

Indonesia's Gastrodiplomacy in East Africa: Culinary Promotion and Public Diplomacy at the ASEAN Food Festival 2025 in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Indonesia's gastrodiplomacy through the participation in the ASEAN Food Festival 2025 in Nairobi, Kenya. The research is motivated by the limited scholarly attention to Indonesian culinary diplomacy in Africa, despite Kenya's strategic position as an East African hub and Indonesia's growing interest in strengthening cultural and economic engagement with the continent. The objective is to analyze how Indonesian cuisine, cultural symbols, and diplomatic narratives were used to support public diplomacy. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach based on secondary data. Data were collected through library research and document analysis of official reports, policy documents, academic literature, and credible media sources, then interpreted through qualitative content analysis. The findings show that Indonesia's participation promoted iconic dishes such as *rendang* and chicken *sate*, supported by *batik*, *wayang*, diaspora involvement, and institutional coordination. These elements strengthened cultural recognition, people-to-people interaction, and Indonesia's image as a multicultural and tolerant country. The study concludes that AFF 2025 became a strategic platform for expanding Indonesian gastrodiplomacy and engagement in East Africa.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia's cultural and culinary diversity provides an important foundation for studying gastrodiploamacy as part of International Relations. Across the archipelago, each region has distinctive culinary traditions that reflect local history, ecological adaptation, social identity, and cultural memory. Dishes such as *rendang*, *sweke*, *pepes*, *gado-gado*, and *sate* are not merely food products, but cultural representations through which Indonesia communicates plurality, locality, and national identity to foreign publics (Antara News, 2024). This makes cuisine a relevant medium of cultural promotion because it is accessible, sensory, emotional, and capable of creating direct encounters between a nation and international society. Food can also function as a soft-power resource because it translates abstract ideas of identity, hospitality, and belonging into concrete experiences that can be tasted, seen, and shared (Ichijo & Ranta, 2016).

In Indonesia's diplomatic history, food has held a symbolic function as cultural representation. Under Soekarno, Indonesian cuisine appeared within diplomatic settings, particularly the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, where hospitality, anti-colonial solidarity, and national identity were projected before international guests. Food was not merely served for ceremonial purposes but also used to introduce Indonesia's cultural richness and political identity as a newly independent state. Soekarno's Mustika Rasa project further showed that culinary heritage was treated as national documentation and an archive of Indonesian culinary nationalism in international diplomacy (Hartono, 2025).

Contemporary Indonesian gastrodiploamacy also can be understood as a continuation of Indonesia's longer history of cultural representation through food. Programs such as Indonesia Spice Up the World link culinary promotion with tourism, diaspora restaurants, and culinary industries. These initiatives connect cuisine with public diplomacy, digital information, global visibility, the creative economy, and people-to-people engagement. Indonesian gastrodiploamacy not as isolated food promotion, but as a sustained cultural strategy that projects hospitality, solidarity, diversity, and national pride to wider

international audiences (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2024).

Indonesian cuisine strengthens public diplomacy because it carries symbolic, social, and philosophical meanings. Dishes such as *nasi tumpeng* represent gratitude, prayer, and communal harmony, while *gado-gado* symbolises diversity through different ingredients in one dish. These meanings support Indonesia's national branding as multicultural, inclusive, and tolerant. Food also creates emotional memory through taste, aroma, appearance, and interaction, making gastrodiploamacy more accessible than formal diplomatic messages. Its effectiveness, however, depends on strategy, context, target audience, and integration with broader public diplomacy initiatives such as overseas food festivals and Indonesia Spice Up World (Humas Kemensetneg, 2023).

Meanwhile, Kenya offers a strategic context for analysing Indonesia's gastrodiploamacy in East Africa. Its relationship with Indonesia is rooted in postcolonial solidarity through the Asian-African Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement, and South-South cooperation. Geopolitically, Kenya is a regional hub for trade, diplomacy, tourism, education, and telecommunications, with projected GDP growth of 5.4 percent in 2024 and 5.6 percent in 2025 (Cowling, 2024). More recent World Bank analysis also confirms Kenya's continued relevance as a major economy in East Africa, although its growth outlook remains shaped by debt pressure, private-sector constraints, and macroeconomic risks (World Bank, 2025). These conditions make Kenya a promising site for Indonesia to strengthen its cultural and economic engagement with Africa. Culinary similarities, particularly spice-based traditions such as pilau masala, create a cultural bridge for people-to-people diplomacy and Indonesian soft-power expansion in Africa through shared taste and familiarity (Iswardhana et al., 2022; 2023).



