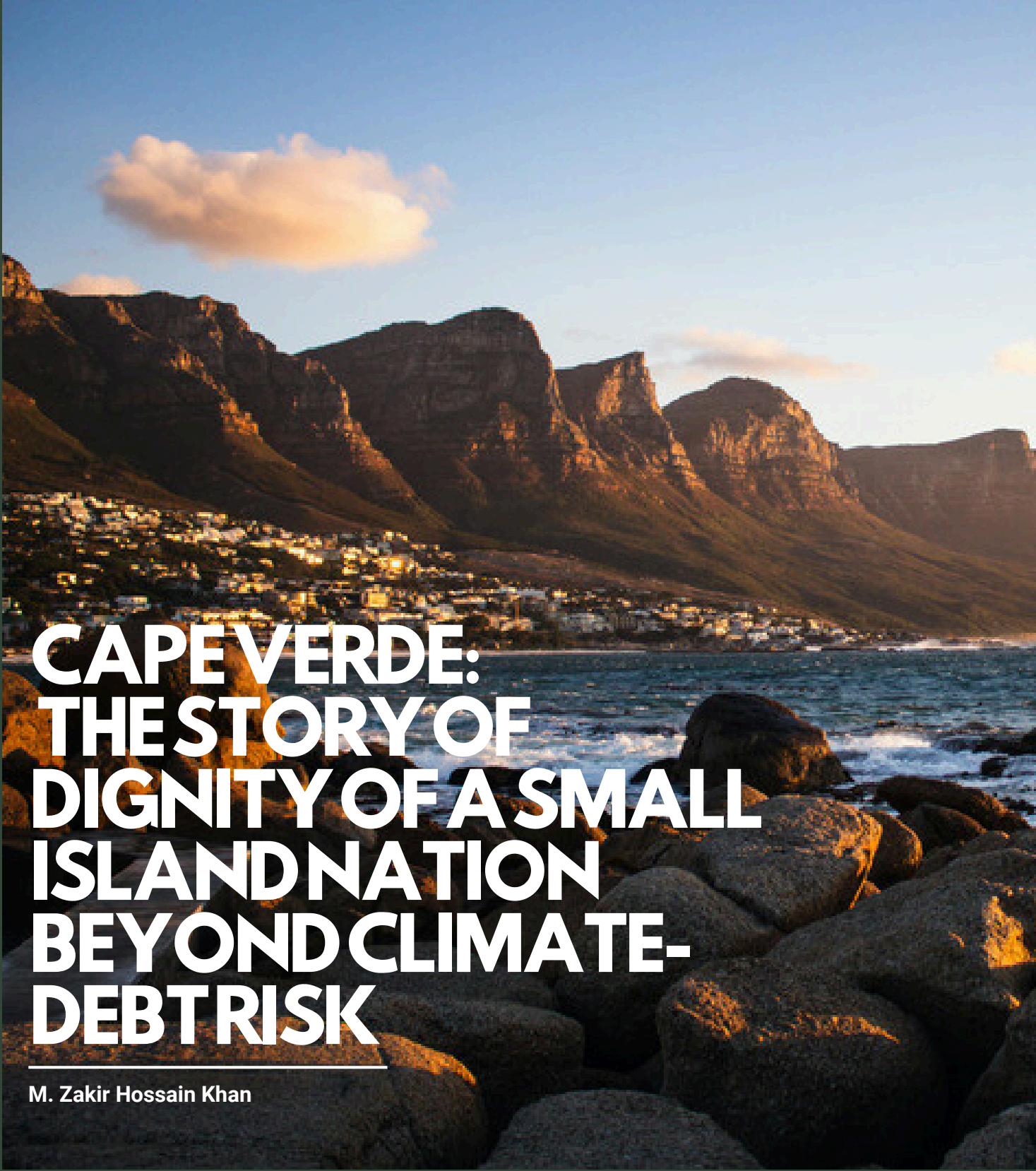




# CAPE VERDE: THE STORY OF DIGNITY OF A SMALL ISLAND NATION BEYOND CLIMATE- DEBTRISK

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**The World Cup 2026** is not only a stage of powerful nations; sometimes, it is the language of dignity of the smaller countries. Right now, Cape Verde is crafting such a language, a small African island nation comprising ten islands of the Atlantic Ocean, located about 600 kilometers away from the coast of Senegal, having a population less than half a million and the courage to challenge the giants of world football.



