Exposing Amplified Food Security Vulnerabilities in Curacao, Aruba, and Sint Maarten Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: Insights from ZonMw Research

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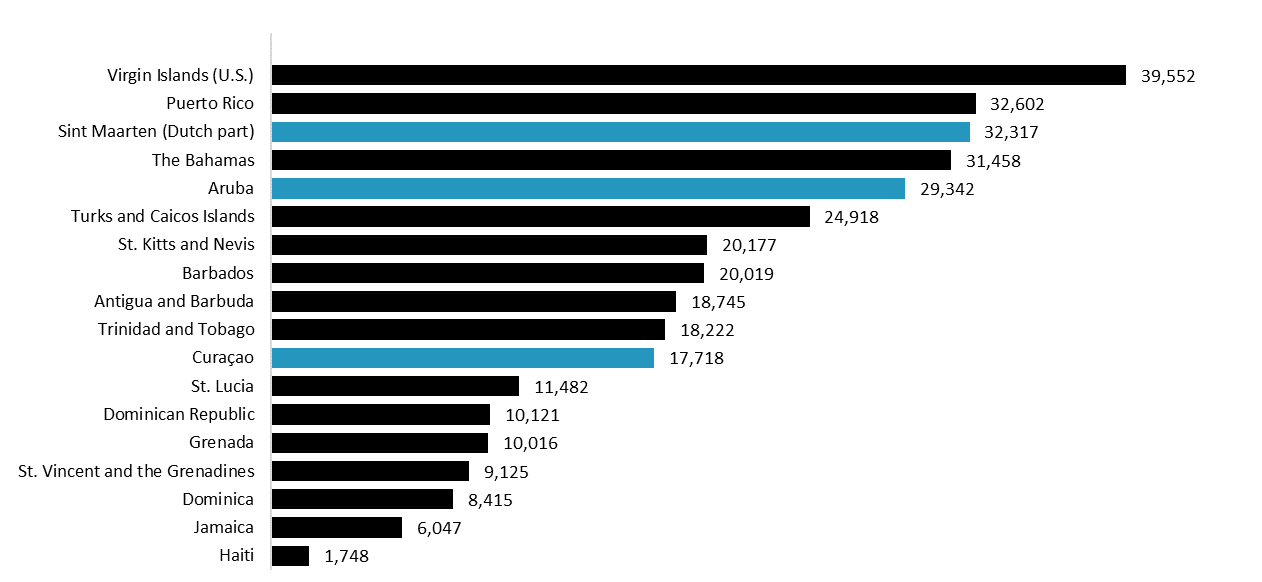
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In a recent study conducted by ZonMw, the critical issue of food security in the Dutch Caribbean territories of Curaçao, Aruba, and Sint Maarten has been brought to the forefront. The research illuminates vulnerabilities in these island communities, further intensified by the global health crisis stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on data collected by the World Food Programme in the Caribbean, this article delves into the intricate web of factors influencing these vulnerabilities, ranging from economic conditions to environmental concerns, with a particular focus on data available for the islands of Curaçao, Aruba, and Sint Maarten (CAS) following the COVID pandemic. According to ZonMw project lead Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Echteld, "*Food Security and Livelihood Protection surveys conducted by the World Food Programme spanning the entire Caribbean have provided valuable insights into the state of food security in the midst of the pandemic."*

## The case for food security on the CAS islands

Sint Maarten and Aruba stand out, particularly due to their relatively high GDP per capita compared to Caribbean peers (see Chart 1), and food security did not prominently feature in local policy discussions before the COVID pandemic.

