

# The power of end-users collective actions: rescuing project success

How small-farmers in Cape Verde turned the *Figueira Gorda* irrigation reservoir project into a success

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## Introduction

**Development projects:** complex endeavors, that not only require the coordination of a multitude of stakeholders, but the continued support by key decision-makers.

**Research gap:** present project management frameworks tend to disregard the role end-users can play in the project implementation phases, relegating their impact on project success primarily to the adoption of project outputs.

**Research question:**

*How can end-users' collective actions revert a development project from failure into success?*

## Studied context

**Cape Verde**, an insular African nation located in the Atlantic Ocean, as a climatic pattern off prolonged dry seasons with very brief monsoons. **Water scarcity is a major limiting factor** of food production, and dramatically conditions **food security**.

In 2010 the government launched a ten year plan, calling for the construction of irrigation reservoirs. One these reservoirs was the **Figueira Gorda reservoir**, which although **completed in 2014 the irrigation network was never built**.

Project success can be a contentious issue (Ika & Pinto, 2022), however, regardless of the specific success criteria, the absence of an irrigation network renders the Figueira Gorda a **failure**.

Despite the project's **top-down abandonment**, local small farmers, **the end-users, creatively utilized the water** made available by the reservoir within their water-constrained environment to **cultivate irrigated crops**.

## Empirical research design

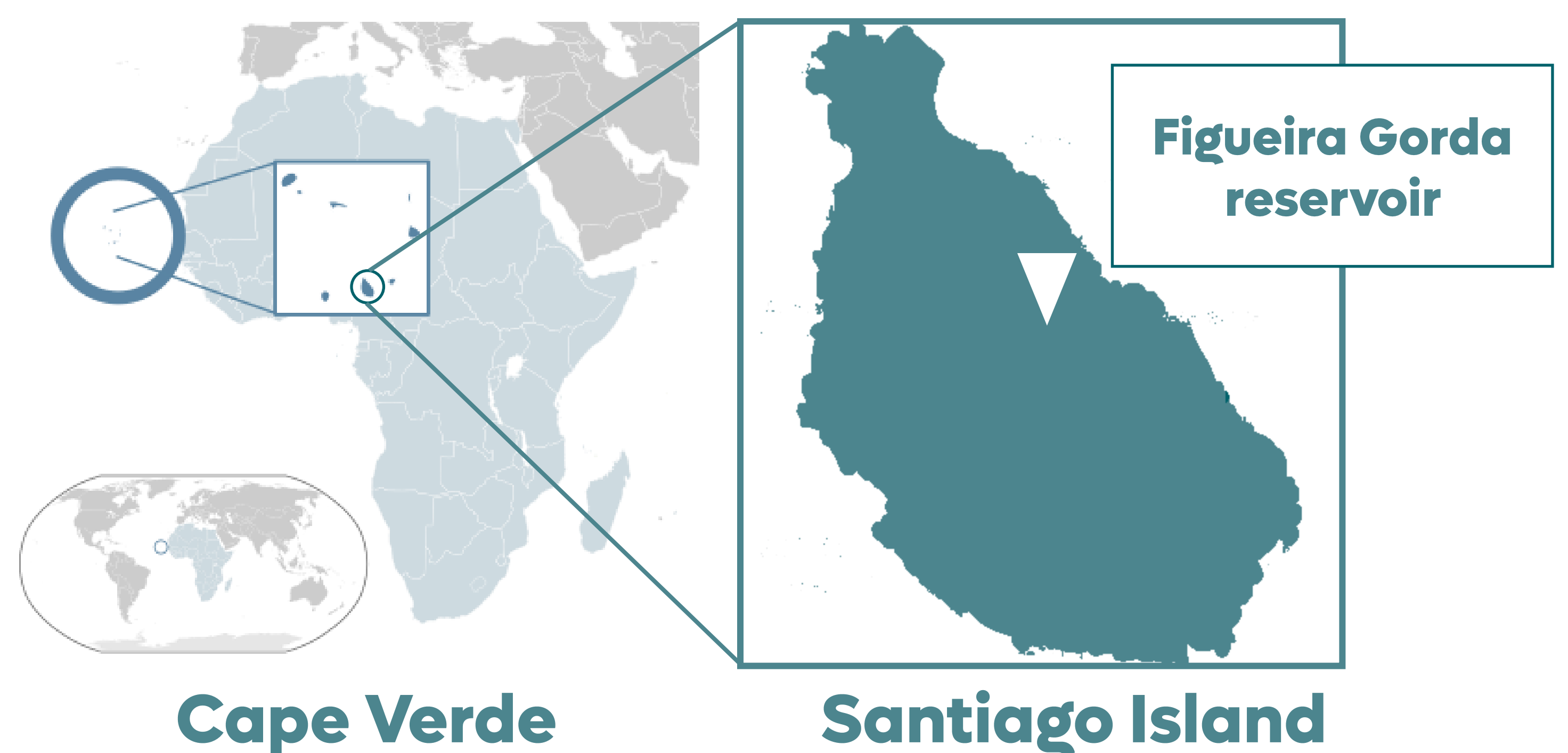
We applied an **abductive research design** (Sætre & Van De Ven, 2024), starting with an **exploratory case study analysis** (Yin, 1994), focusing on the Figueira Gorda due to its **extreme nature** (Flyvbjerg, 2006), characterized by a distinct top-down abandonment of the project, juxtaposed with evident end-user-driven project success.

