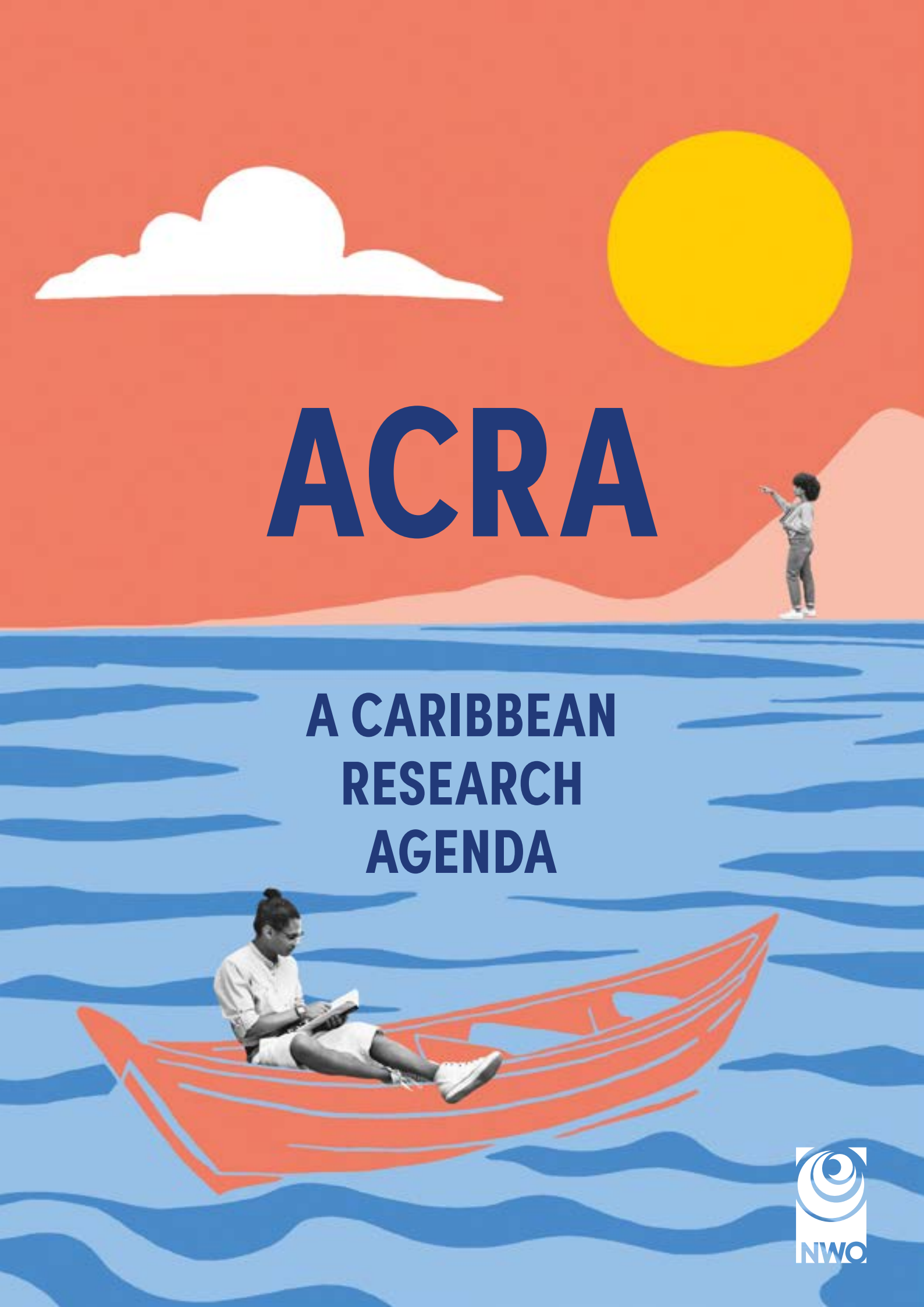




ACRA

A CARIBBEAN RESEARCH AGENDA



COLOPHON

This Caribbean Research Agenda is the result of a collaborative effort by a diverse group of researchers, organizations, and community members across the SSSABC islands and their diaspora. To acknowledge, give credit to, and celebrate these diverse contributions, this colophon lists the names of all those who were involved in the development of this agenda and indicated that they wished to be credited as such. The names are listed in randomized order, and the colophon does not distinguish between different roles, as all individuals involved (including also those who chose not to be credited) provided valuable substantive contributions, without which this agenda would not be what it is.

Elienalda Wilson, Ivelie Lacle, The St. Eustatius Auxiliary Home Foundation, Connie Francis Gumbs, Derrick Simmons, Jasmira Wiersma, Rosabel Blake, Lloyd Narain, Amy Victorina, Jan Bant, Miguel van der Velden, Pamela Lapeña Rojer, Nataly Burgzorg, Anton Loonen, Francis Alberto, Nascha Kagie, Sulima Geerman, Tracy van der Biezen, Maria Henry, Jimmy Faria Albanese, Clifford de Lannoy, Luc Alofs, Nicole Francis Cotton, Danique Martis, Carlvin Brooks, Liviësa Leonora, Francis Delanoy, Churmer Bomba, Marck Oduber, Nifdelly Martis, Elsa Peterson, Marjolijn Christianen, Xander Krolis, Timoteo Silberie, Renske Pin, Violet Gumbs, Nigel Maduro, Roxanne Toré, Gina Marcano,	Don van Eerde, Suitberta Romero, Nadia Dresscher-Lambertus, Patrick Arens, Deedee Johnson, Marciano Geeerd, Dimitri Cloose, Valone Adams, Isaiah Snijders, Kimani Kitson-Walters, Gilbert Vanblarcum, Monica Smith, Adriënne Fernandes, Sharifa Balfour, Ruby Eckmeyer, Earl Merkman, Claudia Kraan, Ria Khudan, Bo Melchers, Damali Bryson, Meralney Bomba, Jerome Dela Cruz, Denzel Ignacia, Gwendell Mercelina Jr., Pedzi Girigori, Mila Dorothea, Flora Goudappel, Marilyn Isaac, Vaitiare Mulderij-Jansen, Eric Mijts, Erik van Sebille, Priscilla Boyce, Elisabeth Echteld, Sabine Berendse, Marilyn Richardson, Damien Schmidt, NAAM Foundation, Régine Croes, Stacey Mac Donald, Jason Fullinck,	Menno Bakker, Jenilva Coffi-Alberto, Marcelle Johnson, Eugene Hoogstad, Lara Chirino, Mary-Ann Falconi, Jackie Bernabela, Raymond Jessurun, Miguel Goede, Kamilah Gumbs, Giandra de Cuba, Cindy Eman, Ivy Defoe, Amber van Veghel, Gale Rigobert, Birgit Kreykenbohm, Lilly Peterson, Nelly Schotborgh-van de Ven, Sharelly Emanuelson, Bastiaan de Jong, Ralph Cantave, Fi de Wit, Edriënna Brandao, Achsah Mitchell, Annemarie Marchena-Slot, Nathalie Houtman, Luz-Celeste Johannes, Jonathan Jukema, Steffen van Heijningen, Tatiana Becker, Sabine Engel, Cheyenne Gumbs, Sorayda Arrindell, Indra Carolus, Mark Vermeij, Wouter Veenendaal, Jessica Johnson, Pheadra Regales, Wieger Bakker, Lenaldo Courtar,	Jamie Pronker, Patricia Wijntuin, Mikayla Vieira Ribeiro, Jeremy Condor, Rechelline Leerdam, Boris van Breukelen, Carolyn Caporusso, Sharité Severina, Linda Berkel, Judith Sonder, Mieke de Droog, Lysanne Charles, Radinka Ustasia, Richard Martina, Werner van de Zilver, Malcolm Wilson, Dhanishka Pohuja, Shamil Ortega, Henrik Lockhart, Elton Villareal, Arginia Lucio, Soraya Verstraeten, Mandy Lacle, Arthur Loefstok, Danick Trouwloon, Ras Mosera, Manfred van Veghel, Kimberly Pietersz, Cadula Jones, Bernice Rollings, Arnold Lubbers, Sanne Bartels, Rhiyon La Pas, Eugenique Wilkins, Nicole Weaver, Guido Rojer, Fernando Simal, Irálíce Jansen, Glenn Thodé.
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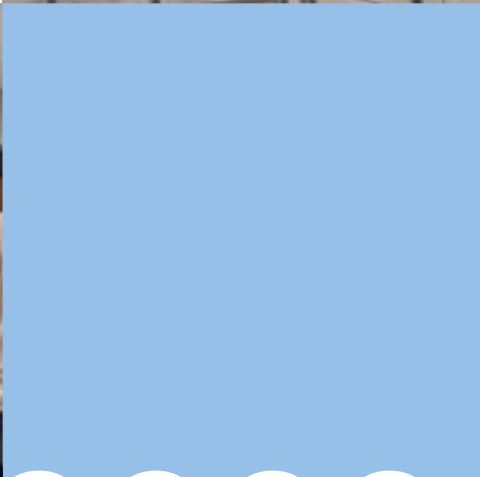
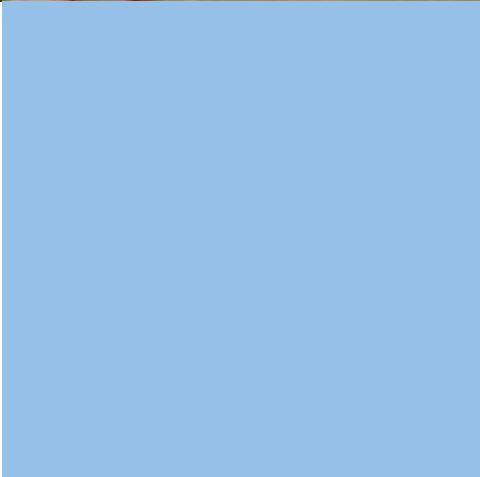
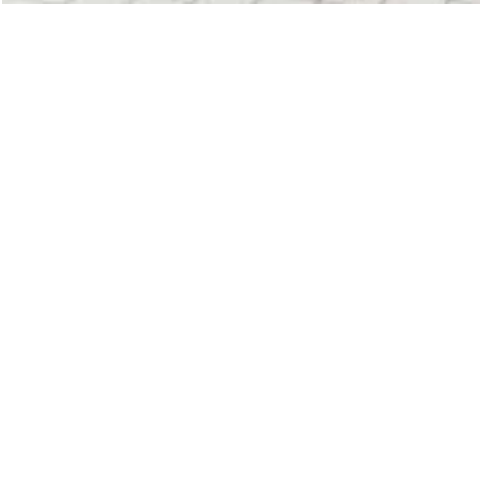
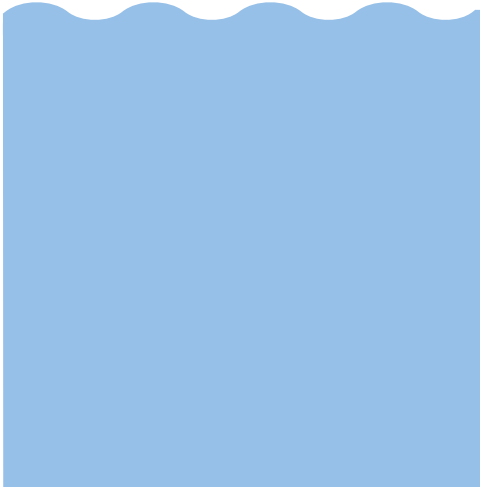
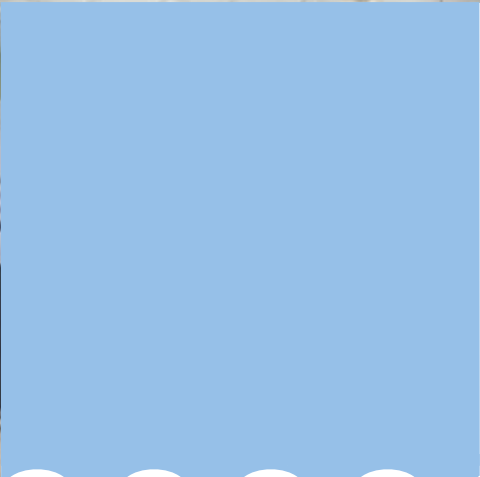
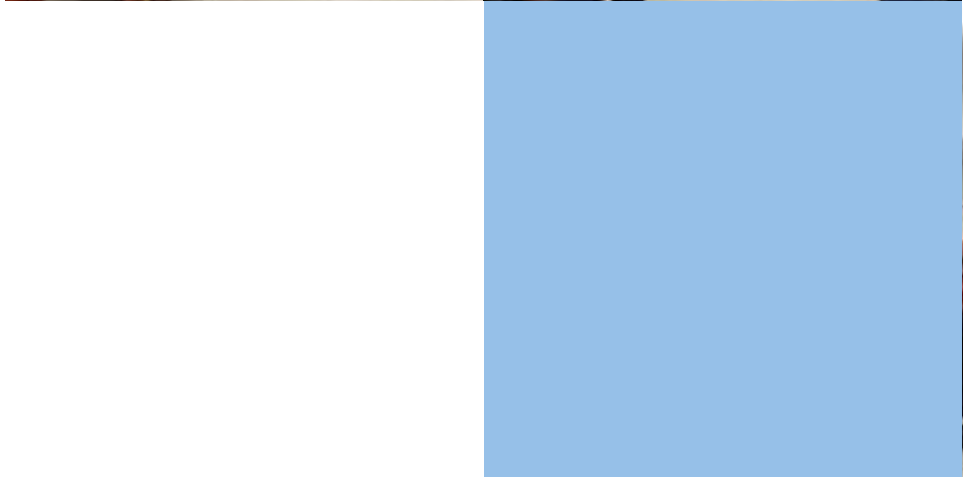
A THRIVING
KNOWLEDGE ECOSYSTEM,
ROOTED IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
AND COMMUNITY WISDOM

“WE NO LONGER WANT
TO BE SUBJECTS OF RESEARCH;
WE WANT TO SHAPE IT;
WITH US, FOR US, AND ABOUT US.”



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1. INTRODUCTION

This Caribbean Research Agenda (ACRA - for A Caribbean Research Agenda) emerges as both a compass and a chorus, pointing research and researchers on the islands forward while echoing the voices of the six Caribbean islands: Saba, St. Eustatius (hereafter Statia), St. Maarten, Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (the SSSABC islands).

It is the result of an ambitious, collaborative, and community-driven process shaped by hundreds of in-person and virtual conversations with island residents, researchers, artists, activists, educators, elders, and civil society leaders. Commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and facilitated by the Dutch Research Council (NWO), this agenda and the process of its creation are more than a roadmap for future inquiry; they represent a reconceptualization of how knowledge can be cultivated, curated, shared, and used in service of communities, sustainability, self-determination, imagination, and justice.

The process of creating this research agenda brought together people from both sides of the Atlantic as part of its core working teams. In its most recent phase - which involved validating previous findings and drafting this agenda text - three members based on the SSSABC islands and one based in the European Netherlands worked closely together over more than a year, sharing dialogue, debating approaches, and translating from community conversations and diaspora dialogues this agenda's direction and text with care and intention.

This collaboration was not incidental, it was essential. It reflected the belief that, just as research must centre island voices, so too must the processes that define research priorities. Across time zones and cultural contexts, relationships were built that were rooted in reciprocity, transparency, and mutual learning. This intentional balance of perspectives aimed to ensure that the agenda development remained grounded in the lived realities of the islands while also creating space for critical reflection on the structures and assumptions embedded in Kingdom-wide knowledge production. This collaborative process did not always mean consensus, but it did mean **commitment to listening differently, to slowing down when needed, and to holding space for discomfort and complexity.**

1.1 What is this Caribbean Research Agenda?

This Caribbean Research Agenda is designed to be a **repository of the research themes and research questions** that, according to Caribbean communities, currently deserve the highest priority (chapter 6). These themes and questions are accompanied by the **terms and conditions** (chapters 4 and 5) to which communities

believe this research must be beholden in order to be able to truly contribute to the development of island communities on their own terms. This agenda is intended as a living document, which island communities can continue to provide input to regularly, keeping it up to date as the social realities and research landscapes on the islands continue to change; and as research questions get answered and new ones emerge. This agenda exists in both a digital and report format, in order to facilitate accessibility across target audiences.

Importantly, this Caribbean Research Agenda is designed not in isolation but in conversation with other research agendas across the wider Caribbean. It sees itself as a connection point, a bridge between researchers, themes, and struggles that transcend colonial and linguistic boundaries. It recognizes the shared histories and interwoven futures of Caribbean peoples and aims to strengthen regional solidarity through mutual learning, co-creation, and aligned priorities. In this way, this agenda seeks to move beyond a Kingdom-centric frame, positioning these six islands not at the edge of research conversations but at the very heart of them.

1.2 What does this Caribbean Research Agenda set out to do?

This is a research agenda not only in purpose, but also in practice. It aims to disrupt extractive models of inquiry that have too often treated Caribbean communities as objects of study rather than as co-creators of meaning and agents of change. It challenges the colonial legacies embedded in academic institutions, funding structures, and research ethics and rejects the marginalization of local knowledges, insisting on methodologies that are inclusive, equitable, and rooted in the lived realities of island communities.