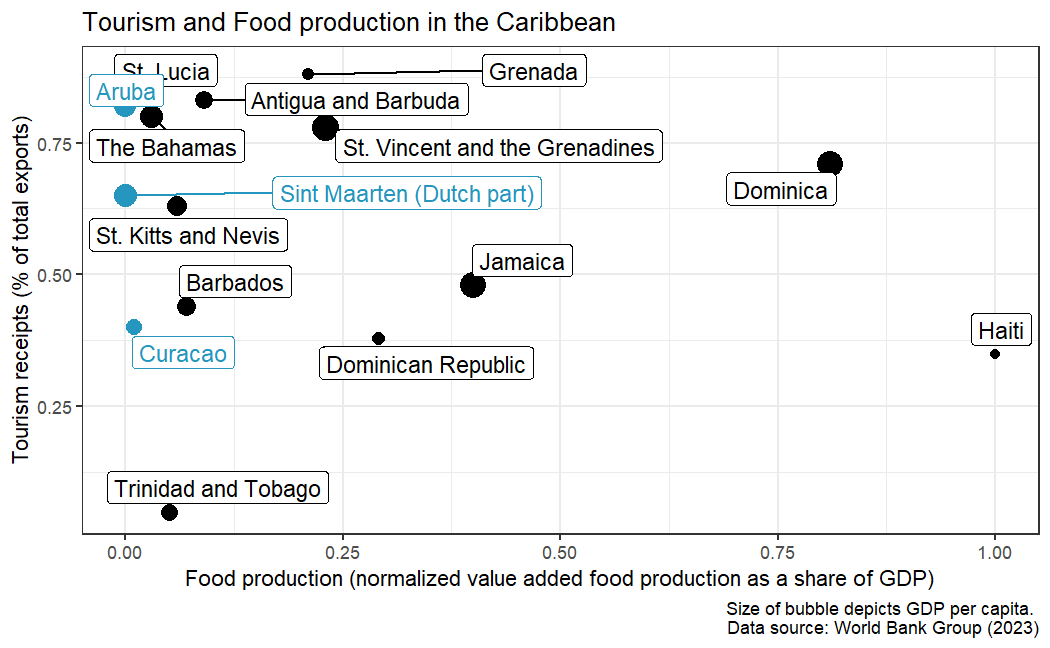
**Chart 1: GDP per capita (in USD)**



*Source: World Bank Group (2023)*

The relatively high living standards in the CAS islands correlate with heavy dependence on tourism and limited local food production (see Chart 2).

**Chart 2: Tourism development and Food production in the Caribbean**



*Authors' calculations, based on data from the World Bank Group. (World Bank Group, 2023)*

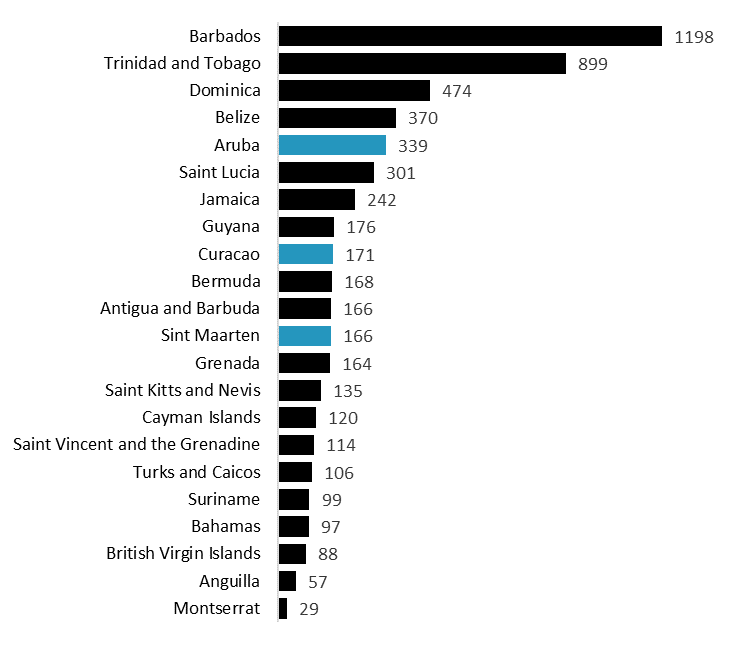
The global pandemic has acted as a magnifying glass, exposing and exacerbating existing issues in health, the economy, and notably, food security. Lockdowns, travel restrictions, and disruptions to the supply chain have made access to food even more challenging for vulnerable communities in these Caribbean territories. Features such as high per capita GDP driven by tourism development, coupled with limited domestic food production, laid bare significant vulnerabilities in sustaining livelihoods in the face of external shocks.

