

## **The Role of Diplomacy and Dialogue in Handling Armed Conflict in Papua Through a Holistic Approach**

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### **Abstract**

*The armed conflict in Papua is a complex and multidimensional problem, rooted in the process of Papua's integration into Indonesia through the Act of Free Choice (PEPERA) in 1969. The conflict involves interconnected political, economic, social and cultural aspects. The security approach adopted by the government, including military operations and the status of the Military Operation Area (DOM), has worsened relations between the government and the Papuan people. In an effort to resolve the conflict, diplomacy and dialog are offered as constructive alternatives. This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method to explore the role of diplomacy and dialogue through a holistic approach, integrating political, economic, social and cultural dimensions in conflict resolution in Papua. The analysis shows that the implementation of Special Autonomy has not been fully effective in addressing the dissatisfaction of the Papuan people. A holistic approach involving various stakeholders is needed to achieve a sustainable solution. Experiences from conflict resolution in other regions, such as Aceh and Mindanao, show the importance of political commitment, inclusive mediation, and the integration of local values in the peace process. Policy recommendations include revitalizing national dialogue, strengthening special autonomy, empowering the local economy, and preserving Papuan culture.*

**Keywords:** *Papua Conflict, Diplomacy, Dialogue, Special Autonomy, Holistic Approach.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The armed conflict in Papua has become a complex and prolonged phenomenon in the history of modern Indonesia. The root causes of this conflict can be traced back to the integration of Papua into the Republic of Indonesia in 1969 through the Act of Free Choice (PEPERA), which remains a source of controversy to this day (Kossay, 2022). Since then, the dynamics of the conflict have evolved, involving various dimensions—including political, economic, social, and cultural aspects—that are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

The escalation of armed conflict in Papua has been marked by the emergence of separatist movements, most notably the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka/OPM) in 1965. This group, along with its various factions, has been involved in a series of violent incidents against security forces and civilians (International Crisis Group, 2012). On the other hand, the security approach adopted by the Indonesian government, including military operations and the imposition of Military Operations Area (DOM) status between 1978 and 1998, has also resulted in numerous human rights violations as reported by international organizations (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

The complexity of the Papua conflict is further exacerbated by development disparities, the marginalization of indigenous communities, the exploitation of natural resources, and migration from outside Papua that has changed the region's demographics (Elmslie, 2017). These factors have contributed to a growing narrative of injustice and alienation among the Papuan population, which in turn fuels separatist sentiments and complicates conflict resolution efforts.

From a socio-economic perspective, the ongoing conflict has hindered development and the well-being of Papuan society. Despite its wealth in natural resources, Papua continues to lag

in human development indicators. Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS, 2020) shows that Papua's Human Development Index (HDI) in 2020 was 60.44, far below the national average of 71.94. This gap reflects the negative impact of the conflict on access to education, healthcare services, and economic opportunities for local communities. A peaceful resolution is necessary to pave the way for inclusive and sustainable development in the region.

Moreover, the conflict in Papua has significant implications for regional stability and Indonesia's image on the international stage. The Papua issue has received attention in international forums, including the United Nations and the Pacific Islands Forum, potentially affecting Indonesia's diplomatic relations with neighboring countries (Rosyidin et al., 2022). Peacefully resolving the Papua conflict would not only strengthen Indonesia's territorial integrity but also enhance its credibility in upholding democratic principles and human rights in the eyes of the international community.

Diplomacy and dialogue play a crucial role in efforts to resolve the conflict in Papua, offering a constructive alternative to the security-dominated approach that has long prevailed. Lederach (1997) emphasizes that sustainable conflict transformation requires the active engagement of various societal layers through inclusive dialogue processes. In the context of Papua, multi-track diplomacy involving government actors, civil society, and international stakeholders can create space for mutual understanding and the identification of solutions acceptable to all parties (Deutsch et al., 2006).

International experience demonstrates the effectiveness of diplomacy and dialogue in resolving complex conflicts. The case of Aceh, for instance, illustrates how international mediation and intensive dialogue between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) led to the 2005 Helsinki Agreement, ending a three-decade-long armed conflict (Aspinall, 2005). Lessons from the Aceh peace process are relevant to Papua, with necessary adjustments to accommodate local conditions and conflict dynamics.