As many of those who contributed to this agenda have emphasized: research in this context must be about more than data collection or publication metrics; it must also be transformational. It must be collaborative, circular, and accountable. It must answer to the needs of the communities in which the research is being conducted and not merely to the curiosity of the academy. In other words, it must ground itself in the following questions:



**Whose knowledge counts?
Who benefits?
Who decides what questions matter, and why?**

Honouring this community input, this Agenda recognizes that knowledge is not only housed in universities or scientific laboratories; it is also found in **oral histories, street corner conversations, spiritual practices, embodied traditions, carnival**

songs, murals, field notes, migration stories, and the silences and stony faces of generations who were not asked or listened to. It acknowledges that **artists, poets, musicians, and community organizers** are also researchers and can be visionaries who interpret, critique, and imagine the world through different but equally rigorous modes of inquiry and knowing. Imagination, then, is not a luxury, riffing off of Audre Lorde and Ruja Benjamin; it is a methodology in its own right.

This agenda envisions a thriving knowledge ecosystem, rooted in scientific knowledge and community wisdom, where various different ways of knowing come together to address societal challenges on the SSSABC islands. In the face of historic erasure and structural inequity, creative and speculative thinking becomes a tool for survival and a strategy for liberation. Research that incorporates art, storytelling, dance, and design opens new pathways for understanding and acting upon the world. This Caribbean Research Agenda thus invites both regional and visiting scholars not only to analyse, but to co-create by joining forces with local artists, educators, policy-makers, and practitioners across all layers and sectors of society in designing research processes that are as expressive as they are empirical. This means remaining critical about the potential of traditional disciplinary research approaches without necessarily outright rejecting them, but instead continuously reflecting about which research approaches may be most appropriate in each context.

1.3 Pursuing Impactful Research

This agenda also calls for a fundamental rethinking of what constitutes impact. In micro-island contexts, research impact often manifests through small yet meaningful shifts that can ripple through tightly knit communities, leading to transformative social, cultural, or environmental change. Recognizing that even modest interventions can yield major benefits is key to designing research projects that are both realistic and deeply relevant to island realities. Notwithstanding, this agenda underlines the importance of not losing sight of the significant challenges that Caribbean island communities face, imploring researchers to seek to contribute as much as possible, in ways that communities themselves find appropriate and meaningful.

Impact is therefore not about only publishing reports; it is also about shifting power relations, restoring dignity, nurturing collective memory, and sparking community-led innovation. It is about ensuring that research produces benefits that are tangible, durable, and visible in peoples' everyday lives. That might be a revised curriculum in local schools, the protection of sacred ecological sites, a new archive of oral histories, or mural projects that visualize shared aspirations - as much as it might be the discovery of new species, the changing of laws, the development of new pharmaceutical drugs, or the introduction of new products and technologies.

In light of the long history and continued ubiquity of top-down approaches to research, this agenda explicitly affirms the value of bottom-up research, rooted in local knowledge and community priorities. Beyond methods and models, this gestures toward something deeper: a poetics of research. Research, when done in relation, can be a site of connection, of encounter, of seeing each other, and ourselves, differently. It can create space not only for learning but for renewal. When communities are invited to learn with and from one another - also across islands and generations, and across disciplines, sectors, and ways of knowing - research becomes more than data collection; it becomes a practice of and in solidarity. A practice that cultivates a kind of intimacy, that builds community, strengthens networks, and makes space for mutual recognition, an antidote to the historical distancing that extractive research has too often imposed. A poetics of research encourages methodologies that honour ambiguity and intuition as much as clarity and reason. These are not soft alternatives to hard science; they are rigorous in their own right, rooted in the rhythms, textures, and aesthetics of Caribbean island life. Bottom-up approaches, when shaped through this poetic lens, foster research that is not only more inclusive but also potentially more resonant and impactful, as it is rooted in local contexts and responsible knowledge-making.

1.4 Justice Principles Governing this Caribbean Research Agenda

Central to this agenda is the concept of knowledge justice.

Knowledge justice is not only about what is studied or who is studying; it is about how research is governed, how findings are communicated, and how results are used. It demands that island priorities are centralized from the inception of projects through to their dissemination and impact. It demands that research and researchers contribute fully to the wellbeing of island societies economically, ecologically, socially, and spiritually, while avoiding harm. Caribbean institutions have a big role to play in enabling this shift. This includes advocating for funding structures that privilege long-term, community-led research, creating interdisciplinary spaces that value traditional and creative knowledge, and supporting platforms for local scholars to lead and publish work on their own terms.

To this end, this Agenda articulates a bold yet grounded set of justice-oriented principles. Among them are:



- **Local leadership and self-determination:** Research on the SSSABC islands must be guided by those who know the islands, their cultures, and the needs of their people. Local universities, civil society organizations, and citizen scientists should be supported to lead and sustain research on their own



terms. Visiting scholars may supplement when expertise or capacity is not yet available locally, recognizing the value of both insider- and outsider perspectives.



- **Equity in funding and recognition:** Resources must be allocated in ways that align with island contexts and repair historical imbalances. This includes recognizing the labour of community members and ensuring fair recognition, compensation, infrastructure, and long-term support.



- **Multivocality and inclusion:** Research must reflect the diversity of the islands' voices and experiences. This means embracing multiple languages, methodologies, and ways of knowing, including those often excluded from academic canons.



- **Transparency and accessibility:** Findings must be shared in clear, accessible ways that resonate with communities. This includes using local languages such as English and Papiamentu/o, hosting public events, publishing in local media, communicating through local channels, going into communities to share findings, leveraging arts and culture, and depositing results in community libraries or digital repositories.



- **Capacity building and mentorship:** This agenda calls for investment in the next generation of island-based researchers. This includes PhD programs, training opportunities, research fellowships, and mentorship initiatives tailored to the Caribbean context. Intergenerational research is vital, as elders carry deep historical knowledge and lived experience, while youth bring fresh perspectives and innovative approaches that together sustain communities and foster cultural continuity. Building capacity must therefore intentionally include mentorship and collaboration across generations, ensuring knowledge transfer and empowering both elders and youth as co-creators of research.



- **Attention to implementation:** Actionable knowledge is key for addressing societal challenges on the SSSABC islands, which requires that research projects are intentional about producing implementable knowledge already at their inception. Furthermore, adequate resources should be made available for the implementation of research results.



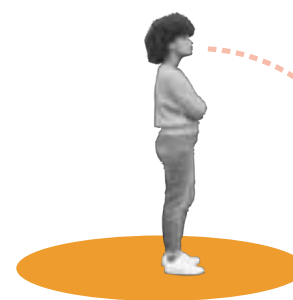
1.5 How is this agenda structured?

This agenda begins by describing its development and the terms and conditions governing it (chapters 2-5). The following chapter first recounts the background to the development of this Caribbean Research Agenda, after which it describes and justifies the methods that were used to develop this agenda. **Chapter 3** then lays out the research landscape across the six Caribbean islands, as much as we could gather from community members through the surveys, expert meetings, community conversations, stakeholder sessions, diaspora dialogues, and emails. This is followed by a discussion of the terms and conditions through two guiding questions: **Who is a Researcher (Chapter 4)** and **How to Pursue Impactful Researcher (Chapter 5)**.

Chapter 6 is the main body of this research agenda. Structured across interconnected themes, this chapter includes a narrative description of each theme and emphasizes why it was deemed a priority by island communities. These narratives are accompanied by research questions posed by community members, which are clustered into sub-themes. While the narratives and themes are presented separately, the themes should not be interpreted as stand-alone but rather as interconnected topics. They represent the various entry points that exist for an integrated approach to research that addresses the various urgent, and interrelated societal concerns in the Caribbean.

Ultimately, this agenda is both an invitation and a provocation. It invites researchers, funders, and institutions to rethink their roles not as neutral observers but as **active participants** in a colonial context, where decolonial approaches to research have the potential to further justice and the self-determination of island communities, while business-as-usual may enact further coloniality. It provokes questions around the ethics of knowledge production and the structures that have historically defined who speaks, who listens, and who is heard. It affirms the right of island communities to author their own stories, shape their own futures, and govern their own research priorities. It encourages boldness not just in ideas but in alliances, methodologies, and visions for what research and researchers are, can, and must become.

In the words of many participants who helped shape this agenda:



*"We no longer want to be subjects of research; we want to **SHAPE** research; **WITH US, FOR US, and ABOUT US.**"*

This is A Caribbean Research Agenda that begins to make that possible.

2. BACKGROUND TO THIS AGENDA

2.1 Background

In 2018, the Dutch Ministry of OCW tasked NWO with developing a research agenda for the SSSABC islands. The Ministry of OCW requested an agenda that aligns with NWO's Caribbean Research Program and, where possible, correlates with the Dutch National Science Agenda. The Ministry of OCW emphasized a desire for this agenda to reflect the priorities of the Caribbean islands' communities, in order to ensure their ownership and buy-in.

As the team tasked with writing the text for this Caribbean Research Agenda, we joined its development process in the summer of 2024, after substantial work on this agenda had already been carried out by NWO and partners. This work is described in more detail below and included two online surveys, the writing of a draft agenda text with seven priority topics, and validating the draft through meetings with Caribbean research experts. With this as input, we interpreted our directive as an invitation to design both a validation approach and final deliverable that prioritize community input and foster genuine engagement. In other words, we wanted to work towards this agenda in a way that was not only about research priorities; but just as much about making sure that those priorities come from and resonate with the communities they aim to serve.

2.2 Methods

1: First online survey

In 2019, NWO gave its first follow up to the OCW assignment by **launching an online, public survey**. Various print and online media on the SSSABC islands disseminated this survey. Importantly, news articles emphasized the aim of including input from island communities at wide - not only limited to people already involved or familiar with research, but expressly inviting any individual or organization to respond with ideas on what questions researchers ought to answer.

This first survey sought to identify main societal and research themes and to make a first inventory of which questions researchers should be focused on according to individuals and organizations on the SSSABC islands. Furthermore, the survey sought to ensure that the resulting agenda would connect to current topics and developments in the Caribbean region.

2019



The survey asked individual citizens and organizations about which (broad) themes or topics they thought deserve most or more attention from researchers. Participants were presented with a shortlist of topics based on NWO's experiences with the Caribbean region at the time: education, culture & identity; sustainability, nature, climate, water & tourism; health & food, food production & agriculture; energy provision & transition; socio-economic issues, governance & safety; or other themes or topics. As follow-up questions, the survey asked what specific knowledge was needed and what the priorities should be in terms of capacity development on the SSSABC islands in the coming five to ten years.

2020

2: Second online survey

The following year, 2020, was marked by the covid-19 pandemic. As NWO expected that the pandemic would impact the needs of the island communities, and to make sure that the resulting agenda would include these potential shifts in community needs, **another survey was launched in 2021**. This survey had the same questions as the first survey. However, in the accompanying instructions, survey participants were more explicitly invited to fill in any missing research themes or topics. **Jointly, the two surveys were filled in about 400 times.**

2021



2022

3: Themes and narratives

In 2022, Jan Bant and Glenn Thodé, two researchers affiliated with NWO's Caribbean Research Programme, were asked to **analyse this survey data to identify overarching themes and narratives**. They concluded that the survey data was sufficiently rich to distil insights from island communities and identify research priorities, which they clustered into seven themes. Based on this clustering, they wrote seven draft agenda chapters in a narrative style.

These seven chapters formed the basis of the subsequent validation steps, and were titled:

1. Economy & Work
2. Safe Societies & Democracy
3. Education, Culture & Identity
4. Sustainable Future
5. Healthy Ecosystems & Environments
6. Food & Nutrition
7. Health & Healthcare



2023

4: Validation with experts

In 2023, NWO sought to design a validation process for these draft thematic agenda chapters that engaged both experts in Caribbean research as well as Caribbean island communities at large. During this phase, NWO reemphasized its commitment that both the validation steps as well as the outcomes of the validation process needed to reflect community ownership and co-creation.

As a first validation step, in April and May of 2024, sessions were organized with experts in Caribbean research to review the identified themes. **Six online sessions were held, each of which was organized around one of the abovementioned themes.** The seventh theme (Health & Healthcare) was excluded, as ZonMw, NWO's sister research funding council that focuses on health and medical research, was simultaneously exploring health-related research priorities on the SSSABC islands.



The sessions involved experts, both with roots in the Caribbean as well as those from the European part of the Kingdom, who had research experience or other expertise related to research in the Caribbean region. Invited experts were sent all six draft agenda chapters before the session. While they were asked to consider the chapter that related to their session, they were also invited to think about and link to the other thematic chapters. **In this way, experts were asked to think through the interconnectedness between the themes, rather than considering them in isolation.**

NWO drew three conclusions from these sessions which informed the next validation step. Firstly, the experts explicitly endorsed the identified themes as the most pressing societal and research concerns that scholars and scientists should address with respect to the SSSABC islands. Next to that, they unanimously emphasized a need to deepen the text and enrich the narratives with concrete research questions in order to provide directions for future research projects or programmes. Finally, in each session, experts explicitly instructed NWO to include terms and conditions for conducting research on the SSSABC islands. According to the invitees, formulating strong terms and conditions would be crucial for guaranteeing ownership and buy-in for any research agenda on the islands.

2024

5: Validation on the SSSABC islands

The lead authors of this Caribbean Research Agenda joined the process at this crucial junction: with the aim of validating and building on the existing draft, in order to write a semi-final text for this Caribbean Research Agenda, which was to function as a living document. In order to validate and build on the existing draft, this

step involved an extensive consultation process both across the six islands and online during the summer of 2024, from June 19 to September 12.

Our approach prioritized inclusivity and sought to engage as many voices as possible through:

- **In-Person Sessions:** we held 12 Community Conversations - two on each of the six islands. These sessions were open to the public and advertised online, via the radio, and through local newspapers, with attendance ranging from 5 to 30 participants at each session.
- **Private Stakeholder Meeting:** we conducted 59 stakeholder sessions with individuals from various sectors, including knowledge institutions, government bodies, nature organizations, heritage organizations, youth workers, artists, farmers, and medical professionals.
- **Online Engagement:** we hosted two Diaspora Dialogues to connect with and receive input from those living abroad or unable to attend in-person sessions.
- **Written Feedback:** we received additional input through written submissions from community members by email or WhatsApp.

In total, we estimate that the island validation process engaged up to 600 individuals and organizations across the SSSABC islands and diaspora. During this time, we shared the main insights from each visit via island-specific newsletters that were sent to everyone who wanted to stay in touch with us as well as via LinkedIn. These newsletters included links to the media that were used for the Community Conversations, as well as the main take-aways from each session.

Several key points emerged from the island validation process. Firstly, participants highlighted that the main titles of the thematic chapters were somewhat generic, and suggested edits and additions to the existing titles as well as suggesting an entirely new main theme. Furthermore, participants emphasized again that the themes, underlying topics, and research questions should not be seen as separate from each other; rather, the societal and research questions are complex and connect to each other on multiple levels. Indeed, participants noted that, from funding through execution and communication of research projects, every step in the research process should reflect the fact that no question exists in isolation on the islands. Finally, and addressing the need identified by the experts during the previous validation step, participants provided substantial recommendations for terms and conditions that could lead to more research ownership and buy-in by SSSABC island communities.



2025

One specific way in which we sought to give credit where it was due and share ownership across island communities was by **asking all participants in the validation process whether they wanted to be credited in this agenda**. You will have found the names of the people who responded positively to this question in the colophon at the beginning of this document. **This is a small way of showing our appreciation to all who have lent and continue to lend their time, energy and ideas in this co-creative process**. And even though the colophon includes the names of many individuals who provided substantive contributions to this agenda, we are also grateful for the input of all others who contributed but chose not to be credited.

6: Final consultation

The input we received from SSSABC island community members during the validation process was used to write a new draft version of this agenda. As a final validation step, we invited everybody who shared their contact details with us, as well as anybody else who wanted to through announcements in the media, to reflect and provide feedback on this draft version through a short online survey between December 2024 and January 2025. This survey asked how people experienced the long process of developing this agenda, whether or not the validation was sufficient, whether or not the draft sufficiently captured island-specific nuances, and whether or not respondents agreed with the outcomes of the process: the chapters, the research questions, and the terms and conditions.

In general, those who had participated in the validation sessions and other readers felt that the process had been **extensive, rich and sufficient**. The chapters were generally deemed to be detailed, and the interconnectedness between themes and topics was deemed sufficiently clear. Respondents found that the draft text read as sensitive to both regional and island-specific needs, while also providing enough openings to international and global research perspectives.