## Post COVID situation

Following the COVID pandemic, the governments of the CAS islands, various multilateral organizations and the Kingdom of the Netherlands initiated efforts to sustain livelihoods of affected households and also bolster food security initiatives.

Following the COVID pandemic, the governments of the CAS islands, various multilateral organizations, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands initiated efforts to sustain the livelihoods of affected households and bolster food security initiatives. Among other measures, the World Food Programme conducted several rounds of surveys on food security and livelihoods protections in the Caribbean, covering all three CAS islands (see Chart 3).

**Chart 3: Food Security and Livelihood Protection survey sample June 2020**



*Source: World Food Programme (2020)*

The collected data provides insights in four areas: markets, food security, livelihoods, and wider impacts.

### Markets

In terms of access to markets (see Chart 4), the impact was visibly more severe in Sint Maarten (28.4 percent), as more households were unable to access markets compared to the Caribbean average. However, in the case of Aruba and Curaçao, this was much less pronounced. Relative to the Caribbean average of 27%, only 9.2% and 12.3%, respectively, were hindered.

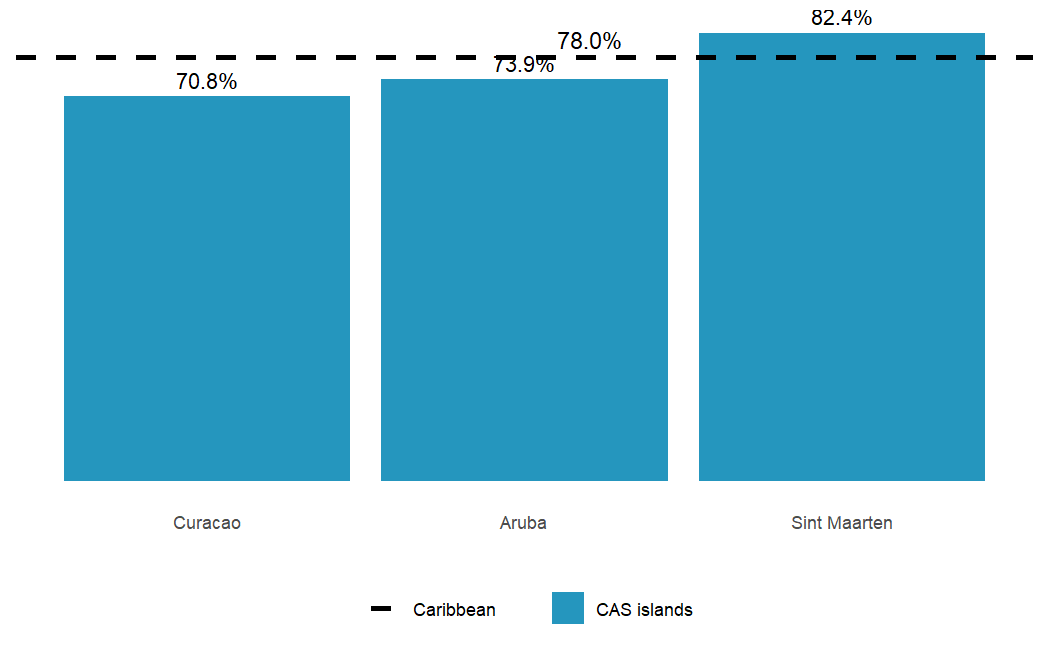
**Chart 4: Access to market: In the past 7 days, was there a time when your household could not access the markets?**

*Authors' calculations, based on data from the WFP survey (2022)*

Reasoning: The islands don’t hold strategic stockpiles, but impediments in efficient transportation (lack of just-in-time) in combination with very developed tourism sectors means that they held excessive food reserves for continuation in the tourism industry. At the time of the COVID-19 crisis, the tourism industry demand suddenly stopped, but this was substituted by stockpiled food items that were initially available for tourists. Wholesalers were able to push these out on the local consumer market.