However, the implementation of diplomacy and dialogue in the context of Papua faces its own set of challenges. Rosyidin et al. (2022) identify several major obstacles, including the lack of trust between conflicting parties, the fragmentation of separatist groups, and the complexity of issues requiring negotiation. Thus, a careful and well-planned approach is needed in designing the dialogue process, taking into account the cultural, historical, and psychological aspects that shape the conflict dynamics in Papua.

A holistic approach to addressing the Papua conflict refers to a comprehensive strategy that simultaneously integrates the various dimensions of the conflict. Anas et al. (2024) emphasizes the importance of addressing not only direct violence but also structural and cultural violence that constitute the roots of conflict. In the context of Papua, a holistic approach entails tackling security, political, economic, social, and cultural issues in an integrated manner, acknowledging the complexity and interconnectedness of these factors.

Implementing a holistic approach requires cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Chandra et al. (2024) used the SAT (Structural-Accelerator-Trigger) model to analyze the roots of the conflict; they suggested interventions such as trust building, inclusive economic policies, strengthening media ethics, and law enforcement as part of a holistic strategy. One key aspect of the holistic approach is the recognition and respect for Papua's unique cultural identity.

Ismail (2023) emphasized the importance of meaningful dialogue that respects Papuan perspectives, provides employment opportunities, and protects local culture as the foundation for peace. Integrating local wisdom and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms with modern approaches can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts in the region.

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of diplomacy and dialogue within a holistic approach in addressing armed conflict in Papua. Specifically, it seeks to explore mechanisms that

integrate various conflict dimensions—political, economic, social, and cultural—into a comprehensive and sustainable resolution framework.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a literature review method to explore the role of diplomacy and dialogue in addressing armed conflict in Papua through a holistic approach. Creswell & Creswell (2018) emphasize that a qualitative approach is highly appropriate for exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to social or humanitarian issues. In this context, the literature review is chosen as the primary method due to its ability to comprehensively synthesize and analyze various sources of information relevant to the research topic (Snyder, 2019).

Data collection techniques involve systematic searches in academic databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and Google Scholar, as well as repositories of documents from government institutions and relevant non-governmental organizations. Inclusion criteria include peer-reviewed publications, official reports, and policy documents published between 2015 and 2023, focusing on themes such as diplomacy, dialogue, holistic approaches to conflict resolution, and the dynamics of conflict in Papua.

Data analysis in this study employs a combination of content analysis and comparative analysis, following the principles outlined by Sugiyono (2020) regarding qualitative data analysis, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analytical process begins with thematic coding of the collected literature, followed by identifying emerging patterns and key themes. The conceptual framework of the research is built upon conflict transformation theory by Patterson (2014) and the concept of structural violence by Anas et al. (2024), both of which emphasize the importance of multi-level and multi-dimensional approaches to conflict resolution. Validity and reliability are maintained through data source triangulation and peer debriefing, in accordance with the recommendations of Creswell & Creswell (2018) to enhance credibility in qualitative research.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### **Analysis of the Root Causes of the Armed Conflict in Papua**

The armed conflict in Papua has persisted for decades, with complex and multidimensional root causes. To understand the dynamics of this conflict, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of the historical, political, economic, and socio-cultural factors that have triggered and sustained it.

Historically, the roots of the conflict in Papua can be traced back to the region's integration into the Republic of Indonesia in 1969 through the Act of Free Choice (PEPERA). The legitimacy of this process has been questioned by various parties, which later became the foundation for the separatist movement of the Free Papua Organization (OPM) (Chauvel, 2004). Dissatisfaction with the integration process continues to serve as a narrative used by pro-independence groups to this day, creating ongoing tension between the central government and segments of Papuan society.

From a political perspective, the centralization of power and the lack of adequate political representation for the Papuan people have become significant sources of discontent. Although a Special Autonomy policy was implemented in 2001, it is often considered ineffective in accommodating the aspirations of the local community (McGibbon, 2004). The imbalance in power distribution and decision-making between the central and regional governments continues

to be a source of conflict, with many Papuans feeling their voices are not heard in development and policy processes affecting their region.

