and D. Agussalim (eds), *Sustainable Development Goals in Southeast Asia and ASEAN: National and Regional Approaches* (Leiden, 2019), pp. 3-38, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Holzhaacker, 'Introduction', p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> K. P. Erawan, *White Paper: Agenda for Green Economy in Indonesia: Policy Initiative, Citizen Assembly and International Cooperation* (Jakarta, 2022), p. xii.

<sup>31</sup> R. Adiputri, 'G20 and Indonesian Presidency', *Politikasta* 3, (2022), <https://politikasta.fi/en/g20-and-indonesian-presidency%ef%bf%bc/>.

corruption were also discussed many times, such as GOPAC and SEAPAC, including the annual hearing between the IPU and the United Nations in February 2021 (online). In relation to sustainable development, the DPR usually participated in IPU meetings, where the committee of sustainable development is available, UN and others. The DPR also organized these five international events:

- (1) World Parliamentary Forum for Sustainable Development (WPFSD), 6-7 September 2017;
- (2) WPFSD, 5-8 September 2018;
- (3) WPFSD, 4-5 September 2019;
- (4) Webinar on the SDG and the role of parliaments in SDG implementation in Indonesia, 19 November 2020 (online); and
- (5) The 1st Global Parliamentary Meeting on Achieving the SDGs 28-30 September 2021 (online).

The first three events had been discussed earlier and the events followed the tradition of 'how Indonesian DPR works' namely that the participants listened to the keynote speakers and political elites' (ministers or parliamentary chairpersons) giving speeches or presentations on the stage, and if there was still time, questions-and-answers with the attendees.<sup>32</sup> This was in the style of conferences and seminars, but not parliamentary works. The events also produced weak documents (Bali Declaration, Bali Commitment, and Bali Roadmap). The later events were conducted online to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

The 'debates' within these later events were merely statements in the speeches. As the proceedings did not report verbatim statements, unlike minutes, the statement was condensed. However, sometimes the speeches and presentations were attached to the documents so the issue was easy to follow. Pictures are also available, showing the situation at the events. The remarks also were not specific in focus. As the issue of sustainability was wide, many topics from corruption, global health, gender to poverty and environmental degradation could be included in the discussion. Most topics that the committee talked about can be stated as sustainability issues.

For example, in 2020, the chairperson at that time, Charles Honoris conveyed challenges in parliamentary diplomacy:

As a focal point SDGs in the DPR, BKSAP commits to support the awareness of all parliamentary members to ensure that all goals and targets of SDGs are integrated into all legislative processes and improve parliamentary diplomacy for SDGs.

Such normative remarks were hard to implement, as awareness is hard to measure, especially this committee could not integrate their works into the legislative process in the DPR. Meanwhile, in terms of climate change, the UN has advocated the 'Act Now' movement,<sup>33</sup> thus no longer raising awareness of the danger of climate crisis. Actions are now needed, including from parliaments.

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<sup>32</sup>Adiputri, 'The role of parliament in SDG', p. 136.

<sup>33</sup>See <https://www.un.org/en/actnow>, accessed on 28 April 2024.

Another remark, for example, was from the DPR's Head of Parliamentary Cooperation in the 2021 forum for Inter-parliamentary Global Cooperation in SDG Implementation:

... even though the government has a mandate to implement SDG programs, the parliament has the task to legislate and ensure that the programs are indeed running. Parliament serves as a bridge between citizens and government in adopting legislation to represent people's wishes.

The remark has a good point, but so far there is no implementation of this normative statement. Besides, it was puzzling to have a statement from a bureaucrat in the parliament's event. It was likely that since the committee of international cooperation served as an organizer, the secretariat personnel had a slot to convey remarks.