### Impact on market access

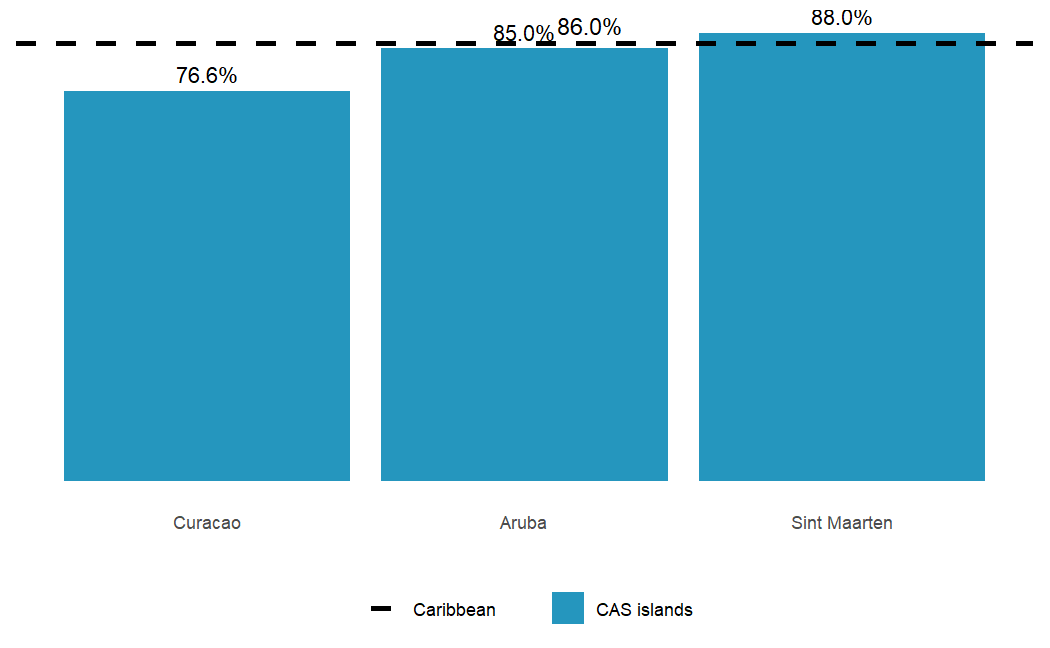
**Figure X: Has there been any changes in the costs of food items over the past 2 weeks**