Figure 1. The Excitement of the ASEAN Food Festival in Kenya

Source: ([RM.id, 2025](#)).

This research addresses limited scholarship on Indonesia's gastrodiploamacy in Africa, especially Kenya. Existing research generally focuses on Australia, the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, where diaspora communities, tourism markets, or foreign-policy visibility are stronger. AFF 2025 in Nairobi is relevant because Indonesia used an ASEAN platform to promote *rendang*, chicken *satay*, *batik*, and *wayang* while supporting Indonesia Spice Up the World. The study focused on culinary symbols, cultural products, and diplomatic narratives were combined as public diplomacy in Kenya (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Nairobi, 2025; Baskoro, 2025).

Literature positions AFF 2025 as more than a cultural event. Gastrodiploamacy uses food as public diplomacy to communicate national culture, shape perception, and build emotional connection. Rockower (2012) argues that food conveys identity through experience rather than formal persuasion, linking gastrodiploamacy to Nye's logic of attraction. Food festivals become arenas where identity and branding are curated for foreign publics. Recent studies show gastrodiploamacy also involves tourism, heritage, and non-state actors (Cabral et al., 2024). This study applies this conceptual lens to examine Indonesia's participation in AFF 2025 as a form of culinary public diplomacy in East Africa (Octavia, 2025).

The proposed approach of this research is to analyse Indonesia's participation in the ASEAN Food Festival 2025 as a case of gastrodiploamacy implemented through a multilateral regional platform in East Africa. The study treats the festival not merely as a

venue for selling or displaying food, but as a diplomatic space where cuisine, cultural symbols, institutional presence, and national narratives interact. Indonesia's culinary booth, the selection of iconic dishes such as *rendang* and *sate*, the display of *batik* and *wayang*, and the link to the "Indonesia Spice Up the World" campaign are analysed as instruments of public diplomacy (Li & Mok, 2025).

Previous studies on Indonesian gastrodiploamacy have mainly focused on bilateral promotion, diaspora networks, tourism branding, and national culinary campaigns such as Indonesia Spice Up the World. Limited attention has been given to how national gastrodiploamacy is practiced through a multilateral regional platform outside Southeast Asia, particularly in Africa. The ASEAN Food Festival 2025 in Nairobi offers a relevant case because it shows how Indonesian culinary diplomacy operated within ASEAN's collective cultural identity while engaging Kenyan publics, diaspora actors, and bilateral public diplomacy. This study fills that gap by analysing Indonesia's national gastrodiploamacy through ASEAN's regional platform in East Africa.

This research identifies three strategies: using iconic dishes to represent national identity, combining cuisine with artefacts such as batik and wayang to create broader cultural experience, and linking culinary promotion to Indonesia's nation-branding narrative as multicultural, tolerant, and creative. The novelty lies in examining gastrodiploamacy in Kenya through an ASEAN platform, an underexplored African setting. The study contributes academically by widening Indonesian gastrodiploamacy studies and practically by recommending stronger coordination, clearer narratives, trade-tourism links, and sustained local engagement for Indonesia's diplomatic presence in East Africa through culinary-cultural cooperation networks abroad.

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design using a case study approach and secondary data-based research. Qualitative research enables the researcher to understand social and political phenomena contextually by examining how actors construct meaning, communicate values, and represent identity within specific

social settings. The case study approach is relevant because this research focuses on a specific diplomatic event, namely Indonesia's gastrodiplomacy practice through the ASEAN Food Festival 2025 in Kenya, and seeks to explain it within its real-life political, cultural, and institutional context (Morgan, 2022). Through this methodological design, the study seeks to produce an academically grounded explanation of Indonesia uses culinary diplomacy as a strategic instrument to strengthen its cultural branding and diplomatic presence in Kenya.