The documents of proceedings from the BKSAP's meetings contained similar normative information. The need for collaboration in implementing SDG was stated often, but real efforts for working together or collaboration, even inside the DPR institution were not really seen. The legislation or oversight work was still conducted in individual rooms of commissions and committees, rather than in Plenary Sessions, including by all parliamentary members. When the international events were organized in Jakarta, mostly only the members of this committee of international cooperation and the DPR elites knew the existence of the event, and not all DPR members.

This international cooperation committee has also published a book about the Green Economy, written by Erawan.<sup>34</sup> Its executive summary hinted at the content of the Indonesian Agenda for Green Economy, which was said to be relevant to 'policy initiative, citizen assembly and international cooperation'. It followed Indonesia's commitment to reduce carbon emissions by 24 per cent by 2040 and 41 per cent, if supported by international funding. However, the book did not inform anything new, only normative ideas, such as:

Members of parliament may enhance the legitimacy of decision-making related to the green economy through a deliberative democracy process in the form of citizen assembly (p. xvi); Indonesian parliament could propose creating a long-term strategy (p. 4); developing citizen assembly to mainstream the green economy in Indonesia [by] inform and work closely with the policymakers (particularly the parliament). (p. 5); [parliament] role on building knowledge, capacities, and experiences on developing green economy policy as part of the long-term strategy (p. 5)

Such a citizen assembly is indeed important, unfortunately, this committee's book did not explicate further, and no similar word appears in other committee's papers. The relevancy of a citizen assembly could be from *musrembang* or '*musyawarah perencanaan pembangunan*',<sup>35</sup> that is the Indonesian way of conducting deliberation for development planning, usually at the national and local levels. This actually is part of the national government, Ministry of National Development Planning (*Bappenas*), to get input from citizens or stakeholders, to 'prepare thematic, holistic, integrative and spatial national development plans to determine ministry, agency and local government programmes and activities'.<sup>36</sup> This is the task of the ministry and the heads of regional

<sup>34</sup> Available at: <https://berkas.dpr.go.id/akd/dokumen/BKSAP-2-4a4031b96536c9785d30f6eb73dc8950.pdf>; p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> See the explanation here <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2023/08/17/00150001/apa-itu-musrenbang-#>

<sup>36</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2023/08/17/00150001/apa-itu-musrenbang-#>

planning at both provincial and district/city levels, as well as at village levels. However, although it is not common, sometimes parliamentary members at the regional level can also attend. This is due to the organizer being from the bureaucracy or executive government. The participants are mostly community leaders, or government officials, although as the name implies, it is supposed to be for everybody living in such a region. DPR members almost never come to such events, although this could be an effective citizen assembly. The separation of power between executive and legislative persists that no parliamentary members come to the executive government events, or vice versa, except being invited as keynote speakers. Usually, the local parliament may also have a citizen gathering, but it is conducted on the initiative of individual members or certain political parties, mostly for advertising their programmes or small campaigns and not to get input for citizens. So it is similar to the BKSAP Day event that the committee of international cooperation holds, to disseminate information, rather than collecting citizens' input.

The committee produced a 100-page book listing concerns on building a green economy ('the paper evaluates responses ... , planned to describe the agenda on green transformation', p. 14) and how the parliament (specifically the committee of international cooperation) can improve it. However, throughout the whole book, theories were stated here and there, again emphasizing the committee tasks in international cooperation, also reiterating parliamentary tasks of legislation, budgeting and oversight. There is no report on what sustainability focus the committee plans to do for certain years, or what kind of input from constituents can be extended to the international level, for example. The analysis will be explained further in the next section.

### Parliamentary diplomacy in practice?

Diplomacy in general view is an art of handling others, and in the discipline of international relations, it has been 'transformed from a primarily states-oriented business to a multi-oriented activity focused on global governance'.<sup>37</sup> Thus, parliamentary members may act as 'diplomats' of citizens' representatives, especially when discussing the global agenda as the SDG. In the case of the Indonesian DPR, notably the committee for international cooperation, discussing SDG is claimed as an act of parliamentary diplomacy and support for multilateralism, even when conducted seminars domestically. What was being negotiated?