Economic factors also play a major role in sustaining the conflict in Papua. Despite being rich in natural resources, including the Grasberg gold and copper mine operated by PT Freeport Indonesia, Papua remains one of the poorest provinces in Indonesia. The stark economic disparity between indigenous Papuans and migrants, and the perception that Papua's wealth benefits outsiders more than the local population, has created a sense of injustice and alienation (Elmslie, 2017). Table 1 compares economic indicators between Papua and the Indonesian national average.

**Table 1. Comparison of Economic Indicators: Papua vs. National Average**

Indicator	Papua	National
Poverty Rate (%)	26.8	9.7
GRDP per Capita (Million Rp)	62.4	59.1
Human Development Index	60.4	72.3

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik (2022)

Socio-cultural aspects also significantly influence the conflict dynamics in Papua. Ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences between Papuans and other Indonesians often lead to misunderstandings and tension. Past transmigration policies changed demographic compositions in parts of Papua, raising concerns among indigenous populations about cultural and identity marginalization (Widjojo et al., 2009). Additionally, differing perceptions of development and modernization between the central government and indigenous Papuans often create friction, particularly in land use and natural resource exploitation.

Another complicating factor is the reported human rights violations in Papua. Security operations conducted by Indonesian forces to suppress separatist movements are often criticized by international human rights organizations for being disproportionate and infringing on civilians' basic rights. This further deteriorates trust between Papuans and the central government, creating a vicious cycle of distrust and violence.

### **Evaluation of Diplomatic and Dialog Efforts**

Numerous diplomatic and dialog efforts have been undertaken by the Indonesian government and other stakeholders to resolve the conflict in Papua. One of the most significant initiatives is the implementation of the Papua Special Autonomy Law in 2001, which aims to give greater authority to local governments in managing internal affairs, including the allocation of special development funds (Resosudarmo et al., 2014). Despite its intent as a comprehensive solution, the policy has faced numerous implementation challenges and criticism.

President Joko Widodo's administration has shown a more open approach to dialogue with Papua. Regular presidential visits and efforts to improve infrastructure and public services are part of a strategy to address development gaps between Papua and other regions. However, critics argue that this approach is overly focused on economic and infrastructure development, while deeper political and human rights issues remain unresolved.

Significant challenges remain in diplomatic and dialogue efforts. A major barrier is the fragmentation among pro-independence Papuan groups, making coherent negotiation processes difficult. Moreover, the presence of armed groups such as the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB), which are not involved in formal dialogue, further complicates conflict resolution efforts. Chauvel (2018) suggests that a more inclusive approach—engaging all parties, including so-called “separatist” groups—might be necessary for sustainable peace, though this would require a major paradigm shift and likely face political resistance.

### **Identifying Challenges and Obstacles in the Diplomacy Process**

Diplomatic and dialog efforts to resolve the conflict in Papua face various complex challenges and obstacles. One of the main issues is the lack of trust among the parties involved. A long history of conflict and human rights abuses has created an environment where building

trust is extremely difficult. According to Cookson et al. (2010), this distrust often hinders sincere and constructive engagement in dialogue.

Differing perceptions of the root causes of the conflict are also significant obstacles. While the Indonesian government tends to view the Papua issue as a matter of economic development and equity, many Papuan activists emphasize political aspects and the right to self-determination (Kaisupy & Maing, 2021). These divergent perspectives often lead to mismatched conflict resolution approaches and hinder negotiation progress.

International factors also influence Papua's diplomatic dynamics. Although officially considered an internal matter by Indonesia, the issue has drawn international attention, especially from Pacific nations and global human rights organizations. Indonesia's defensive stance toward foreign involvement sometimes limits the space for constructive international dialogue and mediation (Chauvel, 2018).

Indonesia's complex governmental structure also poses challenges. Decentralization and special autonomy have created additional bureaucratic layers that can slow decision-making and policy implementation. Coordination among national, provincial, and district/city governments is often ineffective, causing confusion and overlaps in conflict management (Resosudarmo et al., 2014). Armed groups such as TPNPB further complicate diplomacy, as they are not recognized as negotiation partners but remain destabilizing actors.

