



## **TUVALU’S FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY: CONFRONTING THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND THE COUNTRY’S EXISTENTIAL THREAT**

Aninda Nuraygy Hajjisa <sup>1\*</sup>, Charisya<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> International Relations; University of Gadjah Mada; Indonesia

\*email: anindanuraygyhajjisa@mail.ugm.ac.id

### ***Abstract***

This study analyzes Tuvalu’s foreign policy as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) facing the existential threat of the climate crisis. Using Constructivism, Small State Theory, and Climate Diplomacy, this qualitative case study examines COP26–COP29 (2021–2024) documents to explore how Tuvalu transforms its “most vulnerable state” identity into normative bargaining power. The findings show that Tuvalu leverages moral pressure, symbolic acts, identity framing, and the AOSIS network to (1) secure the 1.5°C target in the Paris Agreement, (2) advocate for the Loss and Damage Fund, and (3) push for a US\$300 billion annual increase in global climate finance through the New Collective Quantified Goal. Tuvalu’s strategy illustrates how small states, despite limited resources, can shape global norms and policy outcomes. This study contributes to international relations scholarship by highlighting the role of identity, norms, and moral authority in contemporary climate diplomacy.

**Keywords:** climate change, climate diplomacy, constructivism, foreign policy, Tuvalu

## Introduction

Environmental issues have long been an issue that gets special attention, but to this day, climate change is still one of the serious threats to global security. All countries are affected by the climate crisis, but the extent of the impact varies. Developed countries have a greater capacity and ability to adapt to climate change than developing countries. Therefore, developing countries rely heavily on developed countries for development assistance to adapt to increasingly extreme climate change.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are small countries surrounded by oceans. SIDS faces the most severe threats from climate change. Being at the forefront of this crisis, SIDS are most threatened because sea level rise and extreme weather can threaten their survival (Petzold & Magnan, 2019). Ironically, SIDS countries collectively account for less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet their climate impacts are enormous (UNDP, 2024). Sea level rise, in particular, poses a significant threat, with some islands in danger of being completely submerged due to coastal erosion (Petzold & Magnan, 2019). This threat is not a projection of the distant future but a reality already beginning to be perceived today. Phenomena such as coastal flooding and major storms have damaged local infrastructure, disrupted livelihoods, and forced island-dwelling communities to relocate to safer places (United Nations, 2024).

One of the SIDS is Tuvalu, a small coral atoll island nation located in the Pacific. Geographically, Tuvalu consists of nine low-lying islands. The country has only an area of 26 km<sup>2</sup>, with as many as 11,810 people living in very hostile climatic conditions (Islam et al., 2023). On average, the land is only about 1-2 meters above sea level, so a slight rise in sea level will significantly impact the region. For countries like Tuvalu, climate change is seen as an existential rather than an environmental issue. If their homeland sinks or is no longer habitable, their existence as a sovereign state will be truly at stake.

Therefore, Tuvalu and other atolls began to look for innovative solutions to ensure the sustainability of their national identity. One of the plans conceived by Tuvalu to defend its sovereignty is to use metaverse technology to make Tuvalu the first digital country. Through the official website “Tuvalu.tv”, the Government of Tuvalu informed the international community that its country would protect and digitally archive its national territories according to their geographical coordinates, culture, language, and

status (Rothe et al., 2024). This shows how severe this crisis is, a national security threat to the country. Tuvalu and other SIDS are feeling the most serious impacts but do not have enough capacity and resources to adapt to this crisis.

The climate crisis threatens people's livelihoods and undermines development. However, it also raises critical geopolitical questions that touch the core of international politics: sovereignty, territorial integration, and access to resources. The climate crisis potentially significantly impacts society, undermines human security, and increases the risk of conflict and political instability. The climate crisis is becoming an enormous challenge and has enormous geopolitical consequences (Werrell & Femia, 2016). A stronger strategy for foreign policy in international climate policy is needed, one of which is through climate diplomacy.

SIDS has always sought to voice this grave threat through international forums. Tuvalu seeks to meet its national interest for development assistance through climate diplomacy at international forums. The Conference of the Parties (COP) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an important diplomatic arena for Tuvalu and SIDS countries to voice their climate challenges and adaptation development needs. The COP meeting becomes a strategic space for SIDS to encourage the achievement of concrete results and actions. Through diplomatic alliances such as the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), these countries work collectively to influence the negotiating agenda and ensure that their survival needs are recognized as an integral part of global climate action (Dreyer, 2025).

