

# Hope in Tuvalu's climate change response: Falepili to Digital Nation

by Venu Edwin Pedro and Jess Marinaccio  
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Consultations on the Digital Nation in Funafuti, Tuvalu, January 2026  
*Photo Credit: Digital Nation Tuvalu*

News articles about Tuvalu consistently **depict the country** from the perspective of climate loss. For example, media representations of Tuvalu's Falepili Union Treaty with Australia have transformed a human mobility pathway into a narrative of climate migration inextricably linked to the loss of Tuvalu's land. The treaty, established in 2023, **provides a pathway** where, each year, 280 Tuvaluans gain permanent residence visas for Australia. No specific **justification or reason** is needed to access the visas.

In 2025, a **ballot** was held to determine the first group of Tuvaluans who would obtain the visas. As these Tuvaluans began shifting to Australia, **headlines invited** readers to "Meet the first climate migrants leaving sinking Tuvalu". Although prominent Tuvaluans indicated that **these headlines were inaccurate**, this media portrayal has persisted. Tuvalu has long inspired international interest as a symbol of impending climate doom with **the expectation** that only if Tuvalu disappears will the truth of the climate crisis finally be confirmed for the global community.

This type of reporting focuses on the global failure to mitigate climate change and, out of a sense of failure, accepts that Tuvalu will inevitably be lost. However, **research suggests** that hope is a critical aspect of the ongoing work of climate adaptation that must be undertaken to protect the planet and countries like Tuvalu. For Tuvaluans to continue to live in Tuvalu and for the international community to take Tuvalu seriously as a site for climate action, global perceptions must shift from an emphasis on loss to a focus on hope, which can drive investment, innovation and collective resolve to address rising seas.

This narrative of Tuvalu as a place of climate loss is likewise evident in media portrayals of Tuvalu's Digital Nation, a project in which we are both employed. Under Tuvalu's **Future Now Project**, the Digital Nation does three things: (1) preserve digitised Tuvaluan cultural items and practices in a **Digital Ark**; (2) create a digital twin of Tuvalu's land territory; and (3) **digitise all government services** to ensure improved access for Tuvaluans while also allowing the government to

function virtually in a worst-case scenario where people are forced to leave Tuvalu because of climate change.

Perhaps influenced by early official messaging on the Digital Nation, which **emphasised Tuvalu's eventual disappearance**, domestic and international discussions of the project have centred on loss — the loss of land and hope. The Digital Nation has been **referred to by media and commentators** as “a cry for help” and a “retreat to the virtual as a response to loss”. Domestically, **it has been noted** that the “creation of a digital nation ... implies that Tuvalu will disappear because of sea level rise”.

However, for the authors, the Digital Nation is about **creativity and hope**; it extends beyond simply a reaction to the climate crisis and rejects the inevitability of climate loss. The Digital Nation **represents the hope** that Tuvalu can prepare for extreme climate impacts, with its culture and government services fully protected in the face of rising sea levels and other disasters. But, perhaps more importantly, the Digital Nation represents the hope and the will to create a Tuvalu that is more convenient for Tuvaluans who are currently and will in the future continue to live in Tuvalu. Along with Tuvalu's **submarine cable**, the Digital Nation is an investment in improved connectivity and e-services that can help citizens buy inter-island boat tickets, renew passports or obtain marriage certificates online rather than travelling great distances to do so in person. It is a story of *staying* in Tuvalu — not leaving it.

From a cultural perspective too, the Digital Nation is focused on hope. As a proud son of Tuvalu, I (Venu) have always wanted to give back to my homeland. Growing up, I saw changes in our way of life where our culture was affected by external influences — climate change continues to be one of these influences. I used to volunteer in a mangrove-planting project to protect our land, trying to address external threats. To me, the Digital Nation is a new way to fight, adapt and protect our identity and sovereignty. It is about taking control, shaping our future and keeping our roots alive. External influences will continue to affect Tuvalu whether we like it or not but, to be unique in the world, you need to know your roots, and that is what defines us as Tuvaluans. The Digital Nation connects us to our Tuvaluan heritage, and it has allowed me to contribute to my homeland. As someone who does not want to migrate, the project is a beacon of hope and a way for Tuvaluans to solve the problems they face without relying on others.



Consultations on the Digital Nation in Funafuti, Tuvalu, November 2025 (Digital Nation Tuvalu)

As part of awareness-raising on the Digital Nation, we have interviewed approximately 30 Tuvaluans about the project, and they often feel the same way. They hope to use the project to digitally safeguard Tuvaluan culture for the future. One woman we spoke with wanted to preserve niu (coconut trees) and coconut products because these materials link to the ancestors and traditional crafts. A youth we interviewed sought to preserve knowledge about weaving pulou (local hats), which is threatened not simply by climate change but also because this knowledge is not actively used in Tuvalu. The Digital Nation seeks to address factors impeding Tuvalu's cultural preservation so Tuvaluans do not lose touch with their heritage. It is about being proactive in the face of climate change and other influences and preserving culture for a better tomorrow.

It is not just the Digital Nation. There are numerous initiatives in Tuvalu that are linked to climate change and motivated by hope. Projects on land reclamation, coral restoration and cultural and language documentation are built on hope — the hope of saving Tuvalu, the hope of giving Tuvaluans more space, the hope of maintaining Tuvalu's clean waters, and the hope that “sinking Tuvalu” will someday be known again simply as “Tuvalu”. We call on media outlets to recast narratives about Tuvalu, focusing on this hope rather than inevitable loss.

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Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/hope-in-tuvalu-climate-change-response-from-falepili-to-digital-nation-20260220/>