Data were collected through library research and document-based inquiry by examining primary and secondary written materials. The primary sources include official statements, press releases, policy documents, and institutional publications issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Nairobi, ASEAN-related institutions, and other government bodies relevant to Indonesia's cultural and economic diplomacy. The secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, research reports, and credible media reports related to gastrodiplomacy, public diplomacy, Indonesia-Kenya relations, and the ASEAN Food Festival. Document analysis is relevant for this study because documents do not only provide factual information, but also contain institutional narratives, policy orientations, symbolic meanings, and diplomatic messages that can be critically interpreted in qualitative research. In this study, documents were treated not as neutral texts, but as sources that reflect how institutions frame culinary promotion, cultural identity, and diplomatic objectives. This approach allows the researcher to examine both the factual content of documents and the meanings embedded in official narratives, media representation, and policy discourse (Nowell et al., 2017).

This study analyzed 35 documents collected between March and May 2026, covering academic literature, official institutional reports, Foreign Ministry Library documents, credible media reports, and statistical data. Sources were obtained from Google Scholar, Crossref, DOAJ, publisher websites, kemlu.go.id, KBRI Nairobi, ASEAN, World Bank, IMF, UN ECA, UNESCO, Kenya Ports Authority, Kenya

Tourism Board, Antara, VOI, RM.id, RRI, and Statista. Documents were included when relevant, accessible, verifiable, and directly related to Indonesia's gastrodiploamacy in Kenya and AFF 2025.

The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. This method allows the researcher to identify, classify, and interpret patterns of meaning within textual materials, particularly those related to Indonesia's culinary representation. Qualitative content analysis was chosen because it provides a systematic procedure for examining how meaning is produced, organized, and communicated through documents, public statements, and media narratives (Krippendorff, 2019). The unit of analysis in this study consists of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that refer to Indonesian cuisine, cultural promotion, Kenya, Africa, and the ASEAN Food Festival 2025. These textual units were examined to identify how Indonesia's culinary identity was constructed and connected to broader diplomatic narratives (Iswardhana & Rivai, 2026).

The analytical process followed three stages to ensure transparency, systematic interpretation, and trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). First, documents were selected based on their relevance to gastrodiploamacy, Indonesia Spice Up the World, AFF 2025, and Indonesia-Kenya relations. Second, data were classified into themes: culinary representation, cultural symbolism, public diplomacy, nation branding, and Indonesia's engagement with Kenya and East Africa. Third, findings were interpreted through public diplomacy and gastrodiploamacy by comparing official narratives, academic literature, and media reports. Source triangulation strengthened credibility, cross-checked claims, and reduced single-source dependence during the analysis.

This study uses public diplomacy, cultural promotion, and gastrodiploamacy, as a hierarchical framework rather than interchangeable concepts. Public diplomacy identifies the arena where Indonesia communicates with Kenyan and international publics. Cultural promotion explains the use of cultural symbols such as *batik*, *wayang*, hospitality, and culinary narratives. Gastrodiploamacy is the specific instrument, using food to convey identity and build familiarity. The coding process follows the conceptual hierarchy developed in this study. References to visitor engagement, diaspora

participation, and institutional outreach were coded as public diplomacy. *Batik*, *wayang*, hospitality, and cultural narratives were coded as cultural promotion. Food presentation, tasting, and culinary interaction were coded as gastrodiplomacy.

3. Results And Discussion

3.1. Result: History of Indonesian Gastrodiplomacy

After independence on 17 August 1945, Indonesia used cultural promotion to introduce itself as a sovereign postcolonial state. Under Soekarno, cultural missions, student exchanges, and international festivals promoted national identity, modernity, and distinctive heritage (Cohen, 2019). In this diplomatic setting, cuisine became part of cultural representation through embassy receptions and regional dishes served to foreign guests. *Rendang*, *gudeg*, *sate*, and *gado-gado* entered diplomatic encounters as symbols of hospitality and identity. Although not yet called gastrodiplomacy, food already supported Indonesia's cultural promotion and symbolic projection abroad among foreign audiences (Pujayanti, 2017).

A crucial moment in Indonesian gastrodiplomacy emerged during the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung. The conference gathered twenty-nine Asian and African countries and became a historic forum for anti-colonial solidarity, peace, and cooperation among newly independent states. Within this setting, Indonesian cuisine was introduced to world leaders as part of cultural hospitality and national representation. The event showed that food could support political communication by presenting Indonesia's identity, diversity, and diplomatic courtesy. This moment reflected an early awareness that cuisine could function as an instrument of international diplomacy (UNESCO, 2025).