For Tuvalu, foreign diplomacy is an attempt at their survival as a nation. Foreign diplomacy is an essential strategy to maintain the country's sustainability physically, socially, and politically amid a climate crisis that threatens its existence. With the region particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels, extreme weather changes, and other environmental impacts, diplomacy is becoming a key means for the Tuvalu government to fight for its interests on a global level. Through its participation in global climate negotiations, Tuvalu not only seeks to draw the attention of the international community to the existential threat they pose but also urges developed countries to take responsibility for their historical contribution to climate change.

There are several studies that explain how Tuvalu, as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), transformed its material limitations into normative bargaining power at

the Conference of the Parties (COP) under the UNFCCC. First, Saddington (2024) shows the practice of embodied climate diplomacy where the “bodies” of diplomats, children, coastal residents, and ministers are used as a performative medium to visualize climate change risks. However, this practice tends to stop at the level of symbolic representation without clearly associating it with concrete policy outputs. Second, Saddington & Hills (2023) incorporate an emotional dimension by examining how the sense of “humiliation” due to the label “sinking islands” processed Tuvalu into a “reverse shaming” strategy to suppress large emitters. Third, Jaschik (2014), through an agenda-setting lens, shows that small states can “disrupt” the dominance of large states by exploiting moral authority. However, Jaschik, in his writing, has not traced the link between the influence of discourse and the acquisition of funding or legal protection. Fourth, Rasheed (2019) maps the collectivity of SIDS in building vulnerability norms but does not delve into Tuvalu's case individually or its latest visual diplomacy.

The four studies presented previously affirmed the position of their respective writings on the importance of symbolic performance in the advocacy process and policy responses, especially in the context of moral pressure on state actors. Symbolic performance is a representative action intended to create a moral and political impact on the public and state institutions. However, the four studies tend to stop at the symbolic aspect itself without systematically parsing how moral pressure mediated through symbolic performance is converted into real policy outcomes. Based on this background, this study asks the central question: What is Tuvalu's foreign policy strategy in maintaining its existence as a SIDS country amid the climate change crisis through the COP within the UNFCCC framework? This question explores how Tuvalu's climate diplomacy strategy is being used to obtain development assistance and ensure its country's existential security. This study engages with a critical and timely issue in Pacific studies, foregrounding Tuvalu's foreign policy responses to the climate crisis as an existential challenge. In doing so, it not only deepens the scholarly understanding of small island states' agency in international relations but also contributes to the broader constructivist literature by examining how identity, norms, and discourse shape Tuvalu's diplomatic strategies in confronting global environmental threats.

## **Methodology**

### ***Constructivism in International Relations***

This study uses the perspective of Constructivism in international relations to understand Tuvalu's foreign policy strategy. Constructivism in international relations emphasizes the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping the interests and behavior of states, rather than assuming that material power or economic capabilities alone determine outcomes (Wendt, 1992). Constructivists argue that state interests are not fixed but socially constructed through interaction and shared understandings among actors. In this perspective, international relations are shaped by social norms, collective identities, and the meanings attached to state behavior, which influence both foreign policy goals and global structural change (Rasheed, 2019).

Constructivist approaches to foreign policy highlight the centrality of norms and ideas embedded in a nation's collective consciousness and intertwined with its national identity. From this perspective, the norms and ideas that inform foreign policy are best understood as manifestations of that identity. Accordingly, national identity can be conceptualized as a foundational worldview that integrates the nation's desired self-image and the values it seeks to represent. An intermediate stratum of ideas, consisting of broad attitudes and interpretive frames, links these core identity commitments to the causal beliefs that guide specific policy choices (Erbas, 2022). From a constructivist standpoint, small states and vulnerable actors can exercise influence in global politics not through material power, but by mobilizing norms and identities that resonate within international society. Through this lens, states that are materially weak can gain visibility, legitimacy, and moral authority by framing themselves within broader discourses on global challenges, such as climate change. Constructivism therefore highlights how international negotiations are not only arenas of material bargaining but also spaces where meanings, identities, and normative claims are contested and institutionalized.

### ***The Concept of Climate Diplomacy***

Climate diplomacy has become an essential instrument for facilitating international cooperation on the multifaceted challenges of climate change. At this pivotal moment, it

offers substantial prospects for advancing a sustainable future, contingent on steadfast commitments to equity, innovation, and collaboration in addressing persistent obstacles. (Alam et al., 2024). Climate Diplomacy refers to the use of diplomatic strategies, negotiations, and alliances to address global climate change while simultaneously advancing foreign policy objectives. It highlights how environmental issues, particularly climate change, have become central to international relations, shaping both cooperation and conflict among states. Climate diplomacy is not limited to technical or environmental concerns but also involves broader issues of justice, equity, and responsibility in the distribution of climate burdens and responses (Corneloup & Mol, 2014).