Utilizing an **inductive qualitative approach**, we **triangulated findings from various data sources** (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), including farmer surveys, subject-matter expert interviews, publicly available news, and satellite imagery.

## Preliminary findings

**Bricolage**, defined as 'making do by applying resources at hand to new problems' (Busch & Barkema, 2021, p. 741), encapsulates the actions of small-farmers at the Figueira Gorda reservoir. Following the project's construction, and despite its failure, the **small-farmers became bricoleurs**, ingeniously **utilizing the limiting resource** just made available.

Our study demonstrates that when **failed or abandoned projects offers access to the limiting resource**, end-users can **develop a bricolage repertoire to extract value from it**, fostering a **virtuous cycle** that leads to **project success**.



## References

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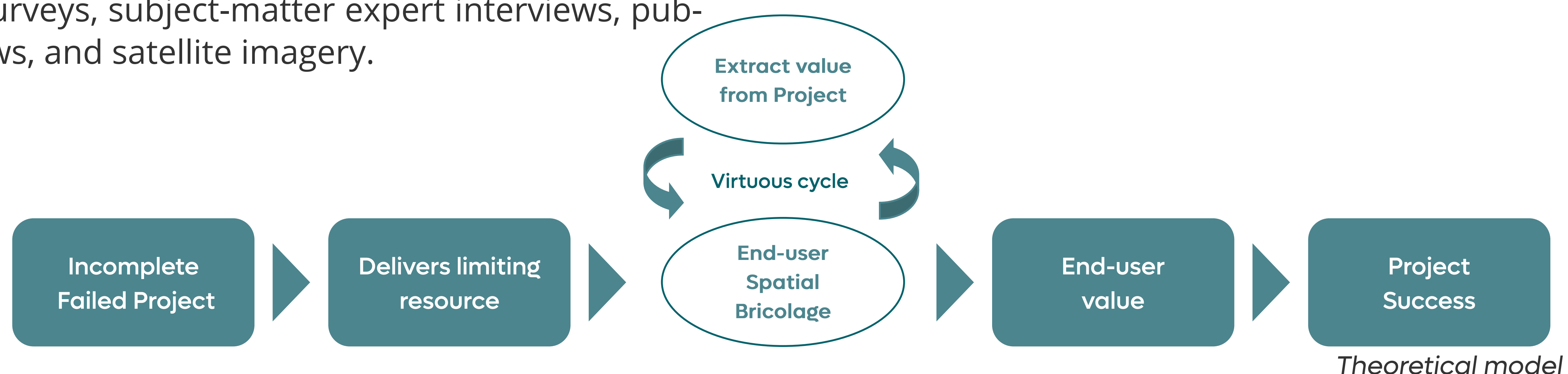
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The Figueira Gorda irrigation reservoir Santiago Island (Cape Verde)