The New Order under President Soeharto shifted Indonesia's diplomacy toward economic development, domestic stability, and regional cooperation. Indonesia's role in ASEAN's establishment in 1967 reflected a pragmatic foreign policy orientation focused on political stability and economic growth. Through the Bangkok Declaration, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand agreed to promote regional cooperation, social progress,

cultural development, and peace (ASEAN, 2025a). Although this period prioritized development and security, cultural promotion remained relevant as Indonesia continued using cultural representation to support regional engagement and international recognition within broader diplomatic practice abroad. Cultural promotion remained important during the New Order through exhibitions, dance performances, culinary demonstrations, diplomatic receptions, and national celebrations. The launch of Visit Indonesia Year in 1991 linked tourism, culture, regional identity, and economic interests, making cuisine part of Indonesia's destination marketing (Adams, 1997). Indonesian restaurants in Europe and the United States later served diaspora communities and introduced archipelagic flavors to local publics. These restaurants became "frontline messengers" of culture through consumption and market adaptation (Yayusman et al., 2023). This process marked an organic form of gastrodiploamacy abroad globally overseas.

In the early 2010s, Indonesian gastrodiploamacy became more structured through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. This direction became clearer with Indonesia Spice Up the World, launched in 2021 to promote gastronomy, strengthen spice exports, and expand restaurants abroad (Rozaah, 2022; Tioria, 2022). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched the Indonesian Gastrodiploamacy Dashboard in 2024, presenting data and information on culinary diplomacy as part of Indonesia's soft power strategy and global cultural visibility (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024).

Indonesia Spice Up the World promotes cuisine through festivals, competitions, exhibitions, restaurant promotion, and training programs. Its purpose extends beyond taste by communicating hospitality, cooperation, diversity, and respect for nature embedded in Indonesian culinary traditions. Indonesian food reflects historical layers shaped by spice trade, local knowledge, and encounters with Arab, Chinese, Indian, and European influences. Rendang, for example, embodies Minangkabau values of patience, endurance, deliberation, and cultural continuity. Its long cooking process symbolizes discipline and resilience, making it a strong culinary identity marker in international promotion (Ermanto et al., 2025).

3.2. Significance and Economic Condition of Kenya

Kenya occupies a strategic position as one of East Africa's key economies and a hub for trade, diplomacy, logistics, and connectivity. Its importance is reinforced by Africa's demographic and economic transformation, with the continent's population projected to reach about 2.5 billion by 2050. This growth will expand demand for food, consumer goods, services, education, tourism, and connectivity. For Indonesia, Kenya offers an entry point to deepen presence, broaden economic cooperation, and promote cultural identity, market expansion, and Indonesian products in East Africa (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2024; IMF, 2023).

Kenya's geographical position strengthens its strategic value through the Port of Mombasa, a major gateway for trade into East and Central Africa. The port connects Kenya with regional supply chains and hinterland markets, including Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, northern Tanzania, South Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia (Kenya Ports Authority, 2025). For Indonesia, this connectivity links economic diplomacy with cultural promotion by supporting promotion of culinary products, spices, processed food, halal goods, and tourism. Kenya's tourism profile also supports cultural exchange and public diplomacy (Kenya Tourism Board, 2025).

Kenya provides a strategic space where cultural representation and economic interests can support each other. From a cultural perspective, Kenya provides a plural and open social environment. Kenyan society is highly diverse, multiethnic, and familiar with cultural plurality. This condition creates openness toward foreign cultural expressions, including food, art, music, fashion, and culinary traditions. Growing interest in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, also creates opportunities for deeper cultural exchange between the two countries (Cowling, 2024).

Kenya's importance for Indonesia is shaped by its population size, economic capacity, and role within Sub-Saharan Africa. As one of Africa's most populous countries and a major regional economy, Kenya has sectors relevant to Indonesian engagement, including tourism, education, telecommunications, logistics, and services. These

sectors connect cultural promotion with trade, tourism cooperation, and creative economy development. Although Kenya recorded 4.7 percent GDP growth in 2024, World Bank analysis notes continuing macroeconomic vulnerabilities. Its value lies in regional connectivity, market potential, and access to East African networks (World Bank, 2025a; 2025b)

Kenya's domestic consumption provides an economic basis for Indonesia's culinary diplomacy. Household consumption reached 32.91 percent in 2022, indicating purchasing capacity and domestic demand, although this figure must be read within Kenya's broader economic structure. For Indonesia, this condition opens opportunities for cooperation in spices, food ingredients, packaged food, restaurant development, and creative economy products. Kenya's position as a regional trade and logistics hub also gives culinary promotion a wider function: introducing Indonesian products to consumers, businesses, and distribution networks connected to East African markets across the region (Cowling, 2024).