Within this concept, states often act as moral voices or “moral conscience” in international negotiations. By invoking principles of fairness and shared responsibility, they seek to shape global norms and mobilize collective action. Key elements of climate diplomacy include advocacy for the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), the establishment of ambitious global temperature targets, and the development of mechanisms for adaptation, finance, and loss and damage. In this sense, climate diplomacy illustrates how international relations increasingly revolve around normative debates and identity-based claims, making it closely aligned with the insights of Constructivism.

### ***Small State Theory***

Small State Theory focuses on the position of states with limited material capacity in the international system. Historically, small states were often regarded as “passive pawns” in global politics, constrained by their lack of military and economic power. However, contemporary scholarship emphasizes that small states can also act as “active players” that pursue their national interests through alternative strategies (Novikova, 2022). These strategies often involve diplomatic agility, coalition-building, and the mobilization of international norms to extend their influence beyond material limitations.

A central insight of Small State Theory is that small states can gain leverage by framing themselves within narratives of vulnerability, justice, or moral responsibility, thereby creating claims that are difficult for larger powers to dismiss. In this sense,

small states are often described as norm entrepreneurs, actors that introduce and promote new ideas, values, or practices that can eventually solidify into international norms. This theoretical perspective highlights how small states can participate meaningfully in global governance, including in areas such as climate diplomacy, by exercising influence disproportionate to their size and resources.

### ***Research Method***

#### ***Design***

This study uses qualitative methods with Case Study-based data collection techniques to analyze Tuvalu's foreign policy strategy in dealing with the climate change crisis that threatens the country's sustainability. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows researchers to analyze the dynamics of the diplomatic process as Tuvalu's efforts to maintain its existence as part of Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

#### ***Unit of Analysis***

This study focuses on Tuvalu's foreign policy actions for analysis. By zeroing in on Tuvalu's state-level strategy, the study examines how a small island nation formulates and implements foreign policy under extreme vulnerability. The unit of analysis is therefore the state's climate-focused foreign policy behavior, which includes participation in international forums, alliance-building efforts, and advocacy for climate action. Defining the case at this level allows this research to systematically investigate Tuvalu's external actions and positioning on climate change, ensuring that data collection and analysis remain centered on the foreign policy phenomenon of interest.

#### ***Data Collection***

The Data in this study will be collected through the analysis of documents, annual reports of the COP and UNFCCC, journal articles, Tuvalu government policies, and other official publications. The document analysis included Tuvalu's official speeches and public statements (such as speeches at the UN/COP), policy documents (UNFCCC reports, AOSIS documentation, International Agency/NGO reports), and international media articles. These documents were chosen to explore how climate justice norms and existential narratives are structured and disseminated by Tuvalu. The scope of this study



covers the period from 2021 to 2024, with the primary objective of understanding how the strategic foreign policy measures taken by Tuvalu to achieve the goals of diplomacy as a country affected by the climate change crisis.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data analysis followed three stages: first, data collection related to Tuvalu's foreign policy and diplomatic strategy on climate change. After that, data reduction distilled this corpus to material directly bearing on foreign-policy choices about climate risk and focusing on Tuvalu's strategy in Conferences of Parties (COP), filtering out tangential content while summarizing key episodes, actors, and instruments; third, data presentation organized the distilled evidence in timelines to visualize patterns across domestic texts and diplomatic arenas; finally, drawing conclusions triangulated those patterns through constructivism, small state theory, and the concept of climate diplomacy, yielding an integrated account of Tuvalu's strategy.

### ***Trustworthiness***

Trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation across official statements, international reports, and scholarship, supplemented by peer debriefing. Transferability was supported by a thick description of Tuvalu's geopolitical and policy context to enable judgements about applicability to other small island settings. Dependability was ensured via an audit trail documenting data collection and analytic decisions, with consistent procedures and logged revisions. Confirmability was advanced through reflexive journaling and explicit linkage of interpretations to quotations and documents, with the audit trail and peer feedback providing external checks, yielding rigorously grounded findings.

### **Result and Discussion**

Tuvalu has converted its designation as the "most vulnerable" to climate change into a source of normative leverage in global forums. Its approach centers on moral suasion, carefully staged symbolic diplomacy, the strategic framing of a climate-victim identity, and coalition building through AOSIS, all of which amplify Tuvalu's voice relative to



its material capacity. Despite enduring bargaining constraints, this strategy has yielded tangible outcomes, including the establishment of a Loss and Damage Fund for affected countries and the elevation of global climate-finance ambition toward a New Collective Quantified Goal of roughly US\$300 billion annually. Tuvalu's experience thus demonstrates how a microstate can shape international norms and policy trajectories by mobilizing identity, narrative, and networks rather than material power.