Notwithstanding, throughout the validation process, **we also encountered individuals who were critical of our approach and/or findings**. Notably, the development of this agenda is rooted in an assignment from the Dutch government, and did not come from Caribbean communities themselves. Furthermore, the initial follow up given to this assignment did not involve any collaboration with partners and stakeholders from or in the region. While the several community validation steps sought to address this by remaining amendable to community feedback, adding research topics or questions that were missed in previous steps, and adding terms and conditions, we also noticed hesitance and reservations. Not all respondents were convinced that this agenda would lead to more Caribbean, community-owned research, highlighting lingering mistrust based on previous experiences with NWO and NWO-funded research. Other respondents were



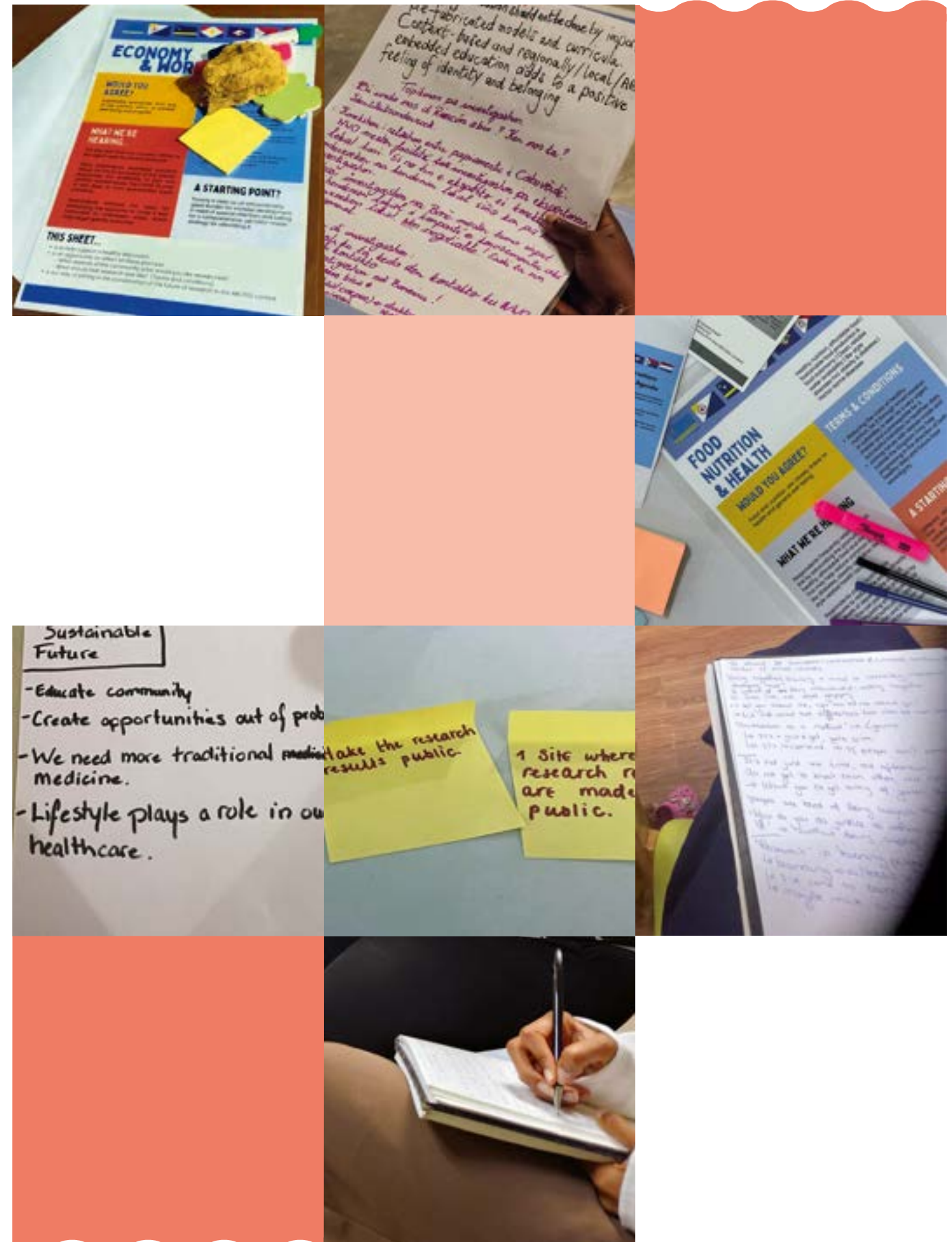
critical about the findings of this particular agenda as well as the approach adopted to validate these findings, arguing in favour of established research approaches and existing funding models. While traditional approaches to research are also deemed important in this agenda, they are envisioned to form part of a knowledge ecosystem that also recognizes the value of others ways of knowing and researching the world. **Nevertheless, these points of critique or reservation may require attention in the implementation of this agenda.**

This Caribbean Research Agenda is, like participants of the Community Conversations underlined, not the end of a process but a beginning. We envision this Agenda as a tool to support researchers, citizens and organizations to find each other around key questions and start conversations on topics that they find important. This agenda is not unique in that respect: there are other (research and policy) agendas with thematic, local, regional, and global scopes that set out with similar aims. We therefore invite knowledge institutes, organizations and governmental bodies to find connections between these agendas and make them explicit. **Perhaps most importantly, this agenda offers NWO and all governments across the Kingdom of the Netherlands the opportunity to invest in researching urgent societal and research issues.** There are sufficient possibilities to do so, as you will read further on in the thematic chapters.

2.3 Justification

The Ministry of OCW requested an agenda that is both grounded in the research priorities of the SSSABC island communities and widely supported by them. Validation was a critical step in achieving this. As the initial surveys were completed by inhabitants and organizations from the SSSABC islands, NWO deemed it only fitting that these findings be returned to the same communities. After all, who better to validate and refine how this data was being interpreted than those where it originated from and those it ought to serve? While time and logistical constraints have limited the scale of our efforts, we have aimed to make the validation process as participatory and co-creative as possible. By centring the voices of the SSSABC communities, we have sought to foster genuine ownership and trust.

This Caribbean Research Agenda sets out to make clear what the communities of Saba, Statia, St. Maarten, Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao are currently curious about and the knowledge needs they have in order to cope with the major issues their islands face. This has led to much enthusiasm among us and among the many islanders who participated in the process, which perhaps is the most important foundation for the future: creating options to work together, rooted in enthusiasm and a shared commitment to impactful, just, and locally owned research. In outlining the major questions that need answering and bringing communities together in enthusiasm, **this agenda thus seeks to contribute to a sustainable, inclusive and stronger knowledge ecosystem in the Caribbean.**





3. RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

The SSSABC islands are characterized by a rich research landscape, where research is done in many different contexts. This includes publicly and privately financed institutes of higher learning, American medical schools, local hospitals, NGOs, and (inter)national research facilities.

Some of these organizations are focused primarily on research, others contribute to it from time to time as a result of their primary mission, and researchers often also operate independently. Yet, whether we are thinking of a researcher working on climate governance at a university, a scientist working on nature conservation in an NGO, or an independent scholar working on cultural heritage, we will find that researchers on the SSSABC islands often work on projects that are strongly intertwined with societal questions.

As a result of this diversity in embeddedness, collaboration is essential and occurs often. Researchers frequently join forces on local, national, regional, kingdom and international levels and, in doing so, design and conduct research of high quality, with both local and global impact.

Caribbean researchers run into multiple challenges, however, which hinder them in optimally designing and conducting research as well as in translating their results to Caribbean and other contexts. Chief among these challenges are the funding dynamics within this research landscape. At the time of writing, research on the SSSABC islands does not benefit from any structural financial means; that is, money without any earmarks that can be used to invest in the development of long term research capacity, strategic research lines, and collaborative infrastructures.

Oftentimes, financial means can only be obtained through competitive funds, for which there is often fierce competition and with conditions that are often not designed with the Caribbean research landscape in mind. This hinders the chances for successful funding acquisition by Caribbean researchers.

Furthermore, because of their statuses as constituents in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, researchers based in Aruba, Curaçao, and St. Maarten are oftentimes not eligible for research funding that is provided on a European level. Similar issues arise when, for instance, philanthropic organizations bar researchers from these islands from receiving funding as Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Researchers on Bonaire, Saba, and Statia also encounter similar challenges, albeit from a different constitutional position, for example because there are no universities established on these islands.

A direct consequence of the lack of structural, long-term investment in research is the difficulty in retaining talented local researchers. The brain drain phenomenon exists not only in terms of education, but also in terms of research opportunities, with many talented Caribbean researchers working in the diaspora. Other Caribbean researchers remain on the islands and conduct their research from here, often quite successfully, yet sometimes without affiliation with an institute of higher learning, which may bring with it other challenges related to embeddedness. In addition, researchers on the islands - including those affiliated with institutes of higher learning - currently often fulfil many necessary tasks surrounding their research themselves. Structural financing would bring with it the opportunity to hire expert support staff as overhead, which would enable researchers to specialize even further.

The policy guiding research and research funding on the SSSABC islands is another challenge. Notably, most of the research policy that pertains to the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands is developed in the European Netherlands, with a focus on the European Netherlands. Furthermore, as the independent governments of Aruba, Curaçao, and St. Maarten face repeated pressing economical and societal shocks, research policy and funding are not necessarily of the highest priority. Despite this, researchers on the SSSABC islands have consistently contributed to policy development, economic advancement, and addressing other societal issues. In addition, and notwithstanding the many challenges named above, the research landscape on the SSSABC islands demonstrates strong growth in terms of scientific and scholarly output.

While this showcases the strength of the Caribbean research landscape, these challenges also illustrate a clear need to better support researchers by enabling them to focus on their unique strengths and talents more optimally. This highlights a need to not only focus on the research themes and questions that are important to communities on the SSSABC islands - which this agenda discusses in chapter 6 - but to also pay attention to the terms and conditions under which this research should be conducted in order to best align with the research landscape on the islands and to best contribute to addressing societal issues - which are discussed in chapters 4 and 5. **Before that, in the subsections below, we describe the research landscape on the SSSABC islands in more detail, distinguishing between all six islands to bring forward the nuanced differences between their research landscapes.**

3.1 Research landscape on the SSS Islands

Saba, Statia, and St. Maarten are the smallest of the SSSABC islands. While most residents are native English speakers,



their cultural influences stem widely from Afro-Caribbean traditions as well as from North and South America.

For many, the connection to the Netherlands lies predominantly in their citizenship, with limited ties to other aspects of Dutchness. Although these islands are not explicitly ignored, many inhabitants experience a sense of disconnect when it comes to research. **On the one hand, there is an acknowledgment of the islands' colonial relevance within the kingdom; on the other, there is a palpable sense of exclusion and marginalization within the broader research landscape.**

The core challenge is one of agency. As is common throughout the Caribbean, many of the inhabitants of the SSS islands are only a few generations removed from slavery, descending from individuals who lacked both social and physical mobility. As a result, many were, quite literally, left behind. Yet, being left behind has also meant preserving distinctive ways of life shaped by the islands' natural heritage and geography, as well as by the proven resilience and ingenuity of their people. These ways of operating have developed largely in parallel to, rather than integrated with, the practices and systems of the Dutch metropole. While larger islands in the Caribbean - including within the Kingdom - have often been prioritized due to their size and population, which has enabled their residents to adapt more easily to dominant Western frameworks, the SSS islands have not received the same level of engagement or support. To some extent, this exacerbates the barriers for researchers and organizations on the SSS islands to participate equitably in the Eurocentric, highly academic research landscape that currently characterizes the islands.

As hosts for significant amounts of research, typically done by visiting scholars, the SSS islands have increasingly become more critical of the often extractive and occasionally exploitative research practices they encounter. On several instances, the community members we spoke to shared their experiences of being treated as objects of study rather than feeling like equal and active participants in the research process. They described being often excluded from the initial planning stages and receiving no meaningful follow-up or access to research findings. **This lack of reciprocity perpetuates a cycle of disenfranchisement, and has led to a sense of research fatigue among many.**



On SABA, the primary concern we encountered was alignment between research and policy agendas. Participants in the community conversations and stakeholder sessions felt that



research on the island was often conducted **as if in a vacuum**, and that research results were often not used by local government and NGOs for evidence-based decision-making. This, in turn, undermined the potential for collaboration between researchers and decision-makers, further adversely impacting opportunities for meaningful change. In this light, there was an expressed desire for research to contribute more tangibly to the development of policies that benefit local communities directly. Another key issue was the lack of resources and capacity within the small local organizations to conduct, participate in, or implement the findings of research, as they struggle to secure research funding while simultaneously trying to serve their communities. Finally, many emphasized the significant disconnect that remains between researchers and the wider community on Saba. Notably, several community members expressed how they often do not feel listened to by researchers and have not experienced any tangible changes as a result of past engagements, and therefore chose not to participate in the community conversations. **There was thus a clear desire for more collaborative and inclusive research processes that produce meaningful impact.** Crucially, community members shared that meaningful participation requires meeting people where they are. Researchers ought to go into community places directly rather than convening communities in academic spaces, and research should answer questions that affect daily life on Saba, while pursuing tangible results for communities.



On STATIA, a significant concern expressed during the community conversations and stakeholder sessions was the lack of clarity around, and effective participation in, research initiatives. Many locals reported feeling disconnected from research questions, processes and results. They also experienced that research seemingly seldom benefitted them, calling instead for approaches that were decolonial and more suited to Statia's context. This sentiment was compounded by what can be described as research fatigue, as many felt overwhelmed by the frequent requests to answer questions about the local landscape and refer researchers to useful individuals. Respondents called for a centralized body or agency to better coordinate research efforts and reduce demands on individual members of society. Furthermore, there was a strong call for research that leads to actionable outcomes, and funding for implementing the findings of research. **The community respondents emphasized the importance of research findings being translated into meaningful, tangible, and locally led actions that addressed island specific needs and had positive impacts on their**



community. In addition, both research methods and dissemination methods need to be aligned with the needs of island communities. For example, islanders may prefer WhatsApp over email, or art-based and culturally-specific modes of engagement such as theatre and dominos over reports and science cafes as ways participating in research or engaging with findings. Heritage, culture, and history were often brought up as key research topics on Statia, as were invasive species and how to thrive within the constitutional constraints of the Kingdom.



On ST. MAARTEN, a prevailing issue was a fear of retaliation, which inhibits open participation in research. Respondents shared that many citizens are reluctant to voice their opinions due to concerns around potential social or political repercussions. This fear is compounded by a sense that research results will not be considered in decision-making anyways, with some community members describing how research reports often end up in drawers without being consulted. We also encountered many questions of identity and representation, particularly around the issue of "Who is a St. Maartener and who is not?" This question underpinned much of the local discourse across community conversations and stakeholder sessions. Finally, there was a strong desire for researchers to engage with the community in a way that reflects and respects local identities and perspectives. Importantly, it was emphasized that research should contribute to the development of island communities, and that it should be island communities who decide what these contributions ought to look like, not researchers. **Similarly, there was a strong and clear call for structural funding to support sustainable research initiatives. The current norm of incidental or short-term competitive funding was viewed as inadequate**, with local stakeholders advocating for more consistent and more substantial financial resources to ensure long-term growth and development.



3.2 Research landscape on the ABC Islands

Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao are the largest of the SSSABC islands. While Papiamentu/o remains their dominant language, its use has a complex social history. Suppressed at various points in the colonial period, it has only recently gained greater acceptance.

As a result, many residents of the ABC islands are multilingual,

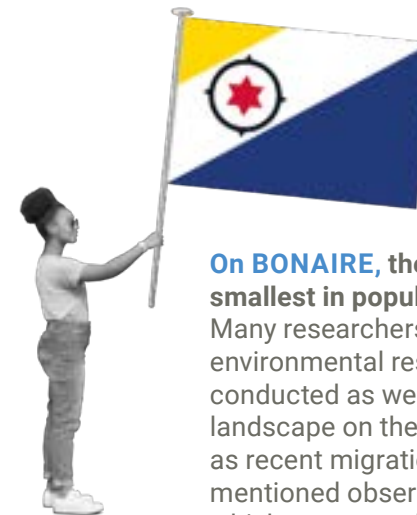
with Dutch being their second or third language and the main educational language of instruction for many. Despite challenges, this multilingualism has presented residents of the ABC islands with opportunities to navigate structures of governance, (higher) education, and research, which remain rooted in Dutchness, often gatekeeping research opportunities within the Kingdom.

In addition to their linguistic position, the ABC islands have historically been administrative centres of governance in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom. Curaçao served as the capital of the Netherlands Antilles until 2010, as well as functioning as an administrative centre during the preceding colonial era. Aruba, in turn, has long operated autonomously on many matters of governance, becoming the first autonomous island country in the Kingdom in 1986. Finally, since the constitutional reforms of 10-10-10, Bonaire has taken on a growing administrative role for the BES islands. These shifts in prominence are closely tied to the size of the ABC islands, which often boast larger populations and more developed infrastructure than their northern counterparts. This has reinforced their status as political, economic, and consequentially therefore also as research hubs.

These factors - larger populations, multilingualism, and a legacy of centralized governance - have enabled the ABC islands to foster strong local education systems and develop island-specific solutions to regional research challenges. With larger populations, fewer residents leave for higher education in the Netherlands or in the region, cushioning against some the cultural and linguistic barriers that often hinder Caribbean students abroad. Moreover, both Aruba and Curaçao host multiple institutes of higher learning, enabling them to offer paid teaching and research positions on the islands. Thus, while there is a large prevalence of foreign research across the ABC islands, the islands also boast strong local research traditions, particularly in the social sciences and humanities.



On ARUBA, there is a diverse and well-established research landscape. Shaped by nearly forty years of autonomy within the Kingdom, Aruban research actors have carved out distinct niches for themselves, with strong institutional frameworks and independent research efforts alike. The government is relatively involved in research on the island, such as in advancing health research for anticipatory health policy and care. Aruban



On BONAIRE, the second largest of the ABC islands but the smallest in population, one finds a smaller research community.