Kenya is relevant to this research because can be functions as Indonesia's strategic gateway to East Africa. Its diplomatic role, Nairobi's regional networks, and the Port of Mombasa's connectivity make Kenya important for linking cultural promotion with economic diplomacy. In AFF 2025, Indonesia used cuisine to introduce national identity while creating initial familiarity with spices, processed food, halal products, tourism, and creative economy goods. Kenya's multiethnic society and spice-based culinary traditions also provide a receptive cultural setting for gastrodiploamacy as dialogue, not merely one-way promotion among Kenyan and international publics effectively.

3.3. The ASEAN Food Festival (AFF) 2025

The ASEAN Food Festival 2025 was organised by the ASEAN Committee in Nairobi at Village Market Mall, Nairobi, on 26 April 2025. It involved Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and the Vietnamese community. Indonesia used the event to introduce cuisine while communicating diversity, cultural values, and economic potential. The Indonesian booth promoted Nusantara food through support from the Embassy of Indonesia in Nairobi, Dharma Wanita

Persatuan, and the diaspora. This participation shows gastrodiplomacy as practical communication within Indonesia's engagement with Kenya today (Baskoro, 2025; Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Nairobi, 2025).

The ASEAN Food Festival (AFF) functions as a regional platform for presenting ASEAN culinary traditions to international audiences. Beyond its role as a food exhibition, the festival reflects ASEAN's collective soft power by projecting unity through cultural diversity and community awareness. This orientation aligns with ASEAN's cultural cooperation agenda, which promotes cultural diversity as a basis for regional identity. Indonesia's participation places national cuisine within Southeast Asia's broader cultural landscape. In this setting, Indonesian food becomes both a nation-branding instrument and a contribution to ASEAN's regional identity in African public diplomacy (ASEAN, 2025b).



Figure 2. ASEAN Food Festival in Kenya
Source: ([Go Places Digital, 2025](#)).

The AFF 2025 event was not only as an Indonesia-Kenya cultural activity, but a regional platform through which Indonesia projected national gastrodiplomacy under ASEAN's collective identity. Indonesia used an ASEAN-branded public space to introduce cuisine, cultural symbols, and diplomatic narratives to African audiences. This case shows layered diplomacy: Indonesian culinary identity operated inside ASEAN regional branding, while

reaching publics outside Southeast Asia. It also strengthens the article's gap by showing national gastrodiploamacy through ASEAN's external cultural engagement in East Africa and interregional public diplomacy.

The ASEAN platform is analytically important because it positions Indonesia's public diplomacy through gastrodiploamacy within a multilateral regional setting, not only a bilateral Indonesia–Kenya framework. Through AFF 2025, Indonesia promoted national identity through cuisine, *batik*, *wayang*, and diaspora participation while joining ASEAN's collective cultural projection. The festival enabled each member state to present distinct culinary traditions within a shared regional narrative of diversity, openness, and cooperation. Indonesia's participation operated simultaneously as national branding and ASEAN cultural promotion in Kenya, making AFF 2025 central to the article's argument and conceptual coherence more explicitly throughout.

The festival strengthened Indonesia's position within ASEAN's cultural promotion in Kenya. Its participation showed ASEAN not only as a political and economic organization, but as a cultural community with diverse traditions and shared values. For Indonesia, AFF 2025 offered space to promote national cuisine while helping construct an inclusive Southeast Asian identity before Kenyan publics. Then, Indonesia's participation in AFF 2025 was not merely a ceremonial cultural activity, but a strategic expression of public diplomacy that connected food, culture, identity, diaspora participation, regional solidarity, and Indonesia's foreign policy interests in East Africa (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Nairobi, 2025). AFF 2025 can be categorized as public diplomacy through indicators. First, it involved an official state actor, the Indonesian Embassy in Nairobi. Second, it addressed foreign publics, including Kenyan society, international visitors, ASEAN communities, and diaspora networks. Third, it communicated strategic messages on Indonesian identity, diversity, tolerance, hospitality, and economic potential. Fourth, it used cultural media, including cuisine, batik, woven products, and wayang. Fifth, it enabled direct people-to-people interaction through tasting,

explanation, and dialogue, while strategically strengthening Indonesia's nation branding in East Africa.