References showed that parliamentary diplomacy is weak in Southeast Asia.<sup>38</sup> Studying documents produced by the committee both from the members' participation at the international events and in the Indonesian DPR organizing the international events confirmed such views as they were barely about diplomacy. They were compilations of events. Although there were declarations or commitment among participants of the parliamentary forums/WPFSFSD, for example – despite their importance – they were weak, and there was no legislative commitment or concrete result afterward. However, the massive usage of parliamentary diplomacy boosted the existence of the committee, and consequently, the DPR and its legitimacy in public.

<sup>37</sup>Neumann, *Diplomatic Tenses*, p.xiii, 1.

<sup>38</sup>See Nuttin, 'Challenges'; J. Rüland, 'Participation without Democratization: The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) and ASEAN's Regional Cooperation', in O. Costa, C. Dri, and S. Stavridis (eds), *Parliamentary Dimensions of Regionalization and Globalization: The Role of Inter-Parliamentary Institutions* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 166-86.



The way that the international cooperation committee handled their activities was mostly by participating in international parliamentary events, like at AIPA, IPU, or organizing big events, inviting parliamentary members from all over the world, for example, P20, a parliamentary forum for the G20 states. After that, the secretariat will produce reports of these events, listing the agenda, and sort of proceeding or summaries or meeting notes (not verbatim statements of the participants). The amount of budget use was also reported. This kind of report was not significant for parliamentary institutions, as it was likely for budget accountability, that certain activities (along with their budget) had been conducted. There were no follow-up legislative works after these events or input for legislation to certain DPR commissions to submit.

The committee for international cooperation also produced reports and a book on the Green Economy.<sup>39</sup> However, as the reports have mixed themes (on all sustainable development, and not on specific issues), the idea of sustainable development from parliament was so vague, and consequently, the parliamentary diplomacy movement was not popular. The contents of the reports and the book were not deep enough for academicians, yet not popular enough for the public.

For example, while the book has 'green economy' title, it was not defined. Other terminologies were also not explained thoroughly, such as 'green transformation', 'challenges', and 'future initiatives'. What are they? This is as if readers would know the meaning by themselves. Moreover, while the book proposed a 'designing techniques of citizen assembly' or 'conceptualization of green economy', – with resilience, growth, transformation, revolution, and 'development paradigm continuity and shifts' – as said to be adopted from Graham Smith's *Deliberative Democracy and The Environment*, (London, 2009) – they were not clear on what aspect and how to implement them in Indonesia. It was likely that having nice words and referencing foreign theories were enough to look scientific. The book also was full of advice for the parliament should do something, like should focus on ... , share, engage, be more active, etc. They were so normative to be practiced. The reports from the parliamentary events such as 'parliamentary dimensions' were also not clear. They referred mostly to the representation of parliaments, as MPs act as the representatives of the citizens, but if we refer to the ideal type of parliament stated above,<sup>40</sup> representation is the only aspect mentioned, there is still deliberation, responsibility and sovereignty, which were not stated in the documents.

The committee of international cooperation also vowed to monitor the national progress on achieving the Agenda 2030, by launching SDGs Dashboard.<sup>41</sup> However, the portal was not available until early 2024.<sup>42</sup> It did not stop here, the committee also stated to put this issue to the regional level of ASEAN parliament's AIPA (ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly):

AIPA Member Parliaments reached a consensus to continuously supporting and monitoring the implementation of the prevailing laws and regulations, in accordance to the parliamentary functions of legislation, monitoring and budgeting. (p. 63)

<sup>39</sup>Written by Erawan, *White Paper: Agenda for Green Economy in Indonesia*.

<sup>40</sup>See Ihalainen et al., 'Parliament as a Conceptual Nexus'.