Many researchers come from abroad, particularly to conduct environmental research, although quite some local research is conducted as well, notably on heritage and culture. The research landscape on the island is shaped by its colonial history as well as recent migration trends. Community members on Bonaire mentioned observable racial and class divisions on the island, which are exacerbated in the research landscape as many researchers are concentrated in Kralendijk, are visibly perceivable as outsiders, and tend to apply Eurocentric methods. This has fostered a sense that research on Bonaire is conducted on external terms, serving outside interests rather than benefiting the Bonairian community. Few research outcomes are seen as directly useful by the local population, adding to the perception that research is more of a burden than a collaborative opportunity. In Bonaire too participants mentioned the risk of retaliation, for example when research results are unfavourable. **Key research priorities on Bonaire include questions of identity, particularly in the context of migration, and the protection of nature and climate.** Bonaire's natural environment, which is central to its tourism industry, faces increasing pressure from development and climate change, as well as challenges in engaging the local population. In this light, some community members expressed concern that connections to and respect for nature may be declining due to migration trends. **There is also a strong desire for research to support regional connections and to help preserve what makes Bonaire unique.**





ON CURAÇAO, the research landscape is diverse and extensive, boasting many voices and characterized by - in comparison - more competition. The island government shows interest in policy-informed research, yet is constrained by limited structural funding, which hampers its ability to invest in the island's research landscape. Much of the research that the government does fund or participate in involves consultancy and policy-driven studies. Nevertheless, there is a widespread perception that both policy-driven and fundamental research frequently fail to translate into meaningful contributions on the island, with findings often "ending up in drawers." Curaçao's research ecosystem is comprised of several institutions of higher learning, active civil society organizations, and a significant number of independent researchers; all of which voiced a desire for greater independence in shaping the island's research landscape and for strengthening its research capacity. **Key research priorities on Curaçao include sustainable development, with an opportunity to align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) priorities set by the government, poverty alleviation, and the impacts of migration on identity.** Other important topics include nature conservation, water management, and the history of slavery, reflecting an interest in leveraging research to address both contemporary and historical challenges facing the island.



3.3 Common themes across islands

A common theme that emerged across all islands is frustration with research practices, particularly around participation and fatigue. Community members across all six islands expressed a desire for clearer communication, increased transparency, and more opportunities for meaningful and fairly remunerated involvement in research efforts. Regarding research fatigue, communities expressed the need for more streamlined and coordinated efforts to avoid overwhelming the local populations and to ensure communication and dissemination approaches meet the islands' needs. Relatedly, communities called for repositories of all the research that had already been conducted on the islands, as much of the existing research outputs are hard to access locally, leading to further fragmentation between research efforts. There was also a shared need for stronger capacity-building initiatives, as local organizations and individuals often lack the resources to pursue funding and drive impactful change. Lastly, a recurring desire was for research findings to

be tangible and actionable. Communities wanted research to go beyond academic exercises and result in concrete outcomes that are locally driven, beneficial and impactful, emphasizing the importance of practical, real-world applications.

In terms of perspectives on the research landscape, participants on all islands expressed a strong desire to shape research funding more on their own terms, advocating for more structural funding and increased capacity-building opportunities. There was also a shared frustration with researchers who "fly in and fly out," conducting studies without accounting for local needs or priorities and failing to share their findings with the communities. Finally, participants also emphasized a need for financing the implementation of research results, to foster sustainable and tangible impacts.

Identity and culture emerged as central research topics on all islands, particularly in relation to the islands' Indigenous and colonial histories as well as the impacts of more recent migration trends. **Tourism was another recurring theme**, with discussions focusing on what constitutes desirable tourism development on each island and how it should balance with other priorities, such as nature conservation. On all islands, community members also emphasized **the interrelatedness of all themes**.

These shared concerns highlight a collective aspiration for a more inclusive, locally driven approach to research on the SSSABC islands. Addressing these issues and working towards a research landscape that genuinely serves the specific needs of each of the six islands will require deliberate effort. For the smaller SSS island communities, this may include piloting small-scale programs, fostering local capacity-building initiatives, and strengthening both regional and international connections. Such an approach must **prioritize collaboration and engagement**, ensuring that research efforts benefit the SSS islands and their residents in tangible and sustainable ways. Residents of the ABC islands recommended that this agenda also **prioritize local ownership and active participation** in shaping research priorities, funding structures, and outcomes. Structural funding and capacity-building initiatives, particularly for (preparatory) PhD-level education, are critical to ensuring that research benefits island communities on their own terms. Furthermore, **intersectoral collaborations between the six islands should be encouraged** to foster shared knowledge and impactful solutions, especially on issues of shared concern such as identity, tourism, nature conservation, and migration. Finally, it is essential to address the lack of follow-up on research conducted by external researchers, ensuring that **results are shared and used to drive meaningful change** on the SSSABC islands.



4. WHO IS A RESEARCHER?

In the conversations that took place to inform and validate this research agenda, participants discussed who, in the context of the SSSABC islands, could or should be regarded as a researcher. Community members saw this as a critical question, highlighting incidences where researchers currently lack the skills or background to conduct meaningful research on the SSSABC islands. Who is ultimately considered a legitimate researcher was also seen as a key concern because it influences the eligibility for funding under this Caribbean Research Agenda, which could potentially help maximize or constrain the scope for impactful research that aligns with local contexts.

In general, participants agreed that **local and diaspora researchers should play a central role in research projects on the SSSABC islands**, ensuring cultural literacy, respect for local knowledge, and adherence to community terms. Researchers from abroad may be welcomed, especially when local expertise is unavailable, but **collaboration with island communities** remains essential.

Community members also agreed that different types of researchers, and importantly those with lived experience and demonstrable skills, should be recognized. Many types of organizations were considered important, with **local universities** seen as playing vital roles in guiding research on different levels. Regarding whom should be considered a researcher and be eligible to conduct research funded under and guided by this Caribbean Research Agenda, community members shared the following visions:



A researcher is a person skilled in the scientific method and can meaningfully incorporate lived experiences in their work.

At a minimum, a researcher is a person **equipped to conduct research**. This could be demonstrated by having been **trained in specific research techniques or skills** that align with the subject being researched. Next to that, participants generally agreed that lived experience and experiential knowledge are crucial sources of information in need of more recognition. Overall, there seemed to be a consensus that conducting research with fitting methodologies on the SSSABC islands requires skills, rooted in both scientific training and lived experience, to be done well.





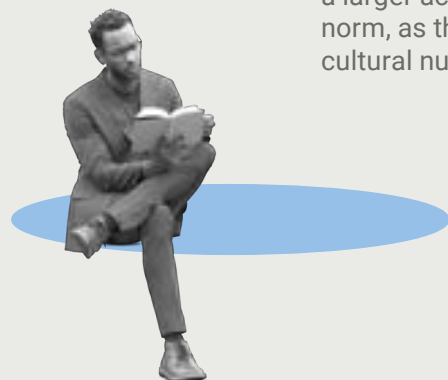
A researcher values diverse skills, including those that stem from lived experience or self-taught knowledge. Different types of researchers, with different education and skill levels, ought to be honoured for their unique contributions. According to participants, in order to foster a conducive environment for critical and balanced thinkers on the SSSABC islands, diverse skills and educational backgrounds need to be valued. This also means recognizing the many instances in which **autodidact individuals and those with lived experience should be considered researchers**, ensuring that the potential of each individual's contribution is not measured only by their degrees or certificates, but also by their demonstrable skills.



A researcher respects local culture and collaborates with local experts. Researchers should have 'cultural literacy' of the SSSABC islands and be respectful to local contexts. Community members mentioned that they experience researchers flying in from abroad, working on short term projects, from which local communities often do not see any benefit. Some community members were therefore adamant that local researchers should be in the lead of collaborative research projects. Diaspora researchers were also seen as crucial components of the research landscape on the islands. Researchers from abroad were also seen as welcome: when research is deemed of value to island communities and local expertise is still to be developed, bringing in knowledge from abroad was not seen as inherently undesirable, as long as **visiting researchers adhere to the terms set by island communities**.



A researcher uses socially and culturally relevant methods to address sensitive topics and involve local people. Notably, oral methods should receive more recognition. These are important research methodologies in the Caribbean context, as they are especially suited to sensitive or taboo topics that may require a more trust-based or personal approach. Furthermore, oral histories have long been embedded in the region and may suit local knowledge production processes better than Western frameworks. Oral methods may involve a larger active role for local researchers than is currently the norm, as they require a keen understanding of local languages, cultural nuances, and intergenerational sensibilities.





A researcher shares methods openly and takes responsibility for their research outcomes. Researchers should conduct themselves in a transparent and genuine manner. Some community members described experiencing the research process as a black box, with researchers often using highfalutin language. They requested that researchers instead **publicly discuss their methods and findings with island communities using accessible terms**, which would also add to collaboration and understanding. In general, it was agreed that researchers also need to be more open and accountable to communities when it comes to thinking about how to achieve and implement the outcomes of their research.



A researcher is affiliated with institutions that align with island priorities. Eligible affiliation options need to be in line with the fabric of island communities and their research landscapes and priorities. For example, while American medical schools conduct research that could contribute to better health outcomes on the SSSABC islands, they are listed as businesses on the islands and are thus not eligible for research funding from the Netherlands. Furthermore, the current research landscape focuses on scientific and scholarly research, while impactful artistic, applied and technical research is being conducted that remains underfunded. Research funding should also enable participation of and partnerships between the variety of tertiary education institutions on the islands, in order to encourage multidisciplinary research.



A researcher is supported by universities, who train and guide researchers in addressing local societal needs. Universities are seen as key pillars for shaping researchers and therefore as key elements in the research landscape on the SSSABC islands. Local universities should be encouraged and supported to match their students and researchers with societal parties that require knowledge development. In doing so, local universities can appropriately initiate and guide research of different kinds, including academic, applied, policy and community-oriented research. Under the supervision of local universities - for example, through committees - the quality of research on the SSSABC islands can also be better safeguarded.



A researcher embraces teamwork to tackle complex societal challenges. Consortia made up of diverse types of organizations should be able to apply for research funding. Many community members emphasized how researchers on the SSSABC islands are supported by diverse organizations, including traditional research institutes like universities, but also governmental departments, civil-society organizations, and private sector actors. This means that funding should be opened to different consortia, especially when operating in a learning community made of publicly and privately funded entities.



A researcher is recognized fully and remunerated fairly for their contributions. All researchers across the research landscapes of the SSSABC islands - including citizen scientists and self-taught individuals that draw primarily from lived experience - should receive **adequate recognition and compensation for their contribution to research**. According to many community members, citizen science is an important element of the research landscape on the islands, that is particularly well-aligned with local priorities and fills gaps that project-based research cannot typically fill. This means that organizations that serve societal roles and conduct research from such a mandate should also be eligible for research funding.





5. HOW TO PURSUE IMPACTFUL RESEARCH

When discussing this Caribbean Research Agenda, community members often highlighted how important it was for them that research truly has a positive impact on the SSSABC islands. Community members often expressed a sense of disappointment that research had failed to have sufficient noticeable impact on their lives in the past and emphasized that this should be a key condition for research funded under this Caribbean Research Agenda going forward.

Importantly, it was noted that impact cannot be achieved in a vacuum; other terms and conditions should be considered as well. Community members generally agreed that research is much more likely to be impactful when it aligns with local contexts and when there is responsible, equitable, and culturally sensitive resource allocation and governance. Some participants recommended that this interconnectedness be approached from a theory of change logic:

- 1 **ASKING WHAT IMPACT ONE WANTS TO ACHIEVE**
- 2 **DECIDING WHICH RESEARCH INITIATIVES ARE BEST POSITIONED TO HAVE THIS IMPACT**
- 3 **DETERMINING HOW TO FUND THE RESEARCH**
- 4 **HOW TO GOVERN THIS RESEARCH**

We have followed this same logic in the way we have structured the terms and conditions around impactful research in this chapter.

5.1 What impact should research have on the SSSABC islands?

Overall, there seemed to be a broad consensus that federally funded research in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom should not only generate knowledge but go beyond that to **also contribute to the islands' development on their own terms**. This small but key shift in the reasoning behind research - notwithstanding a potential role for fundamental approaches to research, as discussed below - sits at the core of the type of impact community members called for.

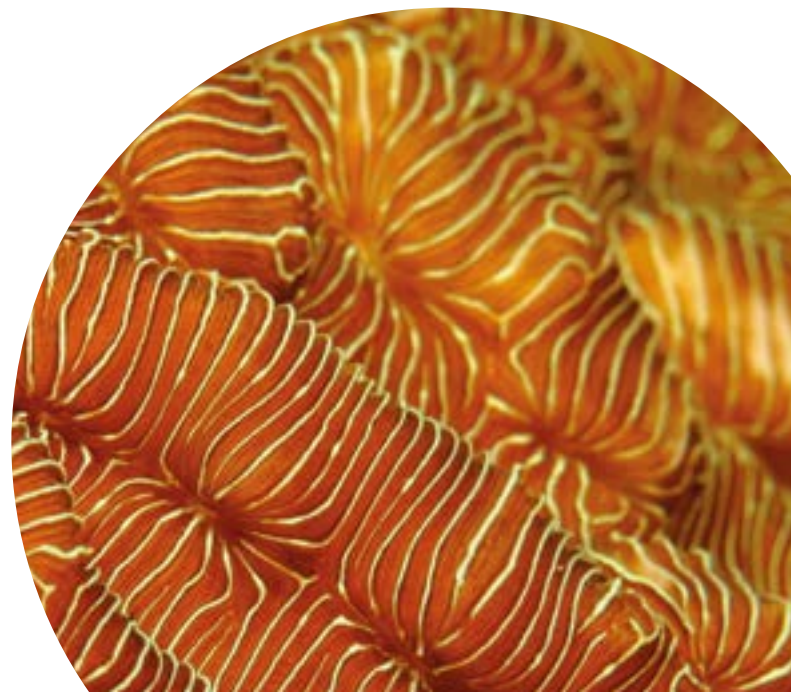
A prevalent theme throughout the community conversations and sessions was that the SSSABC islands and their communities should be the primary benefactors of research funded under this Caribbean Research Agenda. Research questions relevant to the lives of people on the islands too often remain at the margins of research conducted on and/or about the SSSABC islands. Islanders are often under involved or not involved at all in research development processes, and similarly under- or uninformed about research results. A pivot from this would mean centring island researchers and communities from research inception, including conceptualization and planning, so that research projects are better able to address community specific challenges and foster community ownership over knowledge.

Community members highlighted that research should be an investment in the development needs of the island communities centred within the work. Participants agreed that community members should be the ones who determine what development is, how research can contribute to this, and whether research projects have been successful in doing so. For example, community conversations revealed how topics of nation building and long-term development are seen as crucial across all six islands. One way in which research can be impactful on the SSSABC islands is thus by researching, engaging with, and fostering wider discussions around questions of nation building and desirable paths of long-term development.

5.2 Which kind of research initiatives are best positioned to deliver this impact?

In general, participants agreed that research should generate results that are actionable for decision-makers, inform long-term policymaking, and benefit the development of island communities.

In that light, impact-oriented approaches to research were seen as key, with a potentially smaller role for fundamental



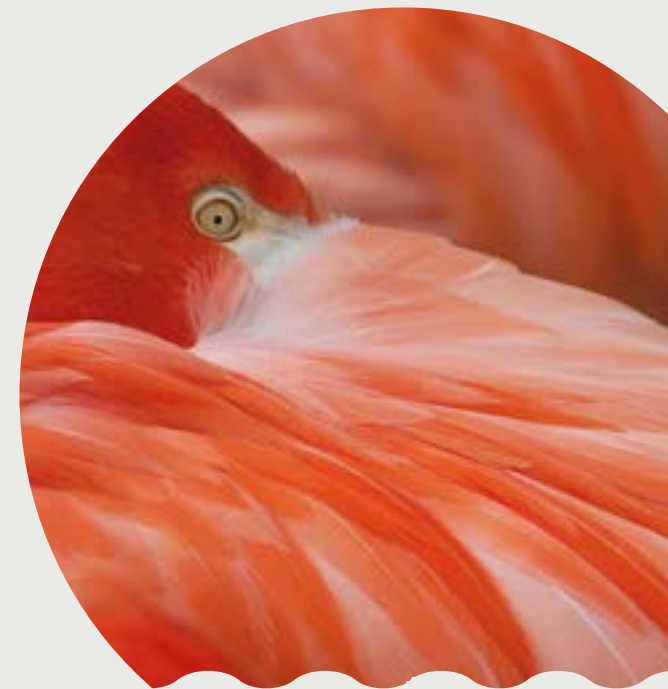
research. Some community members were adamant that impact should be the main point of departure for all research funded under this Caribbean Research Agenda - with impact-oriented approaches like action research, applied research, policy-informed research, and citizen science being placed in the centre. A few others also saw an important role for fundamental approaches to research, where impact is not the main point of departure, but which may nevertheless produce unexpected impacts on society. Yet others cautioned that these unexpected societal impacts may also end up being undesirable impacts, especially if no attention is paid to the needs and priorities of SSSABC island communities during research processes.

This indicates a clear need to find a more appropriate balance between different types of research on the SSSABC islands, which may require strategically shifting away from the fundamental research that has historically been funded on the islands towards more impact-oriented approaches to research.