*Tuvalu's foreign policy strategy in the face of the Climate Change Crisis: Tuvalu's diplomatic steps in an international Forum*

About three-quarters of the population in SIDS countries live in coastal zones, making them particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels and extreme weather. Various studies warn that without adequate mitigation and adaptation actions, many areas in SIDS will become uninhabitable even long before the land is completely submerged (IPCC, 2022). An analysis by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggests that relatively small average sea level rise could drastically increase the frequency of extreme flooding, so many populated areas in SIDS may be abandoned even before the end of the century.

Tuvalu, a country with small coral atoll islands in the Pacific, is experiencing significant impacts due to the climate crisis. Tuvalu comprises nine low-lying islands whose average landmass is only about 1-2 meters above sea level, so even a slight rise in seawater will seriously affect residents. The IPCC notes that Tuvalu's capital city, Funafuti, on Fongafale Island, is at risk of becoming uninhabitable and continues to rise sharply in line with a high emissions scenario that has the potential to become "high to very high" by 2090 if global warming is not controlled (IPCC, 2022). Rising sea levels have exacerbated coastal erosion and saltwater intrusion into the soil. As a result, freshwater wells are threatened by increasing salinity, and subsistence farms are increasingly difficult to rely on because the soil absorbs seawater.

The "king tides" phenomenon routinely floods residential areas in Tuvalu by inundating homes, schools, and critical infrastructure. The impact of tropical cyclones and hurricanes also worsens by eroding coastlines and damaging coastal protective coral reefs. Tuvalu's population of about 11.000 continues to see its territory periodically submerged by a combination of storms and rising seas. This raises real concerns that

Tuvalu could become uninhabitable in the coming years, threatening its statehood. Thus, climate change for Tuvalu and other SIDS countries is not only an environmental issue but a direct threat to the physical existence and sustainability of these countries and an existential issue that threatens the existence of the nation itself and its existence as a sovereign state that is really at stake.

Faced with limited domestic capacity, Tuvalu is taking practical steps to speak out about the impact of the climate crisis. Diplomacy and international cooperation are the main efforts taken by SIDS countries, especially Tuvalu, to maintain their existence. SIDS countries also collectively speak out through global forums such as AOSIS to fight for climate action. For Tuvalu, foreign diplomacy is not just about policy, but about survival as a nation. The Government of Tuvalu actively seeks international support in various international forums to push for more ambitious global emissions reductions and adaptation assistance for the Atoll island states. Tuvalu is very vocal in international forums, one of which is in the COP forum by the UNFCCC. Climate Diplomacy by Tuvalu is rooted in the reality that the country will face a bleak future without global action to control emissions and provide adaptation support.

Since 2002, Tuvalu and Kiribati have been litigating at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against the United States and Australia for climate damages, setting a precedent that small countries can pressure large emitters through legal instruments (Jacobs, 2005). Furthermore, at the SIDS summit in Samoa in 2014, Tuvalu, together with Kiribati, Maldives, RMI, and Tokelau, formed the Coalition of Atoll Nations on Climate Change (CANCC) to increase the collective bargaining power of low atolls in the global forum (SPREP, 2014). In 2017, Fiji's Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama publicly offered permanent resettlement to the citizens of Tuvalu and Kiribati if the effects of the climate crisis get worse and are unavoidable (Radio New Zealand, 2017). This struggle continues as the climate change crisis intensifies in affected countries, especially Tuvalu.

Several other diplomatic efforts have been undertaken by Tuvalu, such as leading the "1.5 to Stay Alive " campaign within the framework of AOSIS, which resulted in the inclusion of a 1.5 C warming limit in the 2015 Paris Agreement (Benjamin & Thomas, 2016). In addition, Tuvalu has consistently pressed the UNFCCC process to establish and fund Loss and Damage mechanisms for vulnerable countries. It has also

pushed for the UN General Assembly resolution 2023, which asks the International Court of Justice to provide an advisory opinion on the countries' obligations to the climate crisis and make international law a new arena for climate struggle (UN Press, 2023). One of Tuvalu's most notable climate diplomacy efforts was Foreign Minister Simon Kofe's symbolic act at COP 26, when he delivered an official speech while standing knee-deep in the sea, visually demonstrating the real threat of rising sea levels facing his country. The action is an important moment that clarifies Tuvalu's message about the urgency of the climate crisis to the international community while affirming that the COP forum is a crucial arena in fighting for the future of SIDS countries, especially Tuvalu.