### **The Role of Stakeholders in the Dialogue Process**

In resolving the conflict in Papua through diplomacy and dialogue, various stakeholders play important and complementary roles. The central government of Indonesia, as the highest authority, plays a crucial role in setting policy directions and providing the legal framework for dialogue. According to Chauvel & Bhakti (2004), the government's recent more inclusive and dialogue-oriented approach has opened new opportunities for constructive negotiations.

Local governments in Papua, at both provincial and district levels, also play a key role as a bridge between the central government and local communities. Their deep understanding of local dynamics and community needs makes them valuable contributors in policy formulation and implementation (Resosudarmo et al., 2014).

Civil society, including local and international NGOs, academic institutions, and religious groups, have a vital role in facilitating dialogue and building bridges between conflicting parties. These organizations often possess credibility and trust from multiple sides, enabling them to act as neutral mediators in negotiations (Widjojo et al., 2009).

Traditional leaders and Papuan community elders also play a key role. They not only represent the voices and aspirations of indigenous communities but also hold significant influence in shaping public opinion and mobilizing support for peace processes. Involving them in dialogue can enhance legitimacy and grassroots acceptance of negotiated outcomes (Kaisupy & Maing, 2021).

### **Strategy for Implementing a Holistic Approach to Conflict Resolution**

A holistic approach to conflict resolution in Papua requires a comprehensive, multidimensional strategy that simultaneously addresses the root causes. One key element of this approach is the integration of security, political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects in every peace initiative. According to Lederach (1997), sustainable conflict transformation requires changes at various levels—from individual to social structures and policy.

Implementing a holistic strategy begins with developing an inclusive framework for dialogue and negotiation. This involves identifying and engaging all relevant stakeholders, including representatives from various Papuan communities, central and regional governments, the private sector, and civil society. Such inclusive forums should be designed to address all dimensions of the conflict—from historical and political issues to economic development and cultural preservation (Cookson et al., 2010).

Another critical element is the application of a human rights-based approach in all Papua-related policies and programs. This includes strengthening human rights protection mechanisms, ensuring fair law enforcement, and addressing past human rights violations through transparent and accountable processes. According to Kaisupy & Maing (2021), such an approach is essential to rebuild trust and improve relations between Papuans and the central government.

An inclusive and sustainable economic strategy is also a key component. This entails developing policies that not only promote growth but also ensure equity and empower local communities. Resosudarmo et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of economic diversification, local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) development, and increased Papuan participation in natural resource management. Table 2 outlines some economic initiatives that could be implemented as part of a holistic strategy.

**Table 2. Economic Initiatives in a Holistic Conflict Resolution Strategy**

Initiative	Objective	Sample Program
Economic Diversification	Reduce dependence on extractive sectors	Development of ecotourism, creative industries
SME Empowerment	Increase local economic participation	Entrepreneurship training, microcredit access
Sustainable Resource Use	Ensure long-term community benefits	Community-company partnerships in forest management

Source: Various sources, compiled by the researcher (2024)

The preservation and strengthening of Papuan cultural identity is also a crucial element in the holistic approach. This involves the recognition and protection of customary rights, including traditional land ownership, as well as the promotion and preservation of local languages and cultural practices. McGibbon (2004) argues that recognition of Papua's cultural uniqueness can reduce alienation and enhance a sense of belonging within the Indonesian state.

### **Integration of Social, Economic, and Cultural Aspects**

Integrating social, economic, and cultural aspects into conflict resolution efforts in Papua is essential for achieving a comprehensive and sustainable solution. This integrated approach recognizes that the conflict cannot be reduced to a single dimension but is the result of complex interactions among various factors.

From a social perspective, the main focus should be on improving access to and the quality of basic services such as education and healthcare. According to the UNDP (2018), Papua's Human Development Index still lags behind the national average. Therefore, investment in human capital development through better education and healthcare facilities, as well as community empowerment programs, is crucial. This not only improves Papuans' quality of life but also builds local capacity for effective participation in development and political processes.

In the economic dimension, more inclusive and community-based approaches are needed. Elmslie (2017) stresses the importance of economic development models that deliver direct benefits to local communities while respecting traditional values. This could involve community-based cooperatives, promotion of local products, and integration of traditional knowledge into agriculture and natural resource management. Moreover, increasing transparency and accountability in managing Special Autonomy funds is crucial to ensure benefits reach the most needy communities.