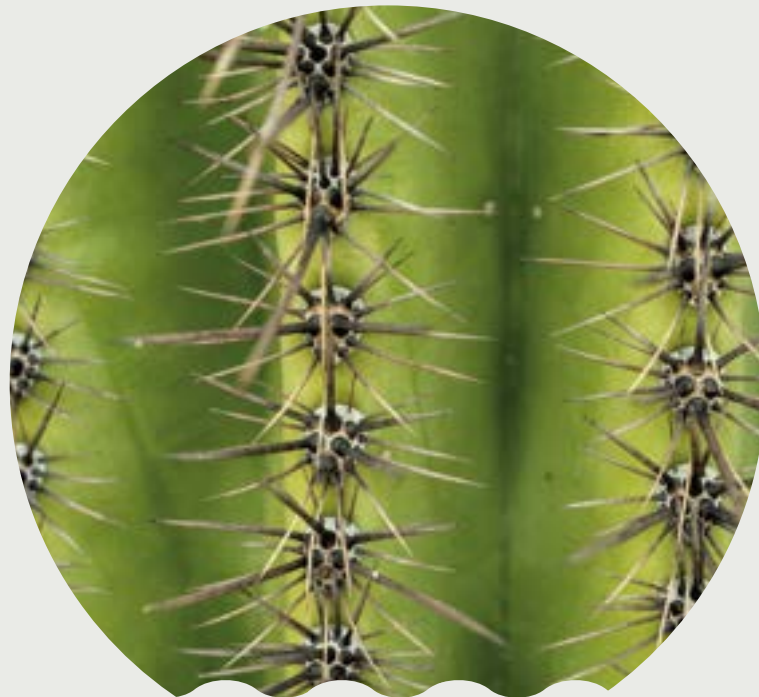
Participants also generally agreed that everyone - from formal researchers, to policymakers, practitioners, artists, and other community members - has a role to play in ensuring that research on the SSSABC islands is impactful. Nevertheless, much of the final responsibility for this was seen to rest with those trained in formal research practices and receiving funding and recognition for their research activities. This thus requires that those who are involved in research that is funded under this Caribbean Research Agenda are willing to dedicate time and energy into considering the societal impact of their work, fostering meaningful and reciprocal relationships with island community members, and investing resources into action-oriented research approaches. It also requires investing in the communication and implementation of research findings in locally appropriate ways.

As such, research projects should directly engage community members who could benefit from the knowledge being produced.

This includes building relationships with government agencies, NGOs, and communities themselves. Participants highlighted that these organizations should preferably be engaged from the beginning and as equal partners, but that there could also be projects where it is more suitable to engage societal actors halfway through or to communicate results to a wider audience after research has been completed.



In these contexts, all measures must be taken to acknowledge the insights and labour of local researchers and local knowledge, as colonial hierarchies and coloniality have often meant that local contributions to knowledge are excluded from official research outputs. Co-creation should reflect the desires and buy-in of the community as both contributors and decision-makers to the production of knowledge. A phrase that captures this well, and is repeated throughout this agenda, was: “We no longer want to be subjects of research, we want to exercise our own agency in research with us, for us and about us.” Ethical involvement of citizen researchers would also mean due compensation for time, thoughts, and techniques contributed to the process.



Community members also called for research efforts and results to be made widely accessible and emphasized that this should count for both new and existing studies. Many community members pointed out that, despite extensive research being conducted on the islands, research results are often unknown or inaccessible. The creation of an inventory was therefore suggested as a first step, with participants highlighting the importance of ensuring that all research, especially that funded under this Caribbean Research Agenda, becomes more accessible. In this light, community members also emphasized the need for results to be made available both online and in

physical copies at local institutions, like libraries, to ensure that they are accessible to all segments of the islands’ populations.

Beyond collecting results in inventories, community members also called for pro-active communication of research results in straight-forward and accessible ways. Participants generally agreed that language plays a central role in ensuring impactful research, advocating for the use of Papiamentu/o on the ABC islands, as well as a broader push to avoid jargon in science communication on all islands. Furthermore, while an academic article may be appropriate for an academic audience, it may not resonate with the entire community, for which more creative forms of communication, like art, could be more effective. The location of engagement was also seen as crucial. In that light, a recurring theme was the importance of meeting people where they are - for example, by going directly into communities and participating in local events - rather than expecting them to come to you. The same goes for direct communication; on some islands, WhatsApp might be more effective than email for daily communication. Rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all approach across all six islands, it is essential to prioritize and adapt to the unique communication needs of each island community. Indeed, science communication should be valued as a practice and a field of research in its own right. **Effective research begins with understanding what the public wants to know about a topic, which helps engage island communities and foster a sense of ownership. How to best do so in different island contexts is something that merits further study.**





5.3 How should impactful research be funded on the SSSABC islands?

The need for a more desirable allocation of resources for research on the SSSABC islands was brought up often during the validation process. This is of importance in addressing long-standing inequities in how research funding has historically been distributed.

More specifically, since NWO's Caribbean Research Program was founded in 2013, up to now none of the funded projects have been fully hosted at research institutes on one of the six islands. No project leader has been granted project funding at a research institute on any of the six islands. In the early funding calls, researchers based on the islands were even excluded from participating as main applicants. This highlights a need for improvement in funding allocation to ensure that research not only supports meaningful impact but also contributes to the development of island communities on their own terms.

According to community members, future resource allocation and governance should be steeped in the tenants of islandness, intersectionality, intentionality, and inclusivity. Such funding allocations and governance practices should consider the historical and social contexts of the SSSABC islands and how research has been executed in the region in the past. They would then challenge and redesign those structures to centre local and regional voices, experiences and knowledge in combination with researchers from the wider Caribbean region and beyond to encourage community-led, culturally grounded, and collaborative research projects. Importantly, new funding allocation should pay attention not only to who is receiving funding, but also to who is not. This should be reflected on and learned from to ensure that biases are minimized, especially those anchored in colonial hierarchies of race, gender, class, language and geographic origins.

Resources should be crafted, earmarked, and distributed intentionally to empower local researchers and communities first and foremost. In addition, funding should promote research reciprocity between local researchers and those from abroad. This includes ensuring that funds are directed toward projects led by or in collaboration with local community members, citizen scientists, and grassroots organizations. Capacity building, including training, tools, and mentorship for local citizen scientists and community researchers must be key in all new research funding allocation schemes.

Resources should be made available for the development of research collaborations, as well as for the pro-active communication of research results and the implementation of research findings. Where and when necessary, funding allocation should also include development phases so that local designs, frameworks and methodologies can be theorized and conceptualized, and local consortia can be formed. Participants also highlighted that it was particularly important to make money available not just for generating knowledge, but also to ensure impact. In this way, engagement does not necessarily end after data has been collected and analysed, but researchers would also hold a responsibility towards communities to pursue impact and contribute to island development.

Research funding allocation must consider and include not only data generation, but also data sovereignty. Local communities must have a say in how knowledge is generated, utilized and stored. Across the six islands, calls came for more access to knowledge previously generated on the islands and the creation of centralized data storage points that were available to local researchers and community leaders. This is thus a key priority for funding, including the physical and digital data storage capabilities and facilities of the islands and the ability to provide access to large segments of society.

Resource allocation should therefore not only support individual research projects; structural funding should be made available for building sustainable research infrastructure. Participants emphasized that this would ensure long-term benefits, for example by funding research hubs, community science networks, and capacity-building. The goal would be to create self-sustaining research structures where island communities can continue to conduct research and develop new funding streams that would allow them to benefit from their own knowledge and knowledge generating pathways long after initial funding ends. Herein lies another key strategic change of approach. Islanders recognize the difference between aid as a crutch and aid as a resource towards self-sufficiency. A successful iteration of this Caribbean Research Agenda and any accompanying funding framework would actively work towards embedding itself within a self-sustaining network of Caribbean research.



5.4 How should impactful research be governed on the SSSABC islands?

Research governance is essential for ensuring that research processes are executed in legally and ethically acceptable manners. To ensure cultural adherence and sensitivity, bottom-up rather than top-down governance approaches would be preferred. Indeed, across all six islands, community members and organizations voiced a desire for more ownership over research calls and funding.

Research governance that includes diverse voices from across society would encourage diverse voices in research itself. Researchers and community members from the SSSABC islands must therefore be included in the governance of research bodies, including the setting of research agendas, priorities, funding allocations, ethics committees, institutional review boards, and research oversight. This would mean including a cross segment of SSSABC island voices in all phases of application and funding decisions and including pathways for these decision-makers to remain accountable to their communities. Decision-making processes must thus be inclusive, transparent, and participatory.

Research governance must pivot from being government and academia driven to being community-led. Communities must be kept abreast of and involved in governance structures through consistent communication. Community advisory boards, participatory budgeting exercises, open calls for proposals that involve local stakeholders in determining research agendas, and multiple layers of reporting must all be utilized to allow for better local embeddedness and capacity building.

Research governance must include various levels of community, where and when possible. Local persons must also be embedded in the development of research policies and procedures to ensure that they are suitable for the local context and not just beneficial to traditional researchers. Capacity building activities, developed with local practitioners, must be undertaken to ensure that community members are empowered to participate in these advisory and decision-making roles. Only when research on the SSSABC islands is actually governed by island communities and in alignment with local community needs, will researchers be truly able to pursue impactful research on the islands.





6. RESEARCH THEMES, TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

This chapter outlines the research themes that emerged directly from conversations with islanders - conversations rooted in care for community, shared futures, and the urgent need to research what truly matters. “Important” here means more than relevant - it means resonant across diverse but deeply interconnected communities, attuned to the current geopolitical and socio-economic landscape, and anchored in a desire to shape the future in a way that honours the past.

We began by surveying Caribbean researchers and community members and asking a simple question: “**What research topics are important to you?**” From there, **seven research themes** emerged. Our team then translated six of these into vibrant posters and used them to initiate deeper conversations with several hundreds of community members - parents, students, elders, educators, workers, and more.

Across all six islands and the diaspora we asked community members: “**Do you see yourself in these words? What questions feel urgent here? What’s missing?**” What emerged from these conversations wasn’t just a list of questions. It was a reframing:

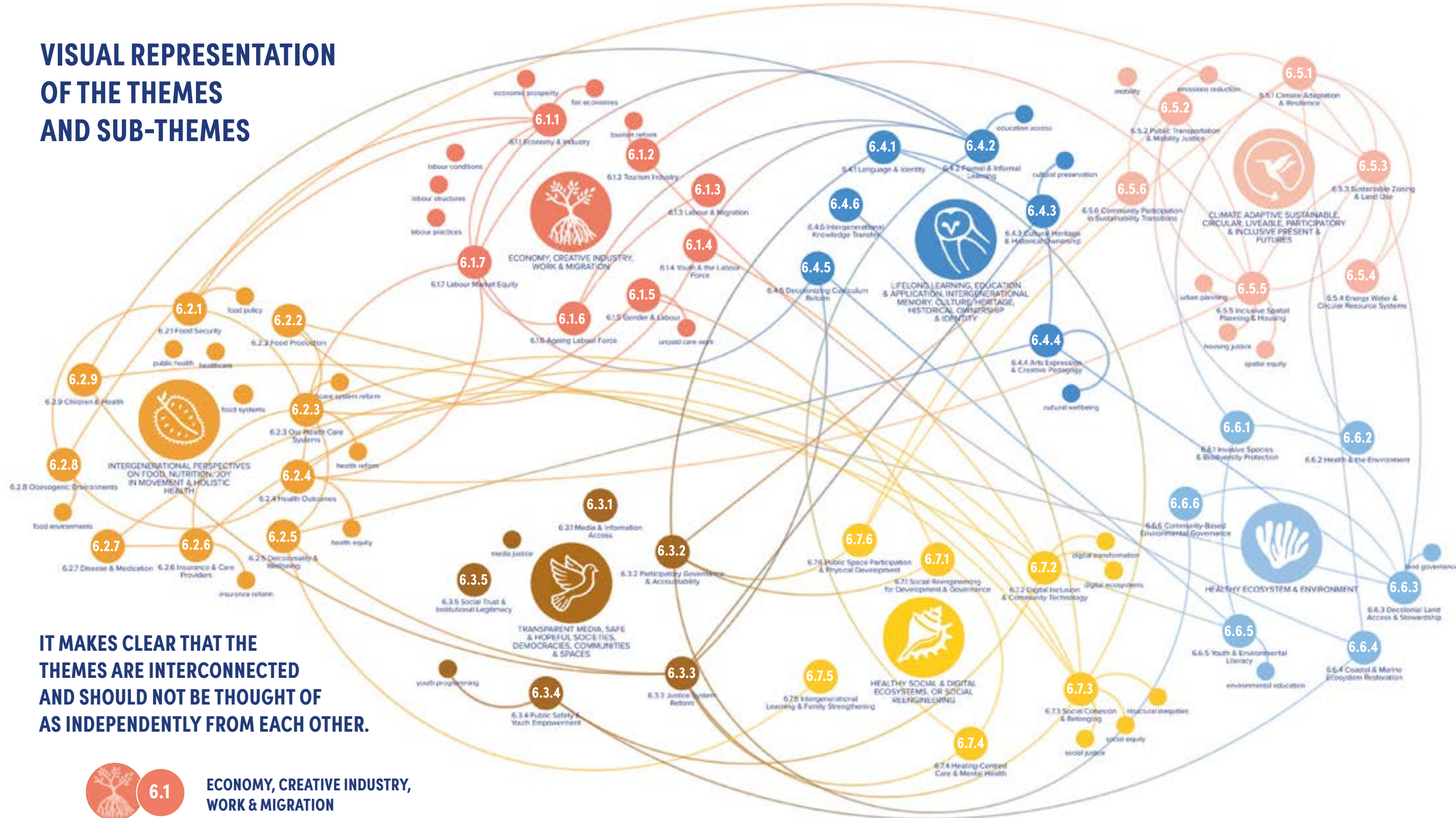
“What we research is secondary to making sure the research matters.”

People responded with honesty, depth, and generosity - offering dozens of research questions, corrections, and reflections. We collected, interpreted, and returned them for review, asking one last question: “**Did we hear you right?**”

The research themes, subthemes, and questions that follow are just a glimpse of the abundance we received. They are not complete, nor are they definitive. Instead, they form an invitation. When asked, these are the topics for which islanders have said: **“If you’re going to come in, start here.”**



VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE THEMES AND SUB-THEMES



IT MAKES CLEAR THAT THE
THEMES ARE INTERCONNECTED
AND SHOULD NOT BE THOUGHT OF
AS INDEPENDENTLY FROM EACH OTHER.



6.1

**ECONOMY, CREATIVE INDUSTRY,
WORK & MIGRATION**



6.2

**INTERGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON FOOD,
NUTRITION, JOY IN MOVEMENT & HOLISTIC HEALTH**



6.3

**TRANSPARENT MEDIA, SAFE & HOPEFUL SOCIETIES,
DEMOCRACIES, COMMUNITIES & SPACES**



6.4

**LIFELONG LEARNING, EDUCATION & APPLICATION, INTERGENERATIONAL
MEMORY, CULTURE, HERITAGE, HISTORICAL OWNERSHIP & IDENTITY**



6.5

**CLIMATE ADAPTIVE SUSTAINABLE, CIRCULAR, LIVEABLE,
PARTICIPATORY & INCLUSIVE PRESENT & FUTURES**



6.6

HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM & ENVIRONMENT



6.7

**HEALTHY SOCIAL & DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS,
OR SOCIAL REENGINEERING**



6.1

ECONOMY, CREATIVE INDUSTRY, WORK & MIGRATION

Across the SSSABC islands, communities are calling for economic futures rooted in fairness, local empowerment, and prosperity for all. Economic vulnerability, limited job opportunities, and persistent poverty - intensified by COVID-19 and climate challenges - remain major concerns.

Respondents called for research to better understand and address these challenges and emphasized the need to move beyond outdated economic models by investing in creative industries, supporting local entrepreneurs, and pursuing economic indicators that reflect true social well-being. There is also growing interest in economic models that are suited to small island states and respect the small scale and unique needs of each island.

Island communities called for research into **inequality in the labour market, brain drain, and unpaid care work**, as well as how to address these pressing challenges, wondering how

migration and emigration policies could play a key role in shaping opportunities. The experiences of migrants and undocumented workers, as well as youth trained abroad, reveal gaps in inclusion and sustainability and were also seen as key topics for further research. Gender disparities in the workforce also emerged as important topics, particularly the mismatch between women's educational achievements and their labour market outcomes.

Ageing populations, especially on the larger islands, raise research questions about workforce renewal and healthcare costs. Stakeholders are also concerned about **tax structures that prioritize external investors over local equity**. Calls for research also focused on how to ensure **better working conditions, stronger unions, and a more inclusive public sector**, reflecting a shared desire to build economies that work for all islanders - grounded in transparency, dignity, and homegrown strength.

6.1.1



ECONOMY & INDUSTRY

Small island economies face systemic vulnerabilities due to scale, dependency, and inequity. Participants called for research on economic models centred on local empowerment, inclusive entrepreneurship, and adaptive industries. Creative industries and approaches tailored to small island states emerged as promising alternatives to models premised on externally driven growth. **This research themes also intersects with food security, sustainability, and labour equity** - underscoring the need to integrate economic development with social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and health-focused public systems.