In the context of Tuvalu's foreign policy strategy, the theory of Constructivism explains how Tuvalu establishes an identity as a small island nation (SIDS) that is highly vulnerable to climate change with normative power. This identity is then utilized in international interactions to obtain development assistance, global attention, international support, and legitimacy. According to Rasheed (2019), ideas related to small island vulnerabilities have created a shared understanding between climate negotiators about their conditions, whereby “ideas can have the causal power to shape countries' foreign policy goals and influence structural change. In other words, the related notion of “vulnerable countries” has become part of a social construct in climate negotiations that affects the way other countries respond to Tuvalu's interests as one of the SIDS countries. Through its identity as a “most vulnerable country” and a “victim of climate change,” Tuvalu seeks to hold a great nation morally accountable. Tuvalu seeks to mitigate the effects of climate change by having a dialogue within the COP within the UNFCCC through an identity-based diplomacy strategy as a victim country, not merely because of economic or military strength. By framing itself as the “most vulnerable country” and the “victim of climate change,” Tuvalu actively encourages the moral responsibility of major countries through the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) (Leong, 2015). This identity is the basis for the legitimacy of their demands and a tool for shaping international norms on climate justice.

By taking advantage of the moral high ground, Tuvalu has consistently asserted that it contributes minimal emissions and is the most affected party. These ethical claims are complex for major powers to refute, as they contain strong arguments about

global justice and moral responsibility. By combining these two strategic roles, namely moral authority as a victim of climate change and a pioneer of normative ideas, Tuvalu was able to significantly increase its diplomatic influence on the international stage in line with the principles of Constructivism in building a state identity as well as a narrative in climate diplomacy.

### *Tuvalu's diplomatic strategy at COP26-COP29*

The Conference of Parties (COP) is the main decision-making body in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In general, the global climate action process will be based on decisions made at the COP annual meeting, where state parties that have ratified the convention gather to evaluate the convention's implementation and encourage strategic decision-making to face the challenge of climate change (Matemilola, 2020). The COP is responsible for reviewing the parties' commitments, facilitating the exchange of information, evaluating the convention's implementation, reviewing, ratifying, and publishing reports, and providing policy recommendations (UNFCCC, 2007). At this forum, Tuvalu seeks to fulfill its national interest in obtaining climate justice and international assistance to face the environmental and existential crisis that threatens the country.

### *COP 26 (Glasgow, October 31 - November 12, 2021)*

At COP26, which takes place in Glasgow in 2021, Tuvalu attracted worldwide attention through the dramatic action of Foreign Minister Simon Kofe, who delivered a speech via video while standing in the middle of the sea with knee-deep water. Footage of a video of Kofe wearing a formal suit on a podium submerged in the water went viral in the media, providing a real visualization that "we are sinking," the country of Tuvalu will sink if the world does not act (Reuters, 2021). Kofe explained the video by stating, "The statement juxtaposes the COP26 setting with the real-life situations faced in Tuvalu due to the impacts of climate change and sea level rise and highlights the bold action Tuvalu is taking to address the very pressing issues of human mobility under climate change." Through these statements and symbolizations, Tuvalu builds moral pressure, and the world is reminded that negotiations in the conference room have real consequences for a country in danger of drowning (Saddington, 2024). Through this

visualization, Tuvalu presents itself as the most vulnerable country and as a decisive factor in pushing for rapid and effective global action to protect its country's life from the effects of climate change.

At the 26th COP, the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Kausea Natano, delivered a touching and urgent message to world leaders. PM Natano expressed the situation his country is facing, emphasizing that "40 percent of the atoll nation's capital, Funafuti, [is] already below sea level at high tide." This grim reality impresses world leaders who are gathering in international forums. PM Natano also wore a scarf adorned with colors symbolizing global warming. PM Natano used this powerful symbol to underline further the urgency of the state of Tuvalu (SPREP, 2021).

Further stressing the urgency, PM Natano called on world leaders to hammer out international agreements: "Mr. President, we must conclude negotiations on the Paris Rulebook and safeguard the integrity of the Paris Agreement. We must urgently call on major emitters to take stronger climate action." He has emphatically stressed his demand for the largest emitters to be held accountable. PM Natano, in particular, also highlighted the limitation of warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the need for large-scale climate finance, and the creation of new funding lines to address losses and damage caused by climate change (Government of Tuvalu, 2021). PM Natano's speech was not only a call for climate justice but also emphasized the grim reality of Tuvalu's already urgent existential crisis, giving a potent reminder that for some countries, the climate emergency is not a future threat but a disaster from now on.