3.4. Discussion: Indonesia's Participation in AFF 2025 as Public Diplomacy

Diplomacy is the practice of managing relations among political entities through negotiation, representation, and communication. It is not merely ceremonial, but an institution for sustaining international order, articulating interests, building trust, managing disputes, and enabling cooperation. As International Relations has evolved, diplomacy has expanded beyond state-to-state channels into economic, cultural, defense, humanitarian, digital, environmental, and public diplomacy. This shift reflects a global context in which public opinion, media narratives, civil society, diaspora communities, and cultural attraction increasingly shape national reputation (Iswardhana, 2018).

Public diplomacy places foreign publics at the center of strategic communication. Edmund Gullion introduced the term in 1965, although the practice has deeper historical roots. Earlier forms of public persuasion can be traced to ancient Rome and Greece, where political communities sought to influence foreign societies through culture, reputation, and external policy, not merely through military power (Kim, 2017). In contemporary scholarship, G. R. Berridge defines public diplomacy as the use of information and communication technologies to engage in dialogue with foreign publics. Kishan S. Rana also emphasises government and non-state agencies through media, culture, education, and branding-building activities.

These perspectives indicate that public diplomacy functions as a semi-formal communication strategy involving multiple actors in shaping perception, trust, and nation branding. Its theoretical foundation is closely connected to Joseph S. Nye's concept of soft power. Nye argues that public diplomacy projects cultural appeal, political values, and legitimate foreign policy to global audiences. His emphasis on credibility, self-criticism, and civil society shows that public diplomacy cannot be reduced to propaganda, since sustainable

trust depends on consistency between message, policy, and practice (Nye, 2019).

Public diplomacy connects state capability, cultural appeal, legitimacy, and public trust. In practice, it covers student exchanges, cultural promotion, art exhibitions, festivals, digital communication, research cooperation, and humanitarian assistance. Cultural promotion in international forums can be understood as soft power because it engages knowledge, emotion, memory, and sensory experience. This approach is consistent with cultural diplomacy literature, which views cultural symbols as a medium for building familiarity and positive perceptions among foreign publics. Public diplomacy also requires coherence between external narratives and domestic realities; a country's image weakens when promoted values are not reflected in governance and social practice.

Indonesia possesses substantial cultural resources that can be mobilized through public diplomacy. Its cultural richness, religious and ethnic diversity, traditions of cooperation, and values of tolerance provide social capital for international nation branding. Diaspora communities, artists, students, culinary entrepreneurs, and media actors help present a more authentic image of Indonesia abroad. Diaspora communities that promote Indonesian cuisine, performing arts, language, and cultural practices contribute to people-to-people engagement. This form of public diplomacy is often more easily accepted because it operates through everyday interaction rather than formal political communication. In Africa and the Asia-Pacific, culture-based approaches can create emotional proximity, familiarity, and informal engagement (Iswardhana, 2025).



Figure 3. Indonesian diaspora in Kenya to participate in AFF 2025

Source: ([Faktanesia.id](https://faktanesia.id), 2025).

The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Nairobi, in collaboration with Dharma Wanita Persatuan of the Embassy and the Indonesian diaspora, played a significant role in supporting Indonesia's participation. This collaboration presented Indonesian dishes such as *rendang*, *sate*, *bakso*, *siomay*, and *es cendol*. These dishes represent different layers of Indonesian culinary identity. Indonesian handicrafts such as *batik* and *wayang* were also displayed, enriching visitors' cultural experience. The combination of food, visual culture, and symbolic heritage strengthened the festival's role as a space of cultural promotion in diplomacy. The involvement of Indomie and Air Asia expanded promotion and showed the relevance of private-sector participation in supporting Indonesia's gastrodiploamacy abroad (Mahayana, 2025). At the national level, Indonesia communicated identity, diversity, and hospitality through cuisine. At the regional level, Indonesia placed that narrative within ASEAN's collective cultural identity. At the bilateral level, the event opened public-facing engagement with Kenya. At the interregional level, it connected Southeast Asia and East Africa through culture, diaspora participation, and informal interaction. However, the analysis are distinguish public exposure from public perception, because there are no any available sources and direct surveys or structured visitor interviews from Kenyan publics.