1. *What would an effective and equitable tax system look like for our island communities?*
2. *What is the financial impact of the current tax system - which is characterized by a series of tax exemptions for investors - on the islands' general economy and on the "small man"?*
3. *What alternative economic models exist that are suited to small island states and could serve as inspiration for economic development on the islands?*
4. *What impact will climate change have on working conditions for the dominant industries and sectors on the islands?*



6.1.2

TOURISM INDUSTRY

While tourism remains central to many island economies, communities voiced concerns about overreliance and its environmental and social costs. Participants emphasized a need to research how to shift toward sustainable, locally beneficial tourism models that respect cultural identity and ecological limits. **This research theme connects to labour practices, urban planning, and food systems**, highlighting its wide-ranging impacts. Research on strategic tourism reform must therefore align with efforts to protect natural resources, ensure equitable labour, and preserve heritage.

5. *What are the experiences of labourers in our islands' tourism industries?*
6. *How do the working conditions in the tourism industry impact the islands in terms of health, family structures, and otherwise?*
7. *Which structural alternatives exist for transforming the islands' economies - as opposed to merely diversifying them by adding other pillars to a tourism-based economy?*
8. *What could a knowledge-based economy look like for the islands?*
9. *What is the perception of islanders on their tourism industries? (How) do their perceptions significantly differ from reality?*
10. *What alternative indicators for (economic) development could be explored and introduced on the islands?*

11. *Which best practices can our islands learn from other small island states both in the region and elsewhere like Singapore?*
12. *How can local businesses on the islands be empowered to find creative solutions to community problems?*



6.1.3

LABOUR & MIGRATION

Migration patterns shape and reflect labour inequities across the islands. Participants therefore called for research on how brain drain, care work burdens, and restrictive emigration policies create systemic challenges. Participants urged research and reform that values both incoming and returning labour, addressing undocumented workers' rights while promoting inclusive mobility. **This research subtheme links closely to education, health, and sustainable development** - pointing to the need for policies that integrate labour rights, social protection, and opportunities for youth and marginalized groups.

13. *How is climate change likely to impact migration trends on the islands?*
14. *What can we learn from and about the lived experiences of migrants, undocumented workers, and asylum seekers on the islands? How are their realities influenced by and relevant for the economic development of the islands?*
15. *What are the working conditions of migrants, undocumented individuals, and asylum seekers on the islands?*
16. *How can emigration procedures on the islands be streamlined and made more equitable?*



6.1.4

YOUTH & THE LABOUR FORCE

Youth across the islands face limited opportunities despite educational progress. Many are forced to migrate for work, contributing to brain drain and generational disconnect. Participants stressed the importance of research that can inform job creation through innovation, creative industries, and local entrepreneurship. **This research theme also intersected with lifelong learning, food production, and digital inclusion**, suggesting that empowering youth is critical to achieving inclusive economies, intergenerational equity, and transformative futures.

17. *How can young professionals from the islands who completed their tertiary education abroad best be empowered to return to the islands?*
18. *In what fields are students from the islands pursuing tertiary degrees abroad, and to which extent does this align with dynamics in the island's labour market?*
19. *What is the financial cost of the "brain drain" phenomenon on the islands' economies?*
20. *How can brain drain be defined for island context, and how is this phenomenon characterized on our islands? Do different islands and sectors experience the brain-drain phenomenon differently?*



21. *How do professionals who have been educated on the islands impact the development of their islands of origin?*
22. *How can the islands obtain an equitable return on their historical investment in the education of young professionals from the islands, from which the islands themselves have not benefited?*
23. *What have been the global economic benefits gained from the labour of the islands and how can we receive what is due from that investment?*
24. *(How) could traineeships and apprenticeships help make work in (niche parts of) the public sector more accessible to diverse groups on the islands?*
25. *What obstacles do young professionals from the islands who completed their tertiary education abroad and want to return back to the island experience?*
26. *To which extent do potential job prospects play a role in the experiences and decision-making of young professionals from the islands who completed their tertiary education abroad and want to return back to the islands?*

6.1.5

GENDER & LABOUR

Despite higher educational attainment, women continue to face labour market disparities. Participants noted the gap between achievement and opportunity, particularly in leadership roles, wages, and care responsibilities. Discussions called for research into gender-responsive labour policies that promote equity, representation, and decent work. Importantly, considerations should be made for policies that do not villainize any group against the other but rather focus on best practices for social justice. **This research theme intersects with health care systems, unpaid care work, and social reengineering,** emphasizing the need to dismantle structural barriers that prevent full economic participation.

27. *To which extent does gender play a role in the experiences and decision-making of young professionals who completed their tertiary education abroad and want to return back to the islands?*
28. *Why is it that, while women from the islands generally have higher levels of achievement in higher education, this is not reflected in the composition of the islands' workforce?*
29. *(In what ways) do women who have completed tertiary education experience more labour market discrimination compared to their male counterparts?*
30. *What are the drivers of gender-based discrimination in the workplace on the islands?*



6.1.6

AGEING LABOUR FORCE

An ageing population presents challenges for workforce renewal, healthcare, and intergenerational sustainability. Participants raised concerns about who will carry forward local economies and knowledge systems, and called for further research on these themes. Ensuring active ageing and knowledge transfer - particularly in agriculture, education, and traditional crafts - was seen as vital. **This research theme links to lifelong learning, migration, and labour equity,** reinforcing the importance of designing inclusive labour policies that value older adults and promote intergenerational solidarity.

31. *How would an increase in retirement age affect the islands' economies?*
32. *What are the impacts of ageing populations on the islands' societies, including on their economy, workforce, and health care systems?*
31. *How can the islands pay for the expected increase in care costs for this ageing population?*
32. *How can changes to the workforce - for example the introduction of young(er) labourers - help pay for the care costs of the islands' ageing population?*
33. *What role could private health care providers play in paying for the care costs of the islands' ageing population?*



6.1.7

LABOUR MARKET EQUITY

Labour market equity emerged as a central demand across discussions. Inequities span gender, age, migration status, and sector, creating barriers to inclusive growth. Participants called for research that can inform stronger unions, transparent hiring, and public sector reform. Equity in labour markets is deeply **linked to fair economies, health outcomes, education access, and social mobility.** Holistic reform requires intersectional approaches that ensure dignity and opportunity for all workers, across industries and generations.

34. *What are the working conditions of labourers on the islands and how can these be improved?*
35. *What is the potential for and what are obstacles to unionizing per dominant industry and sector on each island?*
36. *What role could unions play in safeguarding the rights of employees and addressing cases of exploitation on the*

islands? How does the intimate nature of our small islands affect this potential role?

37. What are drivers of union-avoidance among labourers on the islands?
38. To which extent do employment agencies obstruct unions in safeguarding worker rights? What mechanisms uphold the strategy of 'fostering division among vulnerable employees' on each island?
39. What does the (unpaid) care landscape (mantelzorg) look like on the islands?
40. What could equitable, inclusive, liveable working conditions look like for the islands?
41. How can the public sector workforce on the islands be diversified and strengthened?
42. (How) do foreign investors take the wellbeing of island societies into account in their financial decision-making?
43. What are the consequences of the debt and loans culture on the island societies?



6.2

INTERGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON FOOD, NUTRITION, JOY IN MOVEMENT & HOLISTIC HEALTH

Food, health, and wellbeing are deeply intertwined across the SSSABC islands. Communities consistently raised concern over the affordability, accessibility, and nutritional value of food, and called for more research to support food system transformation across the islands. Import-heavy economies contribute to food insecurity, while local food production remains underutilized.

There is strong interest in research that can support small-scale, sustainable agriculture - especially methods suited to arid environments - and improving food autonomy through regional collaboration. Islanders also highlighted the importance of reconnecting with traditional food knowledge and practices to support both health and cultural traditions.

Health outcomes across generations reveal ongoing struggles with noncommunicable diseases such as obesity and diabetes, linked to an obesogenic environment and poor dietary options. Communities emphasized the role of preventative care, culturally attuned healthcare, and the inclusion of traditional knowledge - such as culinary medicine and medicinal plants - as pathways toward more equitable health systems.

Broader systemic issues also surfaced as topics for further research: shame and stigma around health behaviours, the role of colonial legacies in eating practices, and the persistence of structural racism in healthcare. Specific concerns around insurance infrastructure, medication access, and under-resourced care services - particularly for vulnerable populations - signal the need for holistic reform. Across the board, there is a call for research that can contribute to health systems that are accessible, locally grounded, and responsive to both generational shifts and lived realities.

6.2.1

FOOD SECURITY

Food security is a persistent concern as islanders face high dependence on imports, fluctuating prices, and limited local access to fresh produce. Participants emphasized the need for more research on regional collaboration to increase food security, culturally appropriate dietary policies, and infrastructure for equitable food distribution. This research theme is closely tied to health equity, economic prosperity, and environmental sustainability, highlighting the interconnectedness of food systems with public health outcomes, education, local entrepreneurship, and climate-smart agricultural practices.



44. *How secure and equitable are the islands' food systems, and how can food security and equity be increased on the islands?*
45. *How can the islands' food systems transition towards more locally grown and regionally accessible food options?*
46. *To which extent does epigenetics play a role in the food system outcomes observed on the islands?*
47. *What are the drivers of food insecurity on the islands?*
48. *What are the consequences of food insecurity on the islands' ageing communities?*
49. *What is the quality of food consumed by different social and age groups on each island?*

6.2.2

FOOD PRODUCTION

Revitalizing local food production was seen as crucial for autonomy, self-sufficiency, and ecological balance. Islanders advocated for research supporting small-scale, climate-adapted farming and reintroducing traditional, sustainable growing methods. Strengthening local agriculture can reduce reliance on imports, support livelihoods, and improve nutrition. This research subtheme is closely **linked to education, land access, and health reform** - reflecting a broader call for systems that respect local knowledge, promote economic inclusion, and rebuild connections between people, land, and culture.

50. *What could the impacts of introducing vertical farming be on the islands?*
51. *How can local food producers on the islands be better connected to local consumers?*
52. *How can food producers on the islands connect with regional knowledge banks with expertise on best practices for local food production?*
53. *What options exist for shortening food chains and what would their (social, financial and health) impacts be on island communities?*
54. *To which extent can local food production meet the islands' food consumption needs?*
55. *How can islanders be empowered to consume more locally grown and regionally accessible food options?*
56. *How can individuals on the island with limited mobility be supported in accessing healthy foods?*



6.2.3

OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS

Health care systems are under strain from structural gaps, under-resourcing, and inequitable access - especially for vulnerable groups. To address this, islanders called for research on community-driven, culturally grounded, and preventative models of care. Reforms must include insurance systems, training pathways, and accessibility, particularly in rural areas. This research subtheme **intersects with decoloniality, labour equity, and digital transformation**, reinforcing the need for integrated care frameworks that respond to both historical inequalities and emerging health and demographic challenges.

57. *How effective is the health care that is currently provided on each island?*
58. *What factors affect the differences in equitable health outcomes on the islands?*
59. *What are the drivers of victim blaming in health care on the islands, and how can these be addressed?*
59. *What is the efficacy, effectiveness, and efficiency of health care provision on the islands and how can this be improved?*
60. *How can the island's health care system best be financed?*
61. *What basic tariffs are required for providing equitable health care on each island?*

6.2.4

HEALTH OUTCOMES

Communities raised concerns about worsening health outcomes - especially non-communicable diseases like diabetes and obesity - shaped by limited access to nutritious food, education, and care. Participants called for research to support prevention, traditional remedies, and culturally relevant health education as key strategies. This research subtheme is **deeply entangled with food environments, labour conditions, and structural inequities**, underscoring the need for holistic public health interventions that centre dignity, healing, and wellbeing across generations.

62. *What is the prevalence of shame, fear, and secrecy around health behaviours and outcomes on the islands, and how can these best be addressed?*
63. *What are the main drivers of poor health on the islands?*
64. *How does the health outcomes of different generations compare between islands?*
65. *How can the current prevalence of poor health outcomes on the islands be reversed?*

6.2.5

DECOLONIALITY & WELLBEING

Wellbeing is not only a medical issue but a reflection of colonial legacies and structural injustices. Islanders highlighted how (historically or commercially) imposed diets, disrupted land ownership, and institutional racism undermine health and social cohesion. There is a strong call for further research that can reclaim cultural knowledge - especially in food, medicine, and care practices - and restore autonomy through community-led healing, land rights, and social reengineering. This research subtheme cuts across **education, justice, health, and sustainability**, offering a transformative lens for policy reform.

66. *To which extent can sharing local cooking customs among islanders encourage healthy eating?*
67. *In what ways has colonialism influenced the contemporary eating practices of the islands?*
68. *To which extent is there structural racism in health care provision on the islands?*

6.2.6

INSURANCE & CARE PROVIDERS

Insurance systems and care provider networks were seen as fragmented and exclusionary. Participants cited difficulties in accessing affordable coverage, inconsistencies in care quality, and limited support for preventative services, and called for research that can help address this. This could involve research on streamlining coverage, investing in care training, and ensuring culturally competent services. This research subtheme is closely **tied to healthcare system reform, social equity, and labour structures**, pointing to the need for equitable infrastructure that prioritizes continuity, dignity, and local accountability.

69. *What is an adequate insurance infrastructure for the islands? What customizations are needed for equity of care?*
70. *How can travel insurance be reformed to best serve islanders?*
71. *How can health insurance be reformed to best serve islanders?*
72. *What insurance structure can best ensure that islanders receive the medical care they need?*
73. *How does the BIG registration system affect the quality of healthcare provided on the islands?*
74. *How can health care services be made more accessible to underserved and vulnerable communities on the islands?*

6.2.7

DISEASE & MEDICATION

Access to essential medications and effective disease management remains uneven across islands. Chronic illness burdens are exacerbated by supply chain gaps, limited clinical options, and distrust in medical institutions.

Communities advocated for greater use of traditional healing, better pharmaceutical infrastructure, and education campaigns - and research to inform this. This research subtheme **connects to food systems, insurance reform, and social justice** - highlighting the importance of integrating diverse care pathways that reflect cultural heritage and support equitable health outcomes.

75. *What is the prevalence of and what are the drivers behind cognitive impairments and neurodegenerative diseases on each island and how can these best be addressed?*
76. *Are any changes needed to our vaccination program, e.g., given the fact that the program has been in place for more than 50 years and only girls are currently being vaccinated for HPV?*
77. *How does the frequency of changes in the availability and use of medicine affect the quality of healthcare provided to islanders?*
78. *How can islanders work around current constitutional constraints to better fulfil the island's healthcare needs?*
79. *What role can local medicinal practices play in promoting better health outcomes for islanders?*
80. *What roles can traditional knowledge, food as medicine, and medicinal recipes play in preventative care on the islands?*
81. *How can culinary medicine - i.e., using local foods as medicines - contribute to better health outcomes on the islands?*
82. *How can research on Western treatments and medications account for potential differences in efficacy for people of different ethnic background on the islands, for example due to genetic differences?*
83. *What is the efficacy, effectiveness, and efficiency of lifestyle changes compared to pharmaceutical cures for common diseases on the islands?*



6.2.8

OBESOGENIC ENVIRONMENTS

Participants identified an obesogenic environment - shaped by imported processed foods, urban sprawl, and limited exercise opportunities - as a key driver of poor health, and called for research into strategies to address this. Strategies discussed included regulating harmful food imports, encouraging active lifestyles, and redesigning public spaces to support movement. Obesogenic environments connects **food policy, land use, and education**, calling for cross-sectoral approaches that tackle both physical health and social determinants. These research efforts should align with broader goals of climate adaptation, economic inclusion, and youth wellbeing.

84. *How do neighbourhoods on the islands score compared to each other when it comes to obesity?*
85. *What characterizes obesogenic neighbourhoods on the islands, for example in terms of socio-economic factors, availability of affordable food, and land use?*
86. *To which extent do infrastructure and mobility affect obesity rates on the islands?*
87. *To which extent does the fast-food culture on the islands correlate with the growing presence of (childhood) obesity?*
88. *What interventions could help reduce the prevalence of obesogenic environments on the islands?*
89. *How can the drivers of obesity on the islands be addressed?*

6.2.9

CHILDREN & HEALTH

Children's health emerged as a major concern, with increasing rates of obesity, asthma, and developmental challenges linked to poor diets, limited recreation, and psychosocial stress.

Participants called for research on strategies to address this, such as integrated school-based interventions, culturally inclusive curricula, and family-centred care systems. This research subtheme intersects with **lifelong learning, justice reform, and digital ecosystems**, reflecting a broader need to build nurturing environments that support children's full development and uphold their right to health, identity, and opportunity.

90. *How healthy are the islands' children?*
92. *What is the prevalence of non-communicable diseases among children on the islands?*
93. *What are the drivers of obesity - particularly under young children - on the islands and how can they be addressed?*



6.3

TRANSPARENT MEDIA, SAFE & HOPEFUL SOCIETIES, DEMOCRACIES, COMMUNITIES & SPACES

Building safe, democratic, and hopeful societies across the SSSABC islands requires deep, systemic shifts rooted in transparency, accountability, and equity. Communities voiced frustration with favouritism in governance, weak public institutions, and a lack of (coherently communicated) long-term planning to tackle persistent challenges like crime, unemployment, and migration. There's a clear call for research to inform the modernization of public services, improve trust in institutions, and create strategies that are context-specific yet regionally aligned.

Media emerged as a foundational pillar of democracy and public safety, and a key topic that warranted further research. Across the islands, people emphasized the need for independent, trustworthy journalism that holds power accountable, represents diverse

perspectives, and offers pathways for young people to engage critically with their societies. The lack of local journalism training and limited protections for journalists were also flagged as urgent gaps.

