

Climate Resilient Islands Programme

Papaelise: A place of resilience

During the height of COVID-19, Papaelise was a safe refuge for people away from Tuvalu's mainland. Most of the few dozen residents living there now moved during the pandemic as part of a relocation program to isolate people from its potential impacts.

Additionally, environmental impacts like sea level rise, inundation and the loss of coastal vegetation are all impacting their local livelihoods. There is a high reliance on fish, but coral bleaching, increasingly rough seas and decreased fish stocks are making them more difficult to catch.



Despite these challenges, however, the resilience and enterprise of the people of Papaelise is keeping their growing community alive. This is symbolised by the climate resilience picture chosen by the women's group as part of early Climate Resilient Islands programme activities.

"They chose the coconut palm, because it is the most resilient tree in Tuvalu – also known as the tree of life," the CRI Tuvalu team said. "It has many uses for the people's social and economic welfare."

It's a small place, no more than 400 metres long and about 70 metres wide at its widest point. It sits only a few metres above the water, with open ocean on one side and Funafuti Lagoon on the other. This leaves it exposed to weather and sea-level rise, while making its soil rocky and poor quality. Because of this, Papaelise, despite having provided refuge for people during COVID-19, is itself vulnerable.

The island has no power sources aside from some solar lighting and a few small diesel generators. The only way to the main island is by boat, a trip made difficult in low tide, and there are no facilities for health, education or shopping on Papaelise itself. Students often spend the whole week on the mainland to go to school, returning only on the weekends.

Though the women said there were many possible stories that can be told about how the coconut tree symbolises climate resilience, the interconnectivity of its various elements are the most significant for them.

"The roots, the bark, the inner core of the trunk, the leaves and leaflets all play a different role, but they contribute all together to produce the beautiful and precious coconut fruits that provide sustainable, healthy food and drink for the people of Tuvalu, who have survived these harsh atolls for many hundreds of years," the CRI team reported.

"The fruits of the coconut tree resemble the climate resilience of the Papaelise community. The roots hold the tree up firmly, resembling the land where the people

dwell and cultivate their foods. The soil surrounding the tree to nourish it is like the oceans and lagoon they depend on for their main source of protein, and the trunk provides the important linkages between the roots and leaves to make the fruits.”

Papaelise may not now be seen as a safe refuge as it was during the early days of the pandemic. But already they are beginning to work towards a more resilient future; soon, their efforts will hopefully begin to bear fruit.



Live & Learn thanks the people of Papaelise for their support and contribution to the CRI programme. We greatly appreciate your time and input.

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To ensure they can continue to grow as the coconuts do, Papaelise has begun planning their climate resilience pathway. They aim to safeguard marine resources and their flourishing agricultural operations by restricting fishing to local communities, reviving traditional practices of dividing the land and lagoon in two, using only one at a time, and trying to grow excess fresh food from their gardens while using sustainable agricultural practices to sell more at the Funafuti markets. Freshwater conservation and the education of children are also priorities.

As with the coconut tree, they hope to combine their different resources, abilities and goals in a holistic way, to ensure all aspects of their lives on their small atoll support each other. The Climate Resilient Islands programme is working with them towards these goals, currently compiling a Resilience Profile to help them organise and direct their efforts.

