



Tuvalu: Becoming a Digital Country¹

Tuvalu is a small Pacific nation. At the current pace of rising sea levels, it may be submerged in a matter of decades. It may be the first nation in the world to be lost to climate change. Apart from the human displacement issues that this situation poses, Tuvalu also faces another problem- if its land submerges, it may no longer be considered a country. Sea water is already leaching through the soil, killing crops and spoiling drinking water. As sea levels rise, a broader question emerges- can a country exist without land?

Tuvalu is preparing to become the world's first "digital nation." It would digitally recreate its land, archive its rich history and culture, and digitise all governmental functions. This digital transformation will allow Tuvalu to retain its identity and continue to function as a state, even after its physical land is gone. A permanent digital replica of Tuvalu – a new "defined territory" – will help in continuing to be recognised as sovereign under international law. Tuvalu has already begun taking steps towards its digital transition and notably amended its constitution to incorporate a new, unique and globally unprecedented definition of statehood. The amendment pronounces that the State of Tuvalu shall remain in perpetuity in the future, regardless of the impacts of climate change or other causes resulting in loss of its territory. 18 countries of the Pacific Island Forum recognise Tuvalu's digital sovereignty. 25 countries in total have recognised its digital sovereignty so far.²

Based on international law, there are four requirements to be considered a country:

1. **Defined Territory:** A specific, identifiable area of land or sea.
2. **Permanent Population:** Residents must live on the territory on a long-term basis. There is no minimum population requirement.
3. **Government:** There must be a functioning political authority which exercises control, imposes laws and provides public services on the territory.
4. **Capacity to Enter into Relations with other Sovereign States:** The entity must have the ability to engage in diplomatic relations, and interact with other sovereign countries. A territory is considered a country when it is recognised as sovereign by other countries

¹ The Economist Foundation. Topical Talk. Tuvalu: a digital country? <https://talk.economistfoundation.org/resources/tuvalu-a-digital-country/>

² About Tuvalu. <https://www.tuvalu.tv/about>

globally. Limited international recognition of sovereignty affects the ability to participate in the global community.

Questions

1. What is a “digital nation”?
2. Would Tuvalu still be a country?