In the realm of justice and care, islanders are asking for a shift: from punitive to humane, from reactive to preventative. Topics like prison reform, solitary confinement, and human rights for incarcerated individuals were raised as research priorities, alongside mental health, substance abuse, and the decriminalization of trauma. There's a push to reframe mental health as a health issue, not a criminal one. Together, these reflections point to a shared vision - one where justice, safety, and dignity are evidence-based, community-driven and grounded in care.

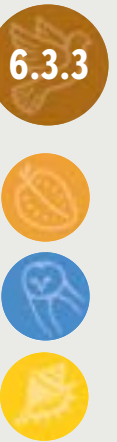


MEDIA & INFORMATION ACCESS
Accessible, independent media plays a central role in building democratic, informed, and hopeful societies. Participants highlighted the lack of local journalism training, digital access gaps, and insufficient protections for journalists - and called for research that can address these topics. Media was seen not only as a tool for accountability but as **a platform for civic education, cultural expression, and youth empowerment.** Strengthening media ecosystems is essential for transparency, democratic renewal, and inclusion across the islands.

- 94. *What does credible journalism look like for island contexts?*
- 95. *What would a viable media landscape look like for and between the islands?*
- 96. *How can young people on the islands be encouraged to pursue careers in journalism?*
- 97. *How can a career in journalism be made more appealing and accessible to citizens of the islands?*



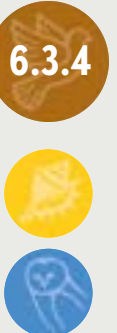
PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY
Transparent and participatory governance is vital to restoring public trust and building safe and equitable communities. Islanders expressed frustration over favouritism, limited consultation, and inadequate long-term planning. Respondents called for research that can inform inclusive decision-making processes, community representation, and clear public accountability. These reflections point to a broader need to modernize governance structures in ways that **reflect local realities, uphold justice, and foster shared responsibility.**



- 98. *What is the influence of the islands' media landscape on society and democracy?*
- 99. *What could an effective independent media establishment or board look like on each island?*
- 100. *What mechanisms can be put in place on the islands to protect journalists who are working on difficult topics and whose lives may be placed in danger because of this?*

JUSTICE SYSTEM REFORM
Transforming justice systems is essential to fostering care-based, rights-respecting societies. Participants called for research on alternatives to incarceration, the decriminalization of trauma and poverty, and a more humane approach to youth and mental health-related cases. Concerns about solitary confinement and systemic discrimination reinforced the urgency of reform. Research that can lead to the reimagining of justice as a community-centred, preventative system was seen as key to **promoting safety, dignity, and wellbeing** across the islands.

- 101. *What could prison reform look like for the islands?*
- 102. *What could a humane and effective policy on solitary confinement look like on the islands?*
- 103. *How can harm be addressed and minimized on the island while honouring individual's human rights?*
- 104. *How can the human rights of incarcerated individuals on the islands be safeguarded?*



PUBLIC SAFETY & YOUTH EMPOWERMENT
Community safety is deeply tied to the empowerment and wellbeing of young people. Respondents underscored the importance of access to education, recreation, and meaningful opportunities as alternatives to criminalization and marginalization. Youth were framed as agents of change who need support, not surveillance. Calls for further research in public safety and youth empowerment were accompanied by calls to invest in **youth leadership, creative expression, and restorative practices**, reflecting a vision of safety rooted in care, inclusion, and belonging.

- 105. *How can individuals struggling from substance abuse and mental health challenges on the islands be protected and empowered?*
- 106. *How can islanders move from treating mental health as a*

justice issue to treating it as a health issue?

107. *What role can and should religion play in addressing substance abuse and mental health challenges on the islands?*

6.3.5

SOCIAL TRUST & INSTITUTIONAL LEGITIMACY

Rebuilding trust in public institutions is fundamental to the creation of fair, hopeful, and thriving societies. Respondents described growing disillusionment with political processes, service delivery, and oversight. There is a clear call for research that contributes to **greater transparency, ethical leadership, and long-term planning**. Trust was framed as both a social and structural condition, requiring collective accountability and governance models rooted in shared accountability.

108. *How can we diversify the services offered by the islands' police force?*
109. *(How) can increased sensitivity training for the islands' police force reduce violent interactions with struggling individuals?*
110. *What are the structural and individual drivers of violent crime on the islands and how can these best be addressed?*

SSS-ABC



6.4

LIFELONG LEARNING, EDUCATION & APPLICATION, INTERGENERATIONAL MEMORY, CULTURE, HERITAGE, HISTORICAL OWNERSHIP & IDENTITY

Islanders share a collective desire to improve their education systems, with a focus on cultural preservation, lifelong learning, and societal cohesion. Islanders stress the importance of locally relevant educational models that are informed by research and align with future job markets, emphasizing sustainability, regional history, and cultural heritage. Education reform should address issues like high school dropouts and curricular mismatches while promoting de-colonial approaches and local capacity building.

On the ABC islands, language, particularly Papiamentu/o, was seen as crucial to **preserving cultural identity**. Islanders advocate for more research into the protection of Papiamentu/o as a first language, citing the importance of supporting its use in schools and across generations. The perceived precarity of the language also influences a sense of belonging and identity.

Social challenges such as structural inequalities and taboos around historical issues like slavery hinder cohesion and cultural participation. Island communities therefore call for inclusive research and education that fosters intergenerational dialogue and addresses cultural illiteracy. In addition, there is a push for research into holistic approaches to education, both formal and informal, that promote the arts and address issues like absenteeism, dropouts, and educational inequalities.

6.4.1

LANGUAGE & IDENTITY

Language was seen as a cornerstone of cultural identity and intergenerational connection. Participants emphasized the need to research, preserve and strengthen local languages, such as Papiamentu/o, within educational systems and public life. Among the SSS islands, pride in safeguarding (similar) dialects was shared from a decolonizing perspective. Language loss was linked to diminished belonging and cultural fragmentation. The role of research in supporting multilingualism and elevating local linguistic traditions was viewed as critical to fostering wellbeing, pride, and self-determination. This research subtheme connects **education, governance, and social cohesion** through the lens of cultural continuity.

111. *How can the Papiamentu/u language be protected and safeguarded on the ABC islands and within the Kingdom of the Netherlands?*

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112. *What linguistic threats are there to the Papiamentu/u language?*
 113. *What are the consequences of not protecting Papiamentu/u as a first language, but only safeguarding it as a second language?*
 114. *How can young learners on the islands be supported to develop their language repertoire in a way that aligns with the transition from secondary to tertiary education as well as considerations for their job security in the future?*
 115. *How does the (limited) knowledge of formal Papiamentu/u among teachers influence the language acquisition of young learners?*
 116. *How do islanders feel about the safety and legitimacy of their language and cultural practices?*
 117. *How does the perpetual precarity around safeguarding Papiamentu/u influence the sense of identity and belonging among islanders?*
 118. *What is the influence of language of instruction on children's educational performance on the islands?*
 119. *Which language of instruction is best suited for each island's context?*

6.4.2

FORMAL & INFORMAL LEARNING

Education must extend beyond classrooms to encompass everyday learning, intergenerational knowledge, and life skills. Participants called for research and educational models that are inclusive, context-sensitive, and regionally relevant. Informal learning - through family, community, and practice - was recognized as equally valuable as formal education. Research on how to address barriers such as dropout rates, absenteeism, and limited access to creative or vocational pathways was seen as key to achieving equitable, lifelong learning for all.

120. *What role should education play in island development?*
121. *What is the impact of regional advanced education on island society?*
122. *How can the high dropout rates and absenteeism under students pursuing tertiary education on the island and in the European part of the kingdom be addressed? What are the main drivers of this behaviour among secondary and tertiary learners from the islands?*

123. *What best practices are there to address violence among young learners on our islands?*
124. *How can highlighting the accomplishments of regionally educated professionals influence the perceived quality and value of Caribbean education?*
125. *To which extent does the availability of familial status/resources play a role in the educational outcomes of students who are pursuing tertiary education on the islands and in the European part of the Kingdom?*
126. *How can young learners from the islands best be supported in their development outside of formal education?*
127. *What are the drivers of inequality in access to afterschool- and extracurricular activities on the islands, and how can these be addressed?*
128. *How can sustainability best be incorporated in (in)formal education on the islands?*

6.4.3

CULTURAL HERITAGE & HISTORICAL OWNERSHIP

Communities underscored the importance of reclaiming historical narratives and protecting cultural heritage as acts of resistance and healing. Participants expressed frustration with sanitized versions of history, particularly around slavery and colonialism, and called for research approaches and inclusive storytelling that reflect lived experiences. Museums, archives, and arts institutions were seen as tools for empowerment and education. This research subtheme intersects with **justice, media, and identity**, emphasizing the need to affirm cultural ownership and historical truth.

129. *What are the most effective approaches for reclaiming and teaching suppressed or distorted aspects of Caribbean history on the islands?*
130. *How can inclusive storytelling practices in heritage institutions promote healing and cultural pride among younger generations on the islands?*
131. *To what extent does community involvement in heritage preservation strengthen local identity and social cohesion on the islands?*
132. *What role can schools and cultural centres play in protecting and transmitting traditional knowledge and historical ownership on the islands?*



6.4.4

ARTS, EXPRESSION & CREATIVE PEDAGOGY

Participants highlighted the transformative potential of the arts in education, healing, and social connection.

Creative expression - through music, dance, storytelling, and visual arts - was seen as essential for identity formation and holistic learning. Respondents called for research on how to achieve greater integration of arts-based pedagogy in schools, as well as more public investment in cultural spaces and youth programming. This research subtheme links **education, wellbeing, and cultural preservation** through a creative, inclusive lens.

133. *What role should creative expression play in formal education to support social connection and holistic learning on the islands?*
134. *How can public investment in community arts spaces empower youth and promote inclusive cultural participation on the islands?*
135. *To what extent can music, dance, and storytelling be used as tools for intercultural understanding and reconciliation on the islands?*

6.4.5

DECOLONIZING CURRICULUM REFORM EFFORTS

Communities emphasized the need for research to decolonize education by grounding curricula in regional histories, ecological realities, and cultural wisdom. Participants criticized research and education systems that prioritize Eurocentric knowledge and fail to reflect local identities or labour needs. Decolonial approaches call for reimagining what is taught, how it's taught, and who gets to teach. This research subtheme is tied to **justice, sustainability, and labour equity**, emphasizing education as a site of transformation and liberation.

136. *What are the barriers to incorporating indigenous and local knowledge systems into mainstream education on the islands?*
137. *To what extent does Eurocentric bias in curriculum design affect student engagement and identity development on the islands?*
138. *How can teacher training programs be reimagined to support decolonial pedagogies and community-based learning on the islands?*

6.4.6

INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

The preservation and transmission of ancestral knowledge emerged as a priority for strengthening community identity and wellbeing. Elders, artisans, and culture bearers were seen as **vital educators, yet their knowledge is often undervalued or lost**.

Participants called for research programs that connect youth with elders, honour oral traditions, and safeguard endangered skills. This research subtheme is closely **tied to sustainability, food systems, and social cohesion** - framing learning as a shared, intergenerational responsibility.

139. *To what extent can intergenerational learning programs strengthen social cohesion and cultural continuity on the islands?*
140. *How can endangered skills and oral traditions be effectively documented, taught, and preserved for future generations on the islands?*
141. *What best practices exist for connecting youth with elders on the islands through mentorship, storytelling, and hands-on cultural learning?*





6.5 CLIMATE ADAPTIVE SUSTAINABLE, CIRCULAR, LIVEABLE, PARTICIPATORY & INCLUSIVE PRESENT & FUTURES

Sustainability is critical for the six SSSABC islands due to their limited space and resources, particularly as tourism continues to grow and strain the islands’ environmental and societal capacities. Islanders are advocating for a shift from mass tourism to more sustainable tourism models, informed by research and supported by spatial planning and investments in self-sufficient energy systems, clean water infrastructure, and circular resource cycles. These changes are seen as essential to reducing dependency on imports and managing waste effectively.

Island communities recognize the urgent need for climate adaptation, with many emphasizing the interconnectedness of healthy ecosystems and liveable futures. Climate change influences migration, invasive species, and resource self-

sufficiency, prompting discussions on potential solutions, including using non-native flora and fauna to address environmental challenges. Research can inform sustainable development trajectories that balance environmental, social, and economic factors, with **public transportation and mobility** seen as key to achieving this goal.

Research on adequate mobility options, like improving public transport, bike routes, and walkability, were therefore seen as essential for inclusivity and reducing the reliance on cars. There is also a push for research on climate resilient infrastructure and disaster risk reduction. Participants highlight the importance of research on **how to embed sustainability into education and policies**, such as zoning and water management, to protect natural resources and public health.



CLIMATE ADAPTATION & RESILIENCE
Communities emphasized the urgent need for research to inform climate adaptation strategies that reflect the islands’ environmental vulnerabilities and socio-economic constraints.
From rising seas to drought and heatwaves, participants described how climate change impacts housing, health, migration, and local food systems. Locally grounded, participatory research and resilience planning was seen as essential. This research subtheme intersects with **sustainable land use, disaster risk reduction, and circular infrastructure**, highlighting the need for adaptive policies that protect both ecosystems and livelihoods.

- 155. *How can island communities strengthen their resilience to climate change through locally grounded adaptation strategies?*
- 156. *What role can community-led initiatives on the islands play in adapting to and mitigating the impacts of hurricanes, droughts, and sea level rise?*
- 157. *To what extent can nature-based solutions help address socioecological challenges across small island environments?*
- 158. *How can buildings and infrastructure be designed to optimally ventilate island homes in extreme weather?*
- 159. *What knowledge-sharing practices can help islanders learn from and implement effective climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures?*



6.5.2

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY JUSTICE

Mobility was framed as a right and a key pillar of sustainability.

Participants raised concerns about car dependence, traffic, and poor access to public transit - especially for youth, the elderly, and low-income groups - and called for more research on these topics. There was strong support for more research into and improved infrastructure for walking, cycling, and buses. Public transportation is deeply tied to **spatial equity, health, and emissions reduction**, reinforcing the need to rethink mobility in ways that enhance access, dignity, and environmental wellbeing.

160. *To what extent does the current public transportation system meet the mobility needs of the local workforce on the islands?*
161. *How can public transportation systems across the islands be improved to meet the needs of all community members, including youth, elders, and people using mobility aids?*
162. *What measures can enhance the safety and efficiency of walking and cycling routes in island communities?*
163. *How can the islands transition from car-dependent systems toward shared and community-based mobility options?*
164. *What opportunities and challenges exist in reimagining island mobility through more inclusive, low-emission, and accessible transport planning?*



6.5.3

SUSTAINABLE ZONING & LAND USE

Zoning was discussed as both a technical and deeply political issue. Communities highlighted how land use policies often favour tourism and external investment over local housing, agriculture, and conservation. Participants called for further research and zoning practices that protect natural resources, ensure housing affordability, and reflect community needs. Research on sustainable land use planning was seen as integral to addressing environmental degradation, food insecurity, and spatial inequality - connecting directly with **climate adaptation, housing justice, and public health**.

165. *How can zoning practices across the islands better balance tourism development with the needs of local residents and ecosystems?*
166. *How can sustainable zoning support food security, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship in island communities?*
167. *What land use policies can protect natural habitats while ensuring affordable housing and equitable access to land for islanders?*
168. *To what extent does current spatial planning contribute to or constrain environmental health and community wellbeing on the islands?*
169. *What best practices exist for participatory zoning and land use planning on the islands that centre local voices in decision-making processes?*

6.5.4

ENERGY, WATER & CIRCULAR RESOURCE SYSTEMS

The need to reduce reliance on imported energy and water was raised across communities. Participants advocated for research on self-sufficient, decentralized systems that promote energy justice and sustainability - such as solar microgrids, rainwater harvesting, and waste-to-resource innovation. These resource systems were seen as vital for building climate resilience and reducing economic vulnerability. This research subtheme links closely to **zoning, education, and circularity**, emphasizing infrastructure that balances environmental stewardship and social equity.

170. *What opportunities exist for expanding solar, wind, and waste-to-resource innovations within the energy systems on the islands?*
171. *How can island communities reduce dependence on imported energy and water through decentralized, renewable systems?*

172. *What community-based strategies can promote energy justice and equitable access to clean, affordable utilities on the islands?*
173. *How can water conservation and management practices be improved to ensure long-term sustainability across the islands?*
174. *To what extent can circular resource management improve environmental wellbeing and economic stability on the islands?*

6.5.5

INCLUSIVE SPATIAL PLANNING & HOUSING

Affordable, climate resilient housing emerged as a priority across island communities. Respondents raised concerns about overcrowding, poor construction quality, and gentrification. Participants called for research that can inform inclusive spatial planning processes that prioritize residents' needs, preserve community ties, and integrate environmental design. This research subtheme is deeply connected to **zoning, mobility, and health outcomes** - reinforcing the importance of spatial justice in creating liveable, participatory, and sustainable futures.

