

A view about SIDS: work to avoid and manage disasters on Cabo Verde

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Interviewee: [José Lopes](#) – Professor, Higher Institute of Business and Economic Sciences (ISCEE), Praia, Cabo Verde

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Source: Cabo Verde NAP (2021)

José,

Thank you for making the time to talk with me about the activities taking place on and for Cabo Verde to reduce disaster risk and avoid disasters.

Can we begin this interview with an overview of your background and current activities, and perhaps your general views about the overall direction of resilience and disaster risk reduction for Cabo Verde and its neighbouring islands?

As a general overview for our readers, I will just start by providing [a general background about Cabo Verde](#) from [the UNDP Data Platform for SIDS](#) (an excellent resource):

The Disasters Avoided initiative highlights examples of proactive action around the world to avoid disasters. 1

The nation of Cabo Verde in the Atlantic Ocean (about 620km off the coast of Africa) consists of ten islands, nine of which are inhabited and a population of approx. 491.233 people (INE, Census 2021). Despite a good economic development performance in recent years, Cabo Verde faces challenges to achieving the SDGs, with inequality one of the country's greatest problems. It is estimated that over one third of Cabo Verdeans are poor and one in ten are extremely poor. Cabo Verde ranks sixth in sub-Saharan Africa on the Human Development Index, but when adjusted for inequality it is lower.

It would be great to gain your views on disaster risk and climate change.

***José:** I am a Public policy analysisist and lecturer, and a researcher in the fields of governance, civil society, social inequalities, climate justice and sustainable development.*

My current research interests focus mostly on governance, social justice and sustainable development issues on Cabo Verde and the broader group of SIDS ([small island developing States](#)).

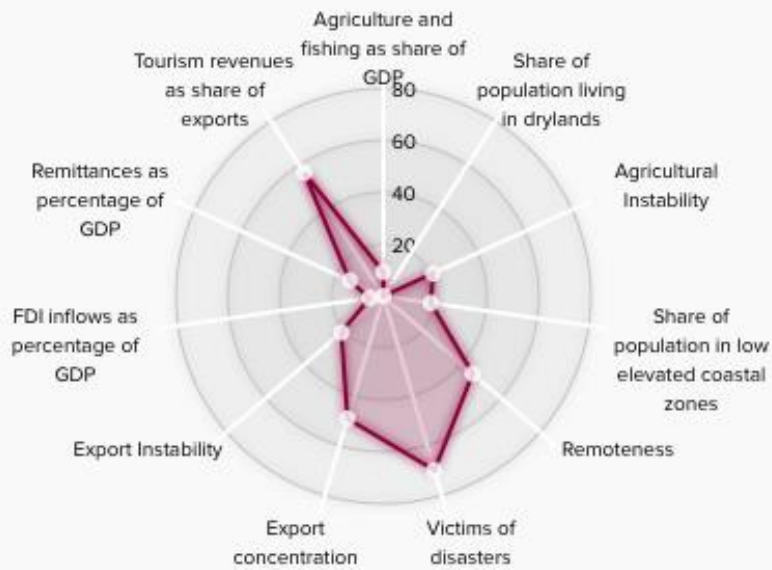
Some key points about disaster risks from my perspective are as follows:

Cabo Verde faces a range of risks that it needs to respond. As the UNDP Data Platform for SIDS describes, our islands are highly vulnerable to a range of climate-related threats and disaster hazards including volcanoes, droughts, flooding, landslides, earthquakes and cyclones.

The World Bank, which has a presence in Cabo Verde and [provides a general profile of the country on its website](#), has produced a report which compares Cabo Verde to a number of African countries, in which Cabo Verde is ranked first for vulnerability. Our set of islands have a history of being highly impacted by the hazards I listed just now. In the past few years, drought has been a major problem for us. Between 2014 and 2019, hardly any rain fell. The government has faced many challenges to raise funds to cope with this challenge. It has had to rely, to a large extent, on donor funding. I have talked with international agencies with a presence on Cabo Verde, and they all agree that there needs to be more national resilience for finance with less reliance on donor support (whilst it is welcome).