*Authors' calculations, based on data from the WFP survey (2022)*

### Shopping behavior

**Figure X: Have you changed your shopping behavior compared to before COVID.19**

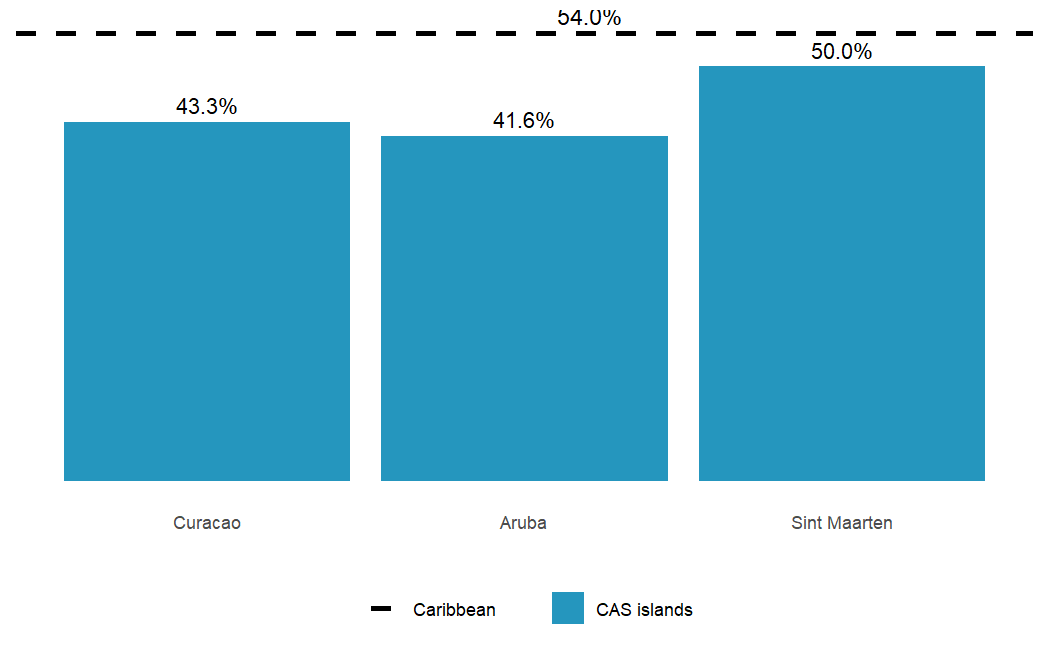


*Authors' calculations, based on data from the WFP survey (2022)*

### Food security

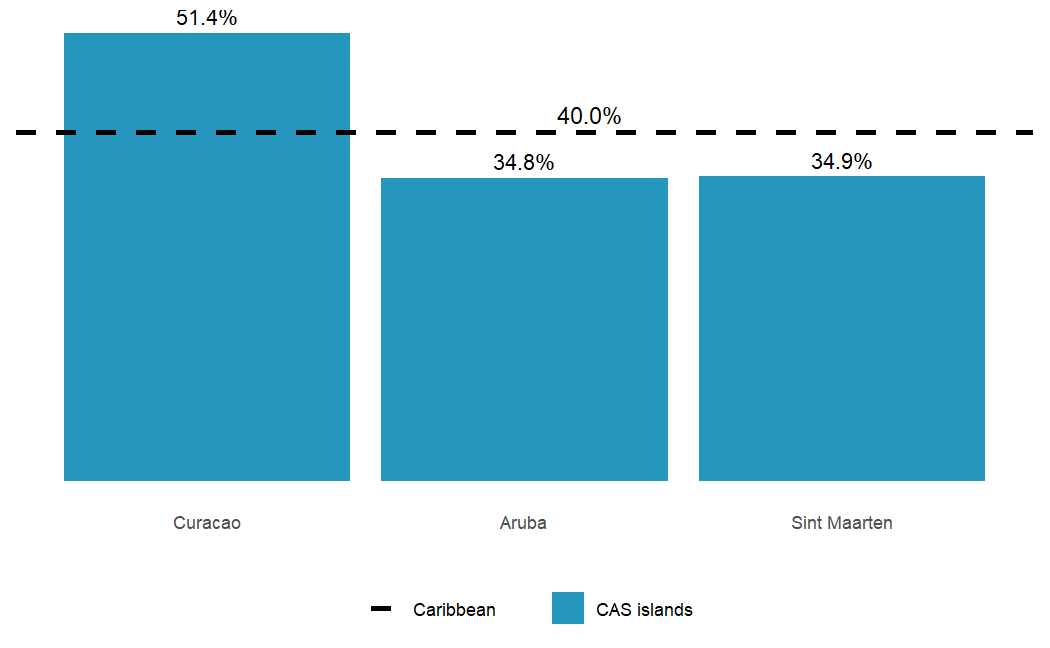
### Livelihoods

**Figure X: % of respondents reporting that their ability to carry out livelihood activities was affected**

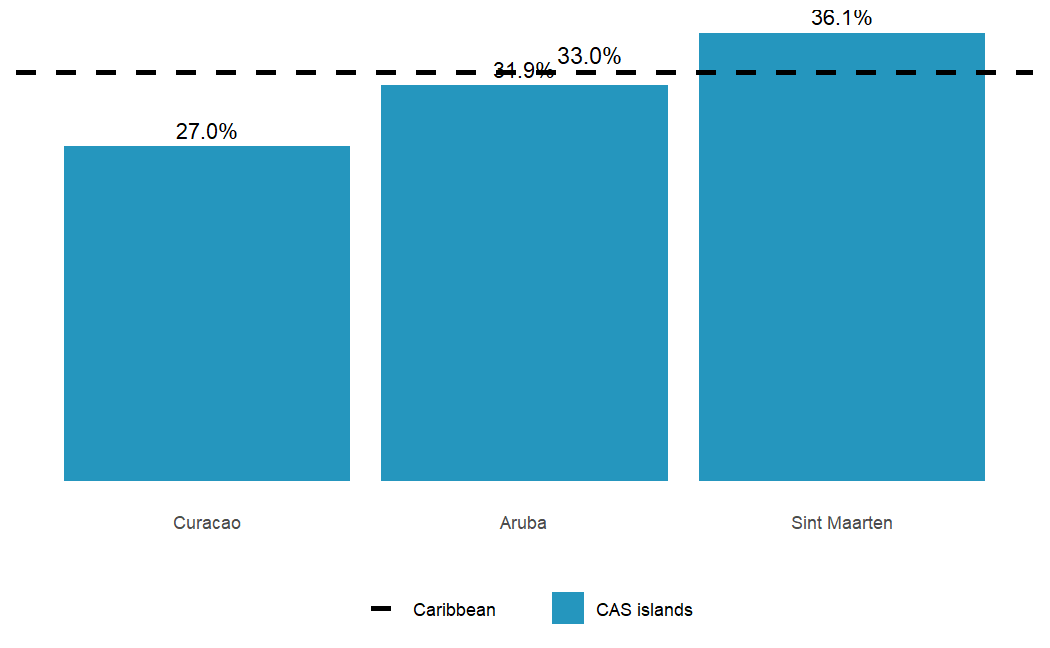


*Authors' calculations, based on data from the WFP survey (2022)*

**Figure X: For those that reported livelihood disruptions, the main reasons were movement restrictions**



**Figure X: For those that reported livelihood disruptions, the main reasons were concerns leaving the house**

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### Wider impacts

## Key Findings

Economic Disparities: The research highlights the economic disparities that contribute to unequal access to food resources. Lower-income households, already grappling with financial constraints, find it increasingly difficult to secure a stable food supply.

Environmental Challenges: Curaçao, Aruba, and Sint Maarten face unique environmental challenges, including climate change impacts and limited arable land. These factors play a role in food production challenges and availability.

Community Resilience: Despite the challenges, the research also sheds light on the resilience of local communities. Grassroots initiatives, community gardens, and collaborations have emerged as crucial components in the fight against food insecurity.

1. Access to Nutritious Food: The survey highlights a concerning decrease in the accessibility of nutritious food across all three islands, indicating an immediate need for targeted interventions.

2. Economic Impacts: The economic fallout from the pandemic has disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, emphasizing the importance of socio-economic support measures.

3. Community Resilience: Despite the challenges, the survey identifies pockets of community resilience, suggesting that building on local strengths can be a key element in developing effective solutions.