Cultural aspects play a central role in Papuan identity and dignity. Thus, integrating local cultural values and practices into development policies and governance is essential. Widjojo et al. (2009) suggest that recognizing and respecting customary law, traditional leadership systems, and spiritual practices can bridge the gap between modern governance structures and traditional Papuan social systems. This can also reduce alienation and foster a greater sense of ownership over development processes.

Environmental considerations are also essential in this integrated approach to conflict resolution in Papua. Given Papua's rich biodiversity and natural resources, sustainable environmental management is vital not only for ecosystem conservation but also for long-term economic resilience. Slama & Munro (2015) emphasize the importance of integrating indigenous ecological knowledge with modern conservation practices. This could involve community-based forest management programs, ecotourism, and environmental service payment schemes that provide economic incentives for conservation. Furthermore, involving indigenous communities in planning and implementing large-scale development projects can help mitigate land and resource-related conflicts.

### Case Studies of Successful Diplomacy and Dialogue in Other Conflict Areas

Lessons from other conflict areas can offer valuable insights for resolving the Papua conflict. One relevant example is the peace process in Aceh, Indonesia. After a prolonged conflict, the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) reached a peace agreement through the 2005 Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding. Aspinall (2005) analyzed that the success of this process was based on several key factors, including strong political commitment from both sides, effective international mediation, and a comprehensive approach addressing political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of the conflict.

The peace process in Mindanao, Philippines, also offers relevant insights. The conflict between the Philippine government and Muslim separatist groups lasted for decades before a peace agreement was signed in 2014. According to Herbolzheimer (2015), one key success factor was a gradual and inclusive negotiation approach involving various stakeholders, including civil society and women's groups. This process also included a lengthy transition mechanism, enabling phased implementation and confidence-building among the parties.

**Table 3. Lessons from Conflict Resolution Case Studies**

Case Study	Key Lessons	Relevance for Papua
Aceh, Indonesia	International mediation, special autonomy	Applicable model for Papua
Mindanao, Philippines	Inclusive approach, gradual implementation	Civil society engagement, phased implementation process
Case Study	Key Lessons	Relevance for Papua

Source: Aspinall (2005); Herbolzheimer (2015)

Although each conflict has unique characteristics, these case studies highlight the importance of a comprehensive, inclusive, and locally sensitive approach in conflict resolution. For Papua, this could involve a combination of internationally facilitated dialogue, strengthened special autonomy mechanisms, active civil society involvement, and the integration of traditional practices into formal peace processes.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of diplomacy and dialogue within a holistic approach to addressing the armed conflict in Papua reveals that the conflict's root causes are deeply multidimensional, encompassing historical grievances from the 1969 Act of Free Choice (PEPERA), persistent political marginalization, stark economic disparities despite abundant natural resources, and cultural alienation of indigenous Papuans. The research demonstrates that Papua's Human Development Index of 60.44 significantly lags behind the national average of 71.94, while the poverty rate of 26.8% far exceeds the national rate of 9.7%, highlighting structural inequalities that fuel the conflict. Existing diplomatic efforts, including the 2001 Special Autonomy Law and development-focused approaches, have achieved limited success due to their narrow focus on economic development while neglecting deeper political and human rights issues, compounded

by fragmentation among pro-independence groups and exclusion of armed factions from formal dialogue processes.

The research confirms that sustainable conflict resolution in Papua requires a comprehensive, multidimensional strategy that simultaneously addresses security, political, economic, and socio-cultural factors. A truly holistic approach must integrate meaningful political dialogue involving all stakeholders, inclusive economic policies ensuring natural resource wealth benefits local communities, investment in human capital development, recognition and protection of Papuan cultural identity and customary rights, and implementation of a rights-based approach in all policies. The successful peace processes in Aceh and Mindanao demonstrate that inclusive approaches involving civil society, traditional leaders, and previously excluded groups are essential for achieving lasting peace, requiring the establishment of comprehensive dialogue forums, strengthened Special Autonomy implementation, trust-building mechanisms, and integration of traditional conflict resolution practices with contemporary diplomatic approaches.

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