Gareth: I appreciate this overview, José. When I look at the UNDP SIDS Data Platform profile for Cabo Verde, it shows that the set of islands that make up the nation has a particular vulnerability to disasters:

MULTIDIMENSIONAL VULNERABILITY



Values for each indicator for vulnerability are normalized among all countries with available data on a scale from 0 to 100

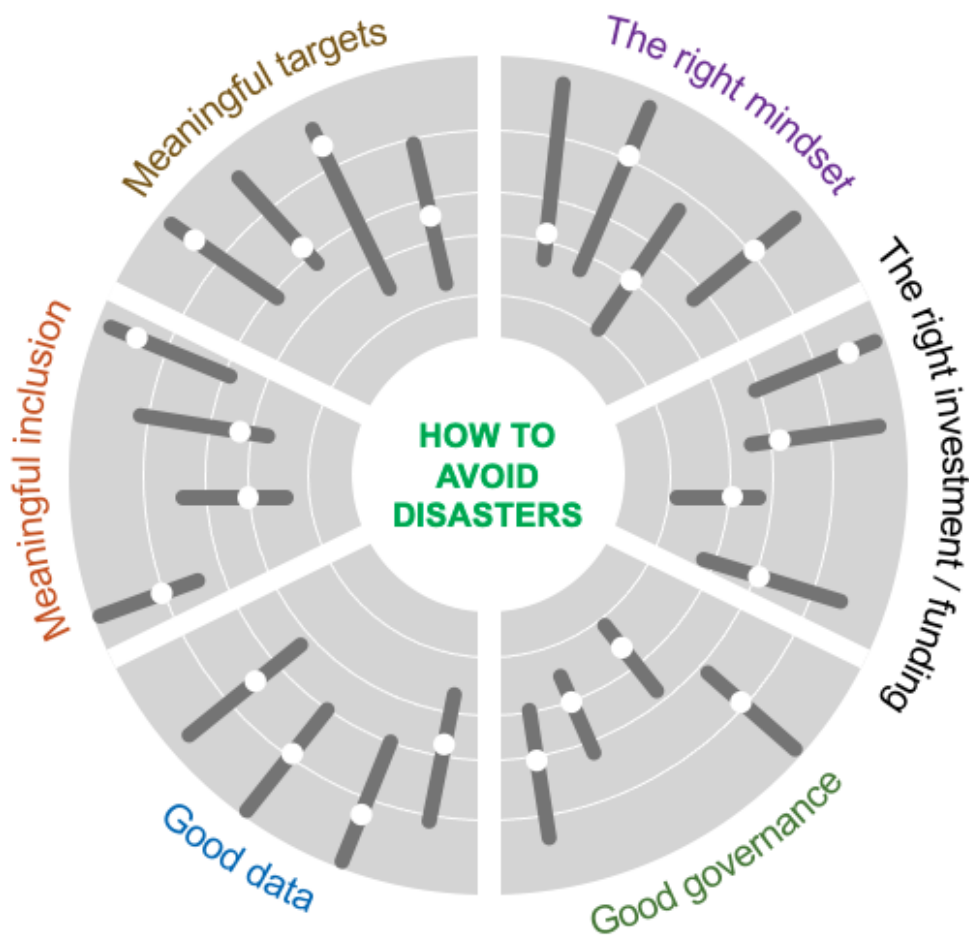
Source: UNDP SIDS Data Platform – [Cabo Verde](#)

How do you see disaster risk being tackled in Cabo Verde today, and how has it evolved over the past 10-20 years? Is it getting more complicated and is there a need to cooperate closely with neighbouring islands to find solutions?

***José:** Cabo Verde's social and economic system, its habitats and its ecosystems in general are widely exposed and highly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions and disaster risks. Chronic events such as floods and droughts or catastrophic events such as volcanic eruptions have always required plans to mitigate the underlying risk factors, and reduce exposure and vulnerability, as well as to adopt approaches integrated post-disaster preparedness, response and recovery.*

Cabo Verde has a National Strategy for the Disaster Risk Reduction, in place since 2017, which involves a variety of institutions and stakeholders in the planning and execution of policies for disaster risk reduction. In the last 10 years, Cabo Verde has experienced a volcano eruption on the Fogo island in 2014, a period of drought from 2014-2019, a hurricane in 2015, and floods in 2020 in the capital, Praia, as well as other events. Cabo Verde cooperates with other SIDS and includes in its risk reduction plans the recommendations emanating from the Barbados Declaration and Plan of Action, the Mauritius Action Plan, the Praia Declaration on sustainable development goals, the SAMOA Pathway, and the Durban Platform for Strengthened Action on UNFCCC/UNFCCC Implementation. In addition, Cabo Verde also integrates into West African platforms for disaster risk reduction.

Gareth: Thanks for this overview, José. As you know, our Disasters Avoided initiative focuses on *how we can prevent disasters from happening*. The model we have developed contains six factors, starting with having the right mindset to avoid disasters (without which the other five factors will never be truly effective). The second factor of the right investment and funding is of course key – and we stress that it needs to be in an appropriate way, and efficiently allocated. Good governance comes next, which includes examples such as the one you gave just now on the regional framework, and taking such agreements through to the local grassroots level, including the involvement of people in participatory governance through to local government and local communities. The fourth aspect is the need, and indeed the criticality, of capturing and using good data, to inform and support good governance and make the right investment decisions. This links into our fifth factor of how we involve everyone in a meaningful way (which takes time, and is worth it), all of which can be tracked with meaningful targets, our sixth factor.