<sup>41</sup>As reported by Erawan, *White Paper: Agenda for Green Economy in Indonesia*. The launching program in 2021 can be followed here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFDxkHlmdjw>

<sup>42</sup>Based on the Secretariat information.



The so-called improvement to monitor laws and regulations within ASEAN, even notably in AIPA, was not happening. In fact, Indonesia itself also found difficulties in managing laws and collaborating with other ministries regarding many issues, especially the environment. For example, the law of Indonesia number 32 of 2014 on the Sea, and law number 32 of 2009 on the Protection and Management of the Environment were weak, unbeknownst to many regional governments both in the provincial and cities/districts area. The laws were old, there was no information on the effectiveness of the law, as environmental degradation continued, there was no overseeing this law on its implementation and there was no effort to renew the law.

Another example was using the Law no. 6 of 2014 on Village to mandate the Indonesian government to allocate village funds to supporting village development in many aspects, roles and funding. Accordingly, funds were transferred from the state revenue to support the implementation of village roles and functions directly. Village funds affected the state budget revenue as number of villages was 74,954. As the number of villages was huge, the involved budget was also big, thus no wonder the controversies surrounding this law was funding. Due to such huge funding, in early 2023 the village leaders mobilized a protest to ask for an extension of six years in office in the law, into nine years. The law was risked to be renewed by the DPR, but not due to village development, but the terms-of-office of village leaders, their salary and the funding, which was prone for corruption.<sup>43</sup> The DPR revised the law, extending the term of office of village head to eight years, who can be elected for a maximum of two times,<sup>44</sup> in Law no. 3 of 2024, as part of the DPR's initiative bill. There is no reference that the village heads needed to commit to protecting the environment, as required by laws, for example, especially village is the smallest unit of government, as the cases of corruption of the village fund were massive.<sup>45</sup> This again shows that budget and position, are always mingled with the DPR task, and not for upgrading the citizens' welfare as a whole, also not for protecting the environment, but for only specific interests of the group of elites, in this case, the village head.<sup>46</sup> The examples from the book were all from Indonesia, and not from ASEAN data, signalling that an improvement related to green economy, environment or sustainability were also not the ASEAN priorities.

The committee of international cooperation had a chance to 'continue to support the international cooperation on financing to fight climate change and seeking innovation for funding in climate actions'<sup>47</sup> through parliamentary diplomacy, if only it and the Indonesia Parliament as a whole institution, knew where they are going in term of sustainable development, protecting the environment and tackling climate change. The statement above has no further explanation – what kind of continuation programme,

<sup>43</sup>See the news <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2023/07/07/18320611/sinyal-bahaya-revisi-uu-des-ancaman-korupsi-hingga-transaksi-politik?page=all>, accessed on 29 April 2024.

<sup>44</sup>See <https://www.hukumonline.com/berita/a/disetujui-jadi-uu-uu-des-memuat-26-poin-perubahan-lt660510bb751e0/>, accessed on 29 April 2024.

<sup>45</sup>The corruption case of the village heads were huge, as reported by the state secretary here, [https://www.setneg.go.id/baca/index/di\\_tengah\\_kontroversi\\_revisi\\_undang\\_undang\\_desa\\_desa\\_sebagai\\_harapan\\_ujung\\_tombak\\_peradaban\\_indonesia](https://www.setneg.go.id/baca/index/di_tengah_kontroversi_revisi_undang_undang_desa_desa_sebagai_harapan_ujung_tombak_peradaban_indonesia), accessed on 29 April 2024.

<sup>46</sup>On the worry of academics on lengthening the term of office for the village heads, see <https://www.kompas.id/baca/polhuk/2024/02/08/ruu-des-bakal-dibahas-lagi-masa-jabatan-kepala-des-ditambah-jadi-delapan-tahun>, accessed on 30 April 2024.

<sup>47</sup>Erawan, *White Paper: Agenda for Green Economy in Indonesia* p. 67.

from where the funding could be secured, and what innovation – sparked further questions on what parliament could do in supporting this statement.