## Call to Action

The findings of the ZonMw research underscore the urgent need for coordinated efforts at local, national, and international levels. Addressing the root causes of food security vulnerabilities requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing economic policies, environmental conservation efforts, and community-based initiatives.

ZonMw's research has been instrumental in shedding light on these vulnerabilities, providing a foundation for informed decision-making. By focusing on the specific challenges faced by each island, tailored strategies can be developed to address the unique needs of Curaçao, Aruba, and Sint Maarten.

As we navigate the complex landscape of a post-pandemic world, addressing food security vulnerabilities in Curaçao, Aruba, and Sint Maarten must be a priority. ZonMw's research serves as a catalyst for informed action, guiding policymakers and stakeholders towards sustainable solutions that will not only alleviate the immediate crisis but also contribute to long-term resilience in these Caribbean islands.

In the spirit of international collaboration, it is crucial that the findings of this survey are used to inform targeted interventions, foster community engagement, and build a foundation for a more secure and resilient future for all. The road ahead may be challenging, but with strategic and compassionate efforts, we can overcome the obstacles and create positive change for the communities of Curaçao, Aruba, and Sint Maarten.

Let us unite in our commitment to ensuring food security for all, recognizing that the well-being of one island is intricately connected to the prosperity of the entire region.

As we navigate the complexities revealed by this research, it is imperative for stakeholders, policymakers, and community leaders to come together. Collaborative solutions, investment in sustainable practices, and the empowerment of local communities will play pivotal roles in building a more resilient and food-secure future for Curaçao, Aruba, and Sint Maarten.

In conclusion, the ZonMw research serves as a clarion call, urging us to prioritize the issue of food security in these Caribbean territories. By acknowledging the challenges and working collectively towards solutions, we can pave the way for a more sustainable and secure future for all.

Stay tuned for more updates as we explore potential strategies and initiatives to address these critical issues.

#FoodSecurity #ZonMwResearch #CaribbeanResilience #COVID19Impact