[The Disasters Avoided model](#): G Byatt, I Kelman & A Prados

If I can start with our first factor, is the mindset of people who are involved in disaster risk in Cabo Verde that they are committed to reducing it?

José: *I would say yes. There is a strong commitment to risk prevention in Cabo Verde if one looks at several projects implemented over the course of the last years.*

The national and local teams, based on the news reports, seem to have been active in implementing the risk reduction strategies. Nevertheless, what perhaps is missing is an overarching policy approach to help evolve a “national mindset”. If one looks at the urbanisation process for instance, especially houses and business infrastructural construction on the waterlines and sea coasts, the conclusion is that policies need to be refined and improved.

Gareth: We know that ensuring appropriate finances for disaster risk reduction are in place is always a challenge. What types of investment and funding, through financing mechanisms, is being used and introduced in Cabo Verde? Can some of the financing needs be provided by the private sector to support disaster resilience?

José: There is a discussion taking place at the moment in Cabo Verde about what types of new financing mechanisms can be deployed. Private finance is part of this. For example, some private banks have issued green and blue bonds with the aim being to attract private finance for areas that are critical for climate adaptation and disaster resilience. The economy in Cabo Verde is growing now, and we recognise the need to invest further in sectors including agriculture (which has a great potential to our economy), and others in a way that supports resilience.

Finance strategies are being implemented through the capital market. This includes people from different countries who were not previously aware of what Cabo Verde can offer them.

The World Bank and the IMF have a financial mechanism that can be used. They are making funds available to the private sector – perhaps what is required now is greater mobilisation and use of this funding by businesses in Cabo Verde.

Gareth: I appreciate this insight into finance mechanisms for Cabo Verde, José. When we describe the factor of the right investment / funding in our Disasters Avoided model, we talk about making sure it is right-sized and appropriate, which includes making sure it goes to the right parts of society, in a practical way that minimises administration and bureaucracy.

José: I agree. Efficiency requires good governance. For a country like Cabo Verde it is not practical for us to have multiple layers in government levels. We need a balance of oversight with being agile and minimising red tape. It’s a challenge to bring everyone from all municipalities together to find common solutions, because they are already stretched dealing with their regular activities.

What I have seen in Cabo Verde is an effort being introduced to have governance structures comprising people from national government, local government and the private sector to an extent. Concerning this governance structure, there is a key institution for disaster risk called the National Council for Civil Protection, which links to regional and municipal structures.

However, these structures struggle to have resources for disaster risk, so much of it is undertaken at the national level. The challenge is complicated because we need local structures that can intervene.

Personally, I think there should be more focus on local structures to intervene when required, with national coordination being focused on guidance and coordination of different groups.

To give you an example of the challenges, last year a wildfire on the island of Santiago led to fatalities, which of course caused major problems in the community and for biodiversity in the local environment. It was very difficult, because at the local level they didn't have the resources to tackle the fire early, before it grew to a large size. I think there are some discussions going on now about how to better support local jurisdictions.

Gareth: Wildfire is one of the areas we focus on in our Disasters Avoided initiative, and I am sorry to hear about this event that you mention. Are some of the ideas on governance part of the national plan that you mentioned earlier, for example to increase the capabilities and the resources at the local level? Are there learnings from other countries on this? I wonder if crowdsourcing funding initiatives or other ideas could help to tackle the problem.

José: *Our national plan does recommend this approach; the challenge is how to make it work and optimise it. The directorate of the environment of Cabo Verde coordinates much of the work effort. Local levels of government need to apply sensible policies that work for the local context. Technical expertise and resources for environmental adaptation and disaster resilience are largely at the national level right now. A new national fund is being created to leverage a debt swap with Portugal to be able to make new finances available, which could help to make funds and resources available at local levels. Municipalities need to draft their proposals for the national government to review.*

Gareth: Is there much difference in the approach required between urban areas such as Praia and rural and remote areas?

José: *There are differences. What I have seen is that major critical infrastructure and major projects such as forestry are in the rural areas. In urban centres we see examples of protecting neighbourhoods on coastal lines, but the way that urban development has progressed means that properties are being built in vulnerable places. In 2020, we had some major floods and Praia was not able to cope with it. What we see in our cities is that urban governance is somewhat lacking.*

Gareth: At [the SIDS Future Forum](#) held in March 2024, I talked about the concept of using a systems approach for urban development. I can understand that small-sized municipal authorities struggle to cope with everything, and I wonder whether linking up with local community heads can help to control certain things like unplanned urban development (I have seen this approach implemented in other places).