In short, all programmes and reports (or publications) of the international cooperation committee were far from being diplomatic. Efforts for promoting sustainability only worked within a smaller group of members, notably only in this committee. It is agreed that a climate crisis will occur and limited awareness has been built, but the parliamentary members, or the Indonesian Parliament as the institution, do not yet fully acknowledge it. Legislation enacted to tackle the climate crisis or any relevancy to SDG was not found in the DPR legislation as a whole. The actions for acknowledging the SDG issue from the parliament remain small and its parliamentary diplomacy does not result in anything concrete.

The committee, however, shows efforts to some extent to bring the parliamentary voice forward about this important issue. The SDG topic is huge, and the limitation of this committee is not merely the ‘fault’ of this committee or its competence, but also in the parliament’s constitutional powers. The DPR through the committee has somehow discussed the sustainability issue which was not previously there before. This again justified the existence of a hybrid regime framework that as a parliament, the DPR provides a stable democracy but the persistence of the executive government hegemony in Indonesian politics shows that the parliament operates under different circumstances. Moreover, the constitutional power of the Indonesian Parliament, which always needs partners with the government for its legislative works, and the different levels between commission and committee show how the DPR operates with its limited legislative power and position. In addition with the persistence of leadership roles (heads of commission, factions or political parties), the conditions of individual members and certain committees as the example we use here, the committee of international cooperation, are complex.

Ideally, parliamentary diplomacy must be bridging what happens abroad to shape the policies domestically, and then disseminate it to citizens. However, so far participating in international gatherings, having elite meetings at the national level, and not bringing the discussion to citizens nor to realizing it into legislation, were normative values of diplomacy. Parliamentary diplomacy ideally added legitimacy and political weight to the national level both internationally and locally. The limited practice in the committee somehow shows the discussion, although yet not effective.

Rüland<sup>48</sup> had claimed that parliament in Southeast Asia, including in Indonesia, was not democratic and thus barriers to parliamentary diplomacy stemmed from democratic and parliamentary deficits.<sup>49</sup> Democracy was practiced only within the election, not in the practice of state institutions as parliaments. The reputation of the Indonesian Parliament, its members, and its performance was poor, if not corrupt.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps, due to such a different conception of democracy between Indonesia’s regulated democracy (only in election) and Western liberal democracy, also how parliamentary dimensions were

<sup>48</sup>J. Rüland, ‘Democratic Backsliding, Regional Governance and Foreign Policymaking in Southeast Asia: ASEAN, Indonesia and the Philippines’, *Democratization* 28, (2021), pp. 237-57.

<sup>49</sup>X. Nuttin, ‘Challenges for Parliamentary Diplomacy in South and South-East Asia and Europe: A Practitioner’s Perspective’, in S. Stavridis and D. Jancic (eds), *Parliamentary Diplomacy in European and Global Governance* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 230-47, p. 238.

<sup>50</sup>‘Survei TII: DPR Lembaga Paling Korup’ CNN Indonesia, 4 December 2020, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20201204075231-32-577831/survei-tii-dpr-lembaga-paling-korup>, accessed 1 May 2022.

acknowledged as a representation aspect, the ideal type of parliament stated above was not portrayed.