### ***COP 27 (Sharm el-Sheikh, 6-20 November 2022)***

COP27 in November 2022, Tuvalu re-framed the pressing issue of climate change through a narrative of its vulnerability, resilience, and demands for international action. Tuvalu also took the normative initiative by becoming a country that also called for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. This initiative calls for a new international agreement to end expansion and phase out the use of fossil fuels (oil, gas, and coal), the main causes of the climate crisis (Newell & Simms, 2019). Citing scientific reports and calling for swift action to stop the proliferation of fossil fuels, Prime Minister Natano pointed to Tuvalu's identity as a country that supports transformative environmental change.

PM Natano described the threat facing Tuvalu by stating, "The warming seas are starting to swallow our lands, inch by inch. But the world's addiction to oil, gas, and coal cannot sink our dreams under the waves" (Smyth, 2022). This message combines identity as a victim state with the firmness of national identity by emphasizing its unsinkable dream while calling for a new norm to phase out fossil fuels. PM Natano also expressed a growing distrust in international climate efforts, saying, "Tuvalu is quickly losing faith in this institution to deliver a sustainable outcome that does not leave island communities and many of us behind" (Government of Tuvalu, 2022). This statement by Tuvalu exerts moral pressure so that international institutions can meet the needs of their country. At COP27, Tuvalu and AOSIS successfully championed the establishment of a Loss and Damage Fund, a historical breakthrough born of decades of moral insistence. An international funding mechanism is set up to help developing countries that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, especially those that cannot be avoided or adapted.

#### *COP 28 (Dubai, 30 November-12 December 2023)*

During COP28 held in Dubai on November 30 - December 12, 2023, Tuvalu continued its climate diplomacy by emphasizing the implementation of commitments and increasing ambition to address the climate crisis. Tuvalu re-framed its national identity as the most affected by firmly stating, "Climate Change is the greatest threat to its existence." Tuvalu demonstrated its proactive steps by explaining various climate initiatives, such as the Rising Nations Initiative and the Long-Term Adaptation Plan, which were carried out to maintain its sovereignty, culture, and identity. PM Natano emphasized, "We must be forward-looking and proactive so that we preserve and maintain our land, statehood, sovereignty, culture, and identity" (Government of Tuvalu, 2023). This statement shows the identity formed by Tuvalu not only as a victim country that waits but also actively seeks solutions and support for development assistance.

Tuvalu, along with Vanuatu and other small island states, is again leading the push for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, which aims to end the expansion of oil, gas, and coal production and align global production levels with the Paris Agreement target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels

(Rafalowicz, 2023). Tuvalu's involvement in this initiative underscores the country's proactive stance in global climate governance, advocating for bold climate action and seeking equitable solutions to protect its vulnerable populations.

#### ***COP 29 (Baku, 11-22 November 2024)***

At COP29 in Baku, 11-22 November 2024, Tuvalu Prime Minister Hon. Feleti P. Teo expressed the urgency for a fair and equitable global approach to addressing climate change, with a focus on its vulnerability as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). He began his speech by highlighting the seriousness of the situation facing Tuvalu, one of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, with more than 50% of its territory expected to be regularly inundated by tidal flooding by 2050 (Government of Tuvalu, 2024). Tuvalu and small island states are entering a new era of negotiations emphasizing the implementation of agreed promises. At COP29, high hopes are placed on the completion of the operationalization of the Loss and Damage fund and the agreement on the "New Collective Quantified Goal" of climate finance that will replace the \$100 billion per year target with \$300 billion per year by 2035 (UNFCCC, 2024).

In his speech, PM Teo called on world leaders to accelerate the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies and to finalize discussions on the NCQG, which must provide sufficient funds to support developing countries, especially the most vulnerable ones such as Tuvalu. PM Teo stated, "A situation globally caused must also have a globally just and equitable solution, with the special needs and circumstances of Small Island States and Least Developed Countries who are suffering the worst impacts of climate change fully recognized." (Government of Tuvalu, 2024), which emphasizes the urgency of access to fair and faster climate finance to the needs of countries most affected by the climate crisis.

#### ***Moral pressure, Norm Formation, and Identity Framing***

Tuvalu's strategy shows how identity, norms, and moral aspects are used as strategic instruments in the foreign policy of this small country. First, moral pressure is the primary weapon in Tuvalu's diplomacy. Without relying on military or economic power, Tuvalu uses moral arguments to convince and urge the largest emitting countries to take responsibility (Corneloup & Mol, 2014). By positioning itself as an innocent victim of



the historical actions of industrialized countries, Tuvalu positions large countries in a position of responsibility before the international community. By positioning the issue of climate change as a global moral issue and not just a technical one, Tuvalu seeks to build a consensus that the world's failure to save Tuvalu means a failure to fulfill universal humanitarian responsibilities.