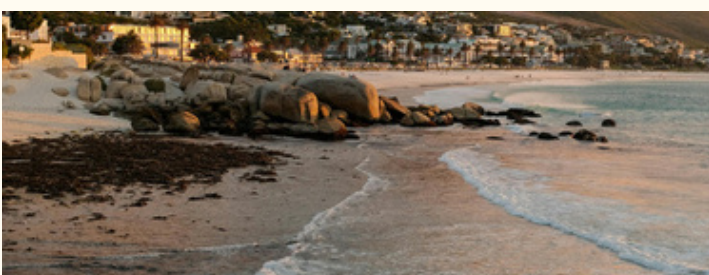
Being able to hold the European champion Spain to a goalless draw in their maiden appearance in the World Cup tournament was nothing extraordinary. It could very well be considered luck. However, the brave 2–2 draw with Uruguay, a historically strong football-playing nation, showed the world that Cape Verde has not come only to participate, but to affirm its presence, dignity, and potential. "Blue Sharks" have become more than a football team for small and vulnerable nations; they have become the flag-bearers of the latter's courage.

What makes the above story more inspiring is the nation behind the team. Cape Verde is not blessed with huge forest, mineral, or river resources. Its resources are very much different, volcanic islands, ocean winds, beaches, marine resources, salt, sun, culture, music and huge blue space around it. Its land is small, but its ocean is huge; the country has a very large exclusive economic zone in relation to its tiny landmass. This means that Cape Verde is not a big land nation, but a big ocean nation.

It is this ocean that brings beauty, identity, and livelihood to the nation. Tourism, fisheries, and maritime industries are very integral to the survival of the nation. Its beaches attract tourists; coastal communities rely on marine resources for their livelihoods, and its diaspora preserves its culture of music and resilience. However, this ocean has now started posing danger to the country because of the rising sea level, coastal erosion, ocean warming, and storm hazards.



The living standard of Cape Verde is better than most climate-vulnerable nations. The nation has achieved some success in education, health, life expectancy, and democratic stability. Its people have created a society that is known for resilience, migration network, culture, and political transition. However, all the above successes are fragile.





A country may have good social indicators, but at the same time be very vulnerable because of the dependence on the external systems for its food, fuel, tourism, water and public finance.

This is precisely the case with Cape Verde; the country has been blessed with good living standard but is highly vulnerable and debt stressed. Most of its food is imported. Its energy system is highly vulnerable to imported fuel. Its agriculture is constrained by arid land, drought and shortage of water. Moreover, its economy is very reliant on tourism that is vulnerable to global shock, pandemics, wars, rising cost of oil price and climate hazard.

The Change Initiative's Climate Debt Risk Index 2025 highlights the said injustice. Such countries like Cabo Verde have little contribution to the problem of climate change, but still face climate shocks, adaptation costs and debt pressure. As most of the climate finance flows through loan,

vulnerable countries have no option but to borrow money for surviving. This means the victims of the climate crisis will have to bear the burden of both disaster and debt repayment.

Under the backdrop, the story of Cape Verde becomes very significant. Although a nation may be exposed to climate-debt risk, its dream is not indebted. Although a nation may be geographically small, its confidence is not small. A country may stand at the periphery of the global economy, but it can create space for itself in the world platform if its people unite, its diaspora engages in the process, and its institutions act visionary under the guidance of its visionary leadership.

Not only this, the story of Cape Verde's football team also sends a broader political and moral message, does not offer pity to the small states; offer opportunities to them;





do not push them into debt traps; provide them fair financing; do not give them development rhetoric; help build their capability. As the small nation has been challenging the big nations in the football field, small island and climate-vulnerable nations have the right to demand justice in the arena of climate finance and global governance.

The story has great importance to our country, Bangladesh. We are a populous nation, but we remain very vulnerable in various aspects, climate change, debt, energy import, job creation, rivers, coastal defense, agriculture, and economic transformation. As Cape Verde has shown, vulnerability should not be the identity of any nation. Real leadership means transforming risk into strength. A small island nation can challenge the big teams at the World Cup, so can Bangladesh through its youth power, diaspora strength, research, policy making, renewable energy, climate justice and Natural Rights Led Governance.

As Cape Verde has taught us, development is not only about the Gross Domestic Product (GDP); it is about dignity as well. Climate finance is not only about the loan; it is about justice. Natural wealth is not only land, mineral or industrial assets; it could also be the ocean, wind, culture, courage, and community memory. The World Cup is not only about scoring goals; it is about the collective eruption of human aspirations.



Today, Cape Verde is showing that small countries have not small dreams. A country even exposed to climate-debt risk can inspire the whole world. A nation that survives by confronting the waves of the ocean also knows how to make waves in the football field.

Therefore, "Blue Sharks" of Cape Verde are doing much beyond playing in the World Cup; they are crafting a new language for small, vulnerable and debt-stressed countries, we are not weak; we are resilient; we are not marginal; we are full of possibility; we are not mere aid-seekers; we are claimants of justice.

This fairytale, therefore, does not belong to Cape Verde alone. It is a story of climate justice, debt-free development, the dignity of small states and a courageous declaration against global inequality.