The 132nd IPU Assembly on 1 April 2015 stated that parliament has a role in ‘mobilizing the means to attain the goals’, by ‘raising our *awareness* of the sustainable development goals and for *making our voices heard* at the United Nations’.<sup>51</sup> (Note that the voices must be heard at the UN only, instead for the wider public). The declaration also listed what the parliament should do: ‘parliamentarians have a moral obligation to act’, ‘invest in citizens’ health, nutrition, education and skills’, ‘[taking] national ownership of the goals’, ‘making the goals known to the constituents’, ‘translating the goals into enforceable domestic laws and regulations’, ‘holding governments accountable for the goals’, ‘building consensus around practical solutions’, ‘having regular feedback from their constituents’, and protecting ‘the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the society’. These can be shortened into bridging a meaningful dialogue ‘between the people they represent and the governments they oversee’, fulfilling ‘people-centered sustainable development, based on the realization of all human rights, to eradicate poverty in all its forms, and eliminate inequalities, thus empowering all individuals to exercise their full potential’. All of these remarks needed to be reconceptualized and understood in everyday language, so citizens can understand, but so far, the committee in the DPR has not done it yet. The performance of the Indonesian Parliament, the DPR, highlights that the institutional prestige and its parliamentary members have never been about accountability and work performance, but only on the *number* of meetings and *participation* in events – not the amount of legislation, or legislation results – and as long as the MPs are perceived to be busy.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

Parliamentary diplomacy in the Indonesian Parliament apparently has a bureaucratic influence, full of administration, meetings, events, and budget accountability. Consequently, most of the participation of the committee of international cooperation at the international level does not result in legislation. This is not great news for the implementation of tackling the climate crisis and acknowledging sustainability issues.

Indeed, in Indonesia, also in Southeast Asia, the discussion about SDG is pioneered mostly by the executive government, and the parliament has been given the flexibility to contribute. With the global commitment to SDG in which countries plan to achieve goals for Sustainable Development in 2030 and the motto of ‘leaving no one behind’, it is natural that the parliaments also participate in the discussion. As we study here, the parliament is interested in contributing to the implementation and legitimation of the SDG programme, but such contribution is not yet significant and gives advantages only to the specific members, committee, and bureaus, but not yet to the public and citizens at large. Despite the limitations, the committee of international cooperation attempted to some extent to bring a parliamentary voice present in contexts in which it was not previously there, even if there are still limits for it, both in competence and in constitutional powers.

<sup>51</sup>Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Parliamentary Involvement in International Affairs* (New York, 2005), <http://www.ipu.org/splze/sp-conf05/involvement-rpt.pdf>; emphasis added.

<sup>52</sup>Nainggolan and Katarina, *DPR dan deficit*.

From the international gatherings, that the committee members attended, these parliamentarians knew already the normative roles of ‘bridging people’, ‘creating/raising awareness’, ‘engaging local communities’, ‘upholding norms’, and ‘promoting sustainability [according to the discussed topics, for example, renewable energy, gender equality, or green economy]’, ‘establishing platforms to share best practices and lesson learned’ – all are common terminologies for the IPU and international organizations – but these remarks need to be followed by how to achieve them. Parliament is a place for discussion, ideally through debates in the public plenum, to convey different opinions from society from different backgrounds. The lack of discussion time on how to practice what they had said was never been discussed. The committee along with the Indonesian DPR, is not yet practicing all aspects of the ideal type of parliament, however, when the ongoing practices would lead to legislation, perhaps, parliamentary diplomacy and, eventually, efforts to tackle the climate crisis will come. The data reveals that the climate crisis is happening and awareness has been built among the parliamentary members on this committee, only the whole parliamentary members or the Indonesian Parliament as the institution does not acknowledge it yet fully. Legislation has not yet been enacted to tackle the climate crisis. The SDG portal promised in 2021 was not also running well. Such small actions and the practiced parliamentary diplomacy were apparently not resulting anything concrete, but still heard.

This illustrates that a parliamentary committee dealing with urgent global issues is still disconnected from parliamentary decision-making, partly due to lacking the constitutional link between the committee and the agenda-setting of the DPR. The committee and its input may have an important *de facto* political role if the government and the DPR plenum would be willing to make use of the committee’s recommendations or discussions concerning the legislation. Thus, the implication that a parliamentary form of agenda-setting and deliberations inside the committee – and for the (inter-) parliamentary diplomacy in general – would be needed in order to make the consultative committee politically important.

## Notes on contributor

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