175. *How can island communities ensure that housing policies promote affordability, climate resilience, and social inclusion?*
176. *How can participatory planning processes ensure that the needs of island residents are prioritized in housing and spatial development projects?*
177. *What planning approaches can prevent displacement and preserve community ties amid urban development and tourism growth on the islands?*
178. *What models of climate resilient housing could be adapted to suit the specific environmental and cultural contexts of the islands?*
179. *How can housing design influence health, safety, and environmental outcomes for islanders?*

6.5.6

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS

People want a seat at the table when it comes to shaping sustainable futures. Participants called for research to facilitate deeper community involvement in climate and environmental policymaking, with specific attention to youth, indigenous knowledge holders, and underrepresented groups. Participatory



approaches were seen as key to legitimacy, innovation, and wellbeing. This research subtheme intersects with **governance, education, and climate adaptation** - emphasizing that sustainability transitions must be inclusive, collaborative, and rooted in lived experience.

180. *What barriers currently limit meaningful participation in sustainability governance on the islands, and how can they be addressed?*
181. *How can islanders be more actively involved in shaping sustainability policies and decision-making processes?*
182. *What participatory mechanisms best support collaboration between island governments, communities, and youth in environmental planning?*
183. *How do community-led initiatives contribute to innovation and wellbeing in sustainability transitions on the islands?*
184. *How can indigenous and local knowledge systems be integrated into island sustainability strategies?*



6.6.1

INVASIVE SPECIES & BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION

Islanders expressed growing concern over the ecological damage caused by invasive species such as sargassum, coralita, and roaming livestock.

These disrupt native habitats, undermine food systems, and threaten tourism-dependent economies. Participants called for research to inform integrated strategies - including business innovation, reforestation, and education campaigns - to manage invasive species while protecting biodiversity. This research subtheme links to **climate adaptation, land governance, and environmental education**, reinforcing the need for local solutions that respect both ecological balance and cultural livelihoods.

185. *How can small-island ecosystems develop integrated management plans for invasive species without harming native habitats or livelihoods?*
186. *What social, economic, and ecological factors enable or hinder community participation in biodiversity protection on the islands?*
187. *In what ways could innovation and entrepreneurship contribute to repurposing invasive materials sustainably (e.g., Sargassum or coralita) on the islands?*
188. *How can reforestation, soil restoration, and animal management be aligned to curb the spread of invasive plants and species on the islands?*
189. *What governance models best balance biodiversity protection with agricultural and tourism interests on the islands?*



6.6

HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM & ENVIRONMENT

The health of ecosystems - both on land and underwater - is vital for the SSSABC islands' economic and social stability. However, these ecosystems are increasingly threatened by land degradation, pollution, tourism-related overuse, and the proliferation of invasive species such as sargassum seaweed and roaming livestock. Coastal ecosystems are particularly vulnerable, with unchecked runoff and pollution contributing to the decline of coral reefs. Invasive species further disrupt biodiversity and exacerbate land and marine degradation. Raising public awareness, especially among youth, about the importance of these ecosystems is seen as key to promoting sustainable resource use and reversing environmental damage.

Islanders stress the need for research to inform localized, community-driven solutions to environmental challenges, including better collaboration and communication to ensure that research and solutions are accessible. Participants highlight the interconnectedness of the environment and public health, with deteriorating ecosystems directly impacting mental, physical, and social health.

6.6.2

HEALTH & THE ENVIRONMENT

Communities highlighted the deep interconnection between ecosystem degradation and public health.

Pollution, land loss, and biodiversity decline are tied to respiratory illness, mental stress, and limited access to nutritious food on the islands. Participants called for cross-sector research approaches that position clean air, green space, and healthy ecosystems as essential components of wellbeing. This research subtheme overlaps with **food systems, mobility, and zoning**, emphasizing that environmental health is public health - and must be treated as such.

190. *How does environmental degradation affect the physical, mental, and social health of island populations?*
191. *In what ways can public health policy integrate ecosystem restoration and environmental monitoring on the islands?*
192. *What indicators could best capture the reciprocal relationship between community wellbeing and ecological health on the islands?*
193. *How can access to clean air, water, and green space be equitably distributed as part of public health planning on the islands?*
194. *What strategies could shift perceptions of environmental health from a technical issue to a social and cultural priority on the islands?*

6.6.3

DE-COLONIAL LAND ACCESS & STEWARDSHIP

Land ownership was described as both a legacy of colonial inequality and a current barrier to sustainability.

Participants called for research that can inform policies that return control of land to communities, ensure equitable access for local farming and housing, and protect against speculative development. Land stewardship rooted in indigenous and local knowledge was seen as critical. This research subtheme intersects with **zoning, food autonomy, and cultural wellbeing**, framing decolonial land justice as environmental justice.

195. *How might land governance systems on the islands be restructured to redress historical inequities in ownership and access?*
196. *What models of community-based land stewardship could strengthen food sovereignty and housing security on the islands?*
197. *In what ways can indigenous and local knowledge inform contemporary land-use policy and environmental justice on the islands?*

6.6.4

COASTAL & MARINE ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

The degradation of reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds is weakening natural defences against climate change. Participants emphasized the urgency of protecting marine biodiversity through restoration, regulation, and education - and called for research to inform this. Coastal ecosystems were seen not just as environmental assets, but as cultural and economic lifelines. This research subtheme ties to **tourism reform, climate adaptation, and youth programming**, highlighting how land and sea must be managed together through inclusive, long-term stewardship.

200. *How can the restoration of reefs, mangroves, and seagrass systems enhance both climate resilience and cultural identity on the islands?*
201. *What are the trade-offs between marine conservation regulations and coastal livelihoods such as fishing and tourism on the islands?*
202. *In what ways could youth and community organizations be engaged in coastal monitoring and restoration projects on the islands?*
203. *How might traditional ecological knowledge contribute to the design of effective marine restoration initiatives on the islands?*
204. *What financing and governance mechanisms can sustain long-term coastal restoration beyond short-term donor cycles on the islands?*



6.6.5

YOUTH & ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

Participants consistently underscored the need to build ecological awareness among youth, and argued that research could play a crucial role in that. Many called for integrating climate and environmental education into school curricula, extracurricular activities, and community-based programs. Young people were seen as both future leaders and current agents of change, capable of reshaping how their communities relate to nature. This research subtheme is closely tied to **sustainability, education reform, and digital ecosystems**, emphasizing that intergenerational knowledge must include environmental literacy.

205. *How can environmental literacy programs empower young people on the islands as active participants in sustainability transitions?*

206. *In what ways can schools and community organizations on the islands integrate hands-on ecological learning into daily education?*

207. *What role do digital tools and media play in shaping youth engagement with climate and environmental issues on the islands?*

208. *How can youth-led initiatives influence local policy and public awareness about environmental protection on the islands?*

209. *What forms of intergenerational learning best transmit ecological knowledge in contemporary educational settings on the islands?*



6.6.6

COMMUNITY-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

Participants called for research that can inform stronger local leadership in managing environmental challenges - from zoning decisions to conservation planning. Centralized, top-down approaches were seen as disconnected from ground realities. Respondents advocated for place-based strategies that honour indigenous knowledge, community input, and collaborative monitoring. This research subtheme overlaps with **governance, land access, and health**, illustrating how decentralized, participatory environmental governance is critical for long-term ecological and social wellbeing.

210. *How can environmental decision-making processes on the islands be made more inclusive of community voices and*

indigenous leadership?

211. *What lessons can be drawn from locally driven conservation projects in building durable environmental governance systems on the islands?*

212. *In what ways can participatory monitoring and citizen science enhance accountability and adaptive management on the islands?*

213. *How might decentralized governance structures improve coordination between environmental, social, and economic policies on the islands?*

214. *What tensions arise between national policy priorities and community-led environmental initiatives on the islands - and how can they be mediated?*





SSS-ABC

Curaçao

6.7

HEALTHY SOCIAL & DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS, OR SOCIAL REENGINEERING

Social reengineering emerged as a crucial concept for addressing the structural challenges and inequalities within the SSSABC islands, which required further research. Social reengineering involves redefining societal norms, behaviours, and institutions to create more equitable and sustainable systems. Islanders emphasized the importance of locally grounded approaches that reflect their lived experiences, particularly in tackling systemic issues such as poverty, unequal access to resources, and generational trauma. Social reengineering aims to empower communities, foster social cohesion, and enable citizens to play an active role in shaping their collective futures.

Discussions also explored the need for a transformation of the social and digital ecosystems, especially through research, education, and development frameworks that align with local cultures. Participants discussed the importance of preserving ancestral knowledge, technical skills, and historical records

to support current and future educational needs - and the role that research could play in this. Additionally, the role of intergenerational learning was highlighted as essential for community development.

On a broader scale, participants stressed the significance of development strategies that transcend short-term political cycles. There was also a call for rethinking public health systems, transitioning from symptom-based to healing-focused care, and promoting holistic lifelong learning models that adapt to changing economic landscapes. Research on how to integrate inclusive practices, such as empowering differently-abled individuals, fostering family well-being, and addressing housing issues, was seen as essential for a more cohesive and thriving society across the islands.

6.7.1

SOCIAL REENGINEERING FOR DEVELOPMENT & GOVERNANCE

Communities called for research that could inform a fundamental rethinking of governance, development, and social systems.

Participants described how policy cycles often fail to reflect long-term needs or lived realities. Social reengineering was framed as a way to realign institutions with justice, transparency, and community-defined priorities. Rooted in lived experience and regional identity, further research should lead to a better understanding of this approach, which links **governance, education, and care** - proposing development models built on dignity, equity, and sustained community involvement.

215. *How can the islands' governance systems be redesigned to prioritize long-term community wellbeing over short-term political cycles?*
216. *What models of social reengineering on the islands could realign public institutions with justice, transparency, and collective care?*
217. *In what ways can development planning on the islands better reflect local knowledge and lived realities?*
218. *How might participatory governance reshape relationships between citizens, policymakers, and the state on the islands?*
219. *What strategies can ensure that social innovation strengthens - rather than replaces - existing community structures of support on the islands?*
220. *How can accountability be redefined in island contexts where formal governance and informal community leadership coexist?*

6.7.2

DIGITAL INCLUSION & COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY

Participants raised concerns about digital divides that limit access to education, economic opportunity, and civic participation. There was a strong call for investment in community-centred tech infrastructure that supports connectivity, local media, and digital literacy - and informed by research on digital inclusion and community technology. Equitable access to technology was seen as essential not just for development, but for cultural preservation, intergenerational exchange, and sound research. This research subtheme intersects with **education, youth empowerment, and media justice**, emphasizing technology as a social, not just technical, issue.

- 221. *What does digital inclusion look like when defined by island communities rather than corporations?*
- 222. *How might locally owned tech infrastructure strengthen democracy and cultural continuity on the islands?*
- 223. *In what ways can open-source and community media networks counter digital dependency on the islands?*
- 224. *How can digital literacy programs on the islands be rooted in storytelling, art, and shared histories rather than purely technical training?*
- 225. *What new forms of solidarity and participation can emerge on the islands when connectivity becomes a shared public good?*

6.7.3

SOCIAL COHESION & BELONGING

Belonging was identified as foundational to safe and thriving communities. Participants described how social fragmentation - driven by inequality, migration, and stigma - undermines trust and wellbeing. Calls for research to support social reengineering included investing in better understanding communal rituals, inclusive storytelling, and policies that repair fractured relationships. This research subtheme overlaps with **media, justice, and education**, reinforcing the need to build systems and spaces that foster connectedness, cultural pride, and mutual respect.

- 226. *How can island communities rebuild a sense of belonging in places and spaces marked by inequality, migration, and loss?*
- 227. *What can shared rituals, festivals, or collective acts of remembrance teach us about social repair on the islands?*
- 228. *How might schools, parks, and public art serve as anchors for cohesion in rapidly changing island communities?*



6.7.4

HEALING-CENTRED CARE & MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health was framed as a social justice issue, deeply connected to structural trauma, colonial legacies, and contemporary stressors. Participants advocated for research on healing-centred systems rooted in local culture, care work, and community leadership. They also called for research on alternatives to symptom-focused treatment including traditional healing, intergenerational dialogue, and trauma-informed education. This research subtheme touches on **justice reform, healthcare, and lifelong learning** - emphasizing that emotional wellbeing and collective healing are central to long-term development.

- 229. *What could mental health care look like on the islands if it were built from the wisdom of caregivers, elders, and community healers?*
- 230. *How can healing be reframed as a collective and political act on the islands, rather than an individual pursuit?*
- 231. *What does recovery mean in island contexts where trauma is historical, structural, and ongoing?*
- 232. *How might work, rest, and community life on the islands be reorganized around emotional and social wellbeing?*
- 233. *What can traditional practices teach modern health systems about wellbeing and relational care on the islands?*



6.7.6

PUBLIC SPACE, PARTICIPATION & PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Built environments were described as reflections of social priorities - and opportunities for transformation which could be informed by research. Participants called for public spaces that invite interaction, dignity, and movement. Research on physical development, including housing, parks, and town planning, was seen as inseparable from social cohesion and sustainability. This research subtheme intersects with **mobility, climate adaptation, and governance**, highlighting the need to research and design spaces that affirm identity, promote inclusion, and enable collective life.

- 238. *How can the design of public spaces on the islands express what island communities believe themselves to be?*
- 239. *In what ways can housing and urban planning repair, rather than reproduce, inequality on the islands?*
- 240. *What stories do the islands' buildings and streets tell about power, belonging, and imagination?*
- 241. *How can public art and green space on the islands become everyday invitations to civic life?*
- 242. *How does island residents' involvement in shaping the physical environment change their sense of agency and home?*



6.7.5

INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING & FAMILY STRENGTHENING

Participants emphasized the importance of intergenerational exchange as a mechanism for social cohesion, wellbeing, and identity. Communities stressed the need to support families across generations through research and policies that centre care, oral traditions, and shared responsibility. Strengthening families was seen as central to reengineering education, health, and governance systems. This research subtheme bridges **culture, wellbeing, and education**, highlighting the role of kinship in sustaining knowledge and building adaptive, rooted communities.

- 234. *In what ways does the rhythm of daily family life on the islands - meals, stories, shared work - create vital sites of education?*
- 235. *What policies could sustain multi-generational households on the islands as sources of social stability?*
- 236. *How might youth mentorship and apprenticeship revive endangered skills and local wisdom on the islands?*
- 237. *How can the role of island community elders shift from memory-keepers to active designers of the future?*



7. CONCLUSION

You have reached the end of this Caribbean Research Agenda. Commissioned by the Ministry of OCW and facilitated by NWO, this agenda is based on the priorities of Caribbean Island communities, includes various entry points for an integrated approach to research, and pays special attention to collaboration.

It was developed through a community-driven process shaped by hundreds of in-persons and virtual conversations with island residents, researchers, artists, activists, educators, elders, and civil society leaders - as well as extensive written input through surveys and direct communication. This approach was grounded in the belief that, just like research must centre island voices, so too must the processes that define research priorities. **As such, this agenda is the direct result of the rich engagement of everyone who participated in its development, whether by filling the surveys, attending expert sessions, stakeholder meetings, community conversations, and diaspora dialogues, or sending emails and texts with their considerations for the future of research on the islands.**

Through this valuable input emerged the picture of a diverse, productive, and impactful research landscape across the SSSABC islands, with nuanced differences between them and characterized by various degrees of research embeddedness. Importantly, while the research landscapes of the six islands differ categorically from the research landscape of the European Netherlands, the research policy that governs these islands is made from the European Netherlands, bringing with it structural challenges. As a result, it was repeatedly emphasized that this Caribbean Research Agenda should **not only speak to the research questions that are important to community members in the region, but also the terms and conditions under which this research should be conducted.** In that spirit, the community members that we spoke to shared visions for who might legitimately be considered a researcher in SSSABC island contexts, and thus who should be eligible for funding under this Caribbean Research Agenda and how to best support them. Furthermore, community members shared visions for how to ensure impactful research by considering which types of initiatives may best deliver impact and how to fund them, as well as how to best govern the research landscapes across the six islands.

The consultation process also culminated into **SEVEN MAJOR RESEARCH THEMES**, which are presented here with **sub-themes and research questions**. Community members emphasized that these (sub-)themes should not be considered in isolation but that they are rather a diverse set of **interconnected entry points** into the complex societal challenges facing the SSSABC islands.



Furthermore, the questions as they are presented in this agenda are the result of grouping the vast number of questions that we encountered through the surveys, expert sessions, stakeholder meetings, community conversations, diaspora dialogues, emails, and texts, and are intended to be amended further to fulfil specific project needs and fit specific research contexts. **Indeed, as social realities on the islands change and questions become answered, some questions may need to be changed while others are added.**

It is our hope that this agenda **reflects, as much as possible, the diversity of contexts, experiences, and needs** that we encountered across the research landscapes of all six islands. We tried to do this through a collaborative process which did not always mean consensus but did mean listening differently and holding space for discomfort and complexity. Thus, while we may not have been able to speak to everyone or to write a single agenda text that fully captures what everyone thinks, we hope that, together with Caribbean island communities, we have co-created **A Caribbean Research Agenda that is not only widely supported by communities but also able to lead to rigorous and impactful research.**

Intended as an invitation and provocation, we hope for this to be A Caribbean Research Agenda that **supports a thriving knowledge ecosystem, which is rooted in community wisdom and scientific research.** Whereby the needs of Caribbean communities are placed in the centre:

**“WE NO LONGER WANT
TO BE SUBJECTS OF RESEARCH;
WE WANT TO SHAPE IT;
WITH US, FOR US, AND ABOUT US.”**