José: Lack of appropriate governance structures and measures is a key challenge. Local government teams are small as you say, and there is only so much that they can coordinate and deal with. We have faced this challenge since the 1990s, with new urban neighbourhoods growing quickly. People keep building, and there is a lack of implementation of policies for building codes and land management.

Gareth: Going back to our model, and thinking about our factor of good data, what kind of data is being tracked in Cabo Verde, to help to make a case for new investments and initiatives to improve the ability to reduce disaster risk, in urban areas and rural areas? I appreciate that Cabo Verde is incorporated into global reports and ratings such as the Multi-Vulnerability Index (MVI), but what about local data capture? Is there anything that local communities help with for data capture?

José: I'm quite sure that data does exist. The Ministries of Agriculture and Infrastructure must have data to support their plans (which includes sharing some of this data with the World Bank). When I worked on a project for [the FAO](#) (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), there was a lot of talk about the need to centralise data and to coordinate it to stop it being siloed. It's a tricky situation involving the need for effort and investment. There are initiatives taking place. It will be interesting to see how local communities can help to support data capture, and to review this data to provide input on action to take.

My concern for Cabo Verde is that there is a lot of data being independently produced, and that it is too disaggregated. If we could organise everyone's efforts in a system and an efficient way, it could make a big difference.

Gareth: We talked earlier about the engagement of the private sector. One sector that comes to my mind is insurance, and how they can help with proactive disaster financing through parametric insurance and other models. This requires good data to succeed, so perhaps this is another example of how connected data can be made to work for people on the ground. I know there are initiatives like this in other islands. If we can set meaningful targets (linking up with the Disasters Avoided model) and linking up with other resources such as a Data Hub, it can provide good opportunities for Cabo Verde.

José: I agree. For Cabo Verde and its financing challenges, any support that can be provided for intelligent insurance is welcome. As I mentioned, there have been some initiatives through the capital markets, and there is more to do. The stock market holds promise, I think.

[The Cabo Verde Stock Exchange](#) recently launched new financing initiatives called blue bonds, green bonds, social bonds and diaspora bonds. All these initiatives are happening and facilitated through the digital Platform Blu-X, a regional listing and trading platform for sustainable and inclusive financial instruments.

It is a strategy that could bring Cabo Verdeans who have left back to the island. If people can get access to a vibrant market with stocks and shares being sold, it is an interesting and smart way of raising finances and funds for climate and adaptation and disaster resilience. Perhaps other mechanisms can be put in place, if data convinces investors that there is value in making investments. We need to make decisions based on good data (which is one of your model factors, of course).



Source: Bolsa de Valores (Stock Exchange) Cabo Verde— [home page screenshot of 22 April 2024](#)

Gareth: The stock market can be a good example of meaningful inclusion, José, because it provides a way for local people to invest in what they see as important.

Talking about local people and making a connection to using systems thinking, I have spoken to the Chair of [ARISE-US](#) (ARISE being the global business community network organised by UNDRR) recently about continuity planning at a community level, in a way that is similar to a business creating a business continuity plan. You mentioned earlier the many hazards that Cabo Verde has to deal with – at the community level, is there work going into these types of plans, and the testing of them?

José: *I would say yes and no. When I worked with the FAO, one of the key activities we focused on was community governance, as a strategy to increase community awareness of forest protection and conservation.*

The idea was to integrate local community associations into the work that the local government and councils do, and the delegations of the Ministry of Agriculture and, if appropriate, the private sector. Knowing who needs to be in the structure, what their contribution is and how they work together is key. Also, we need to help them to develop sustainable incomes that can support their resilience.

What I saw in this piece of work is that there wasn't a great deal of awareness about the value of social capital in building resilience in some communities, the concept of social capital and local authorities working with communities and supporting organisation has worked well. Community local structures and social capital is key. With some advocacy work and reasoned discussions can help a great deal in this area. Sometimes, policies are outcomes of who Policy Makers are – and these people change.

Gareth: We talk about meaningful inclusion in our Disasters Avoided model, and I think this directly relates to your points. I am drawn to think about how I have seen integrated governance work for disaster risk reduction and management in Australia. There are some good examples of integrated governance in this country (for some examples, [an interview I held in March 2024 with Ruth Ryan might be of interest to review](#)).

We have covered a lot of very interesting and topical points. Is there anything else that you would like to mention about the efforts and activities in Cabo Verde and maybe elsewhere?

José: *One thing that I would like to highlight is the need for having in place a more efficient data collection and storage. Cabo Verde, like other SIDS, needs a better disaster risk data collection and storage. This would help to support research and policies across SIDS.*

Thank you very much for your time, José, to discuss the challenges facing Cabo Verde, and how disasters can be avoided. I really appreciate it.

José- Thank you for your interest in Cabo Verde. I wish you and your team, all the success.