



Five years of the Caribbean Netherlands



Impact on the population

Summary for the public

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- b contributing to a responsible choice of policy objectives, as well as indicating advantages and disadvantages of the various paths for achieving these objectives;
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1 The state of affairs

When the new political relationships were set up, it was agreed that the situation will be evaluated after five years. An assessment would be made of the effect of the new relationship on the situation on the islands. The Committee for evaluation of the effect of the new political structure for the Caribbean Netherlands (Commissie evaluatie uitwerking nieuwe staatkundige structuur Caribisch Nederland) which was created for this purpose has set out three studies to gain insight into the consequences for legislation, public administration and the population. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (scp) was asked to carry out the study on 'consequences of the transition for the population'.

1.1 The Caribbean Netherlands

Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba have been part of the Netherlands since 10 October 2010. The inhabitants of the Caribbean islands were optimistic. Two-thirds thought that the situation would improve. What is the position five years later? Schools, hospitals, the police, water supply, sewerage and the Internet have all improved. But life has become so expensive that many people struggle to make ends meet. Worries about money cast a heavy shadow over the successes. In 2015 the islanders are more negative about education, healthcare and public safety than two years earlier. And they give their quality of life a low rating: just scraping a 6 on Bonaire, not quite a 6 on Saba and only just over 5 on St Eustatius. That contrasts sharply with the 8 given by most Dutch citizens in Europe.

Box 1.1 Three 'mini countries'

The islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba are also referred to as 'the Caribbean Netherlands'. Bonaire is the largest, and lies 90 kilometres off the coast of Venezuela. The 18,400 inhabitants mainly speak Papiamentu.

The small islands of Saba and Sint Eustatius lies some 900 kilometres from Bonaire. The 1800 Sabans and 4000 Statians mainly speak English.

The three islands are really each an independent country, with their own ports, airports, water supply, electricity and Internet. But they are too small to offer all types of education, medical care or police tasks.

1.2 Research

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research has investigated what has been achieved on the islands since '10-10-10'. Issues examined were the economic situation and aspects such as work, benefits, roads, airports, ports, schools, hospitals, police and prisons. The researchers checked whether the agreements have been fulfilled. They have examined which departments and bodies have worked on the development of the

islands, and whether they knew what the others were doing.

Particular efforts were made to hear from the islanders themselves as to what they notice about the changes in their daily lives. It's about their opinion, their perception, their reality. The perception of that reality by the inhabitants may differ from the situation according to researchers. But people act in accordance with the reality as they perceive it.

Box 1.2 The views of the population

In April 2015 researchers travelled to the three islands in order to hear from the inhabitants what the transition to the new political situation means for them.

- A representative survey was conducted amongst the population (Saba 146 people, Sint