AFF 2025 received positive responses from visitors, as reflected in enthusiasm reported during the event. All Indonesian food prepared and sold at the booth was consumed, indicating public interest in Indonesian cuisine among local and international audiences. Visitors from various national backgrounds also demonstrate the broader appeal of Indonesian culinary culture beyond the Indonesian diaspora. This positive audience response indicates the potential of culinary interaction to support Indonesia's nation-branding efforts by creating cultural familiarity, strengthening public exposure, and encouraging more favorable associations with Indonesia. The presence of Kenyan figures and foreign diplomats created an informal yet strategic space for interaction, where food functioned as a diplomatic bridge enabling relaxed communication

between Indonesia and partner countries. However, since this study relies primarily on secondary sources, this finding should be interpreted as reported audience enthusiasm rather than as direct evidence of measurable perception change among foreign publics. This study acknowledges a limitation in measuring Kenyan public perception. The available data mainly consist of official reports, media coverage, and institutional narratives on AFF 2025. These sources are sufficient to analyse Indonesia's diplomatic framing, cultural presentation, institutional strategy, and use of ASEAN as a regional platform. They are not sufficient to measure attitudinal change among Kenyan visitors. For this reason, the claims are limited to public exposure, cultural visibility, and diplomatic communication. Future research should include interviews, visitor surveys, media reception analysis, or social media data from Kenyan audiences.

Indonesia's participation in AFF 2025 illustrates the importance of collaboration among state institutions, diaspora communities, women's organizations, and private actors in gastrodiploamacy. The Embassy provided diplomatic coordination and institutional legitimacy, while Dharma Wanita Persatuan and the Indonesian diaspora contributed cultural knowledge, culinary preparation, and representation. Private companies added commercial visibility and connected cultural promotion with economic interests. This synergy shows that gastrodiploamacy is better understood as a multi-actor diplomatic practice, not merely a state-led activity. Government institutions, citizens abroad, community organizations, and business actors construct national branding.

Indonesia's participation in AFF 2025 should also be understood as regional diplomacy. The ASEAN platform provided Indonesia with a wider diplomatic setting because Indonesian cuisine was presented alongside other Southeast Asian culinary traditions. This arrangement strengthened Indonesia's visibility while situating it within ASEAN's collective identity. The analysis connects national promotion, ASEAN cultural identity, and bilateral engagement with Kenyan audiences within one multilateral festival context.

4. Conclusion

Through the ASEAN Food Festival 2025, Indonesia sought to introduce several iconic national dishes, particularly rendang and chicken satay, as part of its broader gastrodiploamacy strategy in Kenya. This research concludes that Indonesia's participation in the ASEAN Food Festival 2025 in Nairobi represents a form of gastrodiploamacy carried out through a multilateral ASEAN platform in East Africa. The principal finding shows that Indonesian cuisine, particularly rendang and chicken satay, was presented not only as food, but also as a cultural narrative connected to identity, regional diversity, hospitality, and creative economy potential. The presence of *batik*, *wayang*, diaspora participation, Dharma Wanita Persatuan, the Indonesian Embassy in Nairobi, and private-sector actors indicates that Indonesia's culinary diplomacy operated through a multi-actor public diplomacy model. AFF 2025 also allowed Indonesia to promote its national identity while participating in ASEAN's broader collective cultural projection.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in clarifying gastrodiploamacy as a specific instrument within cultural promotion and public diplomacy. The case of AFF 2025 shows that food can function as a medium for communicating national identity. This distinction is important because the study relies on documentary sources. It does not measure audience perception through interviews, surveys, feedback forms, or systematic social media analysis. For this reason, the positive audience response reported in official and media sources should be interpreted as an indication of diplomatic potential, not as direct evidence of improved national image among foreign publics.

Future research should examine Indonesia's gastrodiploamacy in Africa through audience-based methods, including interviews with visitors, surveys of local consumers, analysis of diaspora networks, and social media engagement data. Comparative studies with other ASEAN Food Festival events in Africa, Europe, or Australia would also help explain whether Indonesia's culinary diplomacy produces similar or different patterns across regions. Such studies can

strengthen understanding of how food, regional platforms, and public diplomacy interact in shaping Indonesia's international presence.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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