Second, the process of norm formation becomes very visible through Tuvalu's initiatives to introduce new ideas in international forums. For example, although not yet officially adopted, Tuvalu's call for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty has succeeded in triggering a deep global discourse on the urgency of a fossil fuel phase-out agreement as a new norm in climate change mitigation. In addition, Tuvalu's persistent efforts to push for a loss and damage funding mechanism contributed to elevating the issue from its initially marginalized position to the top of the agenda, which eventually received a funding decision at COP27.

Third, framing the "victim" identity was carried out simultaneously with affirming the capacity to act. While emphasizing vulnerability and victimhood, Tuvalu did not diminish the dignity of its nation. Instead, they combined the narrative of suffering with a call to defend dignity, culture, and the right to life. This approach demonstrates the constructivist understanding that national identity is not static but can be built and adjusted in response to new challenges (Wendt, 1992). By framing itself not only as a passive victim but also as a moral leader and innovator in climate adaptation, Tuvalu strengthened its bargaining position in the international negotiation arena.

### *Evaluation of Tuvalu's Foreign Policy Strategy*

#### *Increasing international attention to the existential issues of SIDS countries*

Tuvalu's diplomacy in dealing with the threat of the climate crisis has shown extraordinary effectiveness through a simple yet powerful approach. A clip of the Tuvalu Foreign Minister's speech standing in waist-deep water received widespread attention and praise from the international community on social media (Reuters, 2021). The viral video of Tuvalu's speech succeeded in triggering greater international attention to the existential issues faced by SIDS countries. Tuvalu's diplomatic strategy, which relies on touching yet straightforward visual messages, raised global awareness of the issue of SIDS survival (Varada & Kofe, 2023). The viral video and Tuvalu's

consistency in voicing the existential issues faced by SIDS have opened the world's eyes and invited the international community to care more and take real action in dealing with the climate crisis that threatens their existence.

Thus, Tuvalu's diplomacy is an example of how a small country can use the power of social media and symbolism to place its existential issues on the world stage. Their simple yet meaningful message reached various groups and fostered global solidarity. This success is not only a victory for Tuvalu's diplomacy but also for all SIDS who hope that the world can provide concrete attention and support for their survival in the future.

### **Increased development assistance for Tuvalu's climate adaptation**

As a result of its efforts from COP26 to COP29, Tuvalu's climate diplomacy has secured two important milestones in its quest for international development assistance: the creation of the Loss and Damage Fund and the agreement of the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) and after a long struggle since COP26, AOSIS countries, including Tuvalu, pushed for formal recognition of unavoidable climate losses. This pressure paid off at COP27 in Egypt, where developed and developing countries agreed to establish a Loss and Damage Fund to support countries affected by extreme climate disasters and sea level rise (McDonnell, 2023). The fund was agreed to be operationalized at COP28 in Dubai with an initial funding commitment of over USD 700 million (Handmer et al., 2024). This mechanism provides countries like Tuvalu with direct access to financial assistance that can be used for long-term recovery and rebuilding of damaged infrastructure.

The collective efforts of developing countries to push for climate finance reform also paid off with the agreement of a new NCQG at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. This NCQG replaces the previous target of USD 100 billion per year and now reflects the need for larger, more equitable climate finance (Harris, 2025). Tuvalu has consistently called for the new target to include mitigation funding, a larger proportion for adaptation, and prioritizing accessibility for developing countries. The final outcome of these negotiations stipulated that the NCQG would be USD 300 billion per year until 2035, excluding loss and damage funding as a long-term commitment to climate justice (UNFCCC, 2024). Tuvalu now has a more secure funding pathway to finance

adaptation projects and cover unavoidable climate losses. With the loss and damage fund structure in place and the new NCQG in force, development assistance to the most vulnerable countries has increased in size and clarity of access, sustainability, and accountability. This makes Tuvalu not only a passive recipient of aid but also a normative actor that has succeeded in aligning its development interests with the global climate agenda.

### *Negotiation power imbalance between small countries and large industrial countries*

The imbalance of negotiating power between small countries such as Tuvalu and large industrial countries is one of the crucial issues in global climate change governance. International forums such as the COP have been the main arena for international climate negotiations since its inception in 1992. However, in climate negotiations, there is an imbalance in the role and influence between small countries such as SIDS and large countries (Betzold, 2010). SIDS countries have limited resources and are often marginalized in decision-making, while large industrial countries that contribute high emissions dominate the agenda and outcomes of the negotiations.

One of the main factors in this imbalance is the limited capacity of small country delegations to participate in international negotiations (Chan, 2021). This reduces the opportunities for countries such as Tuvalu to influence the agenda and outcomes of the negotiations, even though they have a considerable interest in the decisions taken. A clear example of this imbalance was seen at COP26 in Glasgow. At this meeting, there was a change in the language of the agreement, changing the phrase from “phasing out” of coal use to “phasing down,” influenced by countries with heavy dependence on coal, such as India and China (Menon, 2022). This change is disappointing not only for Tuvalu but also for other SIDS countries facing serious threats from the rise in sea level.

In response to this challenge, the Government of Tuvalu took strategic steps to improve its climate negotiation capacity. With technical assistance from the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub (CCFAH), Tuvalu conducted climate finance negotiation training. This training aimed to strengthen the country’s ability to navigate the complexities of international climate negotiations. The training helped to improve the knowledge and methodologies essential to accessing the finance needed to prevent and manage climate change-related risks (CBC, 2024). With efforts like this,

Tuvalu seeks to reduce the imbalance in negotiating power and strengthen its position in the international arena that large countries have dominated. Although the challenges remain enormous, increasing technical and strategic capacity is hoped to help Tuvalu advance its interests amidst the increasingly real and pressing threat of global climate change.

***Strengthening the diplomatic position in future climate negotiations and Policy Strategy recommendations as a form of evaluation***

In the face of the increasingly urgent threat of climate change, strengthening the diplomatic position is a top priority for Tuvalu in the upcoming climate talks. As one of the countries most vulnerable to the effects of sea level rise, Tuvalu must continue to improve its negotiating capabilities in order to be able to voice its interests and needs more effectively in international forums, especially the Conference of Parties (COP). This strategy includes increasing diplomats' technical capacity, using strong media and symbolism, and building strategic alliances with other countries, especially small and developing countries with similar interests. Strengthening diplomacy also strengthens arguments based on scientific data and authentic experience in the field to encourage more ambitious and equitable decision-making in climate change mitigation and adaptation. These strategies include several key supportive measures.

First, increasing the technical capacity of Tuvalu diplomats is essential as they need to develop a deep understanding of global climate issues and skills in multilateral diplomatic negotiations. In addition, the utilization of strong media and symbolism has become an important strategy. Tuvalu can leverage social media and global awareness campaigns to increase its visibility and influence in driving and accelerating global action on climate change. Second, the most recommended step is building strategic alliances with other countries, especially small and developing countries with similar interests. Tuvalu can strengthen its bargaining position through this alliance and influence the international agenda regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation. In addition to strengthening diplomacy, the continuity of international support is also the key to Tuvalu's continued existence. This support includes climate finance, technology transfer, and a political commitment to respect Tuvalu's sovereignty over its maritime territories and Natural Resources. Tuvalu must continue to rally global

solidarity so that the issue of its existence remains a priority on the world climate agenda.

In addition to strengthening diplomacy, the continuity of international support is a crucial aspect of the continued existence of Tuvalu as a sovereign state. This support is not only in the form of climate finance and technology but also a political commitment from the international community to respect the rights of small states to their maritime territories and Natural Resources. Tuvalu must continue to strengthen global solidarity so that the issue of its existence remains a priority on the international climate agenda. Active involvement in various climate finance mechanisms and international partnerships is also important to ensure that the flow of resources to build climate-resilient infrastructure and adaptation programs can continue sustainably.

To conclude the research in future policy evaluation and recommendations, Tuvalu needs to develop an integrated multi-dimensional strategy. First, increasing institutional capacity and human resources in climate negotiation and management is crucial so countries can take a more active and effective role in international processes. Second, diversification of funding sources by exploring opportunities from a variety of global and regional mechanisms must continue to be strengthened to reduce dependence on a handful of major donors. Third, the strengthening of public diplomacy through global awareness campaigns and the use of social media must be enhanced to build the support of the wider international community. With targeted and sustainable policies, Tuvalu can strengthen its bargaining position while maintaining the country's and its people's viability amid the increasingly real threat of climate change (Campbell & Barnett, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the above analysis results, it can be concluded that Tuvalu managed to transform its status as the “most vulnerable country” to climate change into a significant normative power on the international stage. By leveraging moral pressure, symbolic action, framing an identity as a climate victim, and support from the network of small island states (AOSIS), Tuvalu can influence global policy direction and increase support for development assistance. Although it still faces challenges in negotiating, the effectiveness of Tuvalu's strategy is reflected in establishing a Loss and Damage Fund

for affected countries and increasing global climate funding targets through the New Collective Quantified Goal of US\$ 300 billion per year. Beyond the case of Tuvalu, these findings contribute to a broader understanding of how small and resource-constrained states can transform symbolic performance and moral pressure into tangible policy outcomes. In this sense, Tuvalu's experience not only enriches the constructivist discourse in international relations but also provides a model for analyzing how vulnerable states employ identity, norms, and discourse to exert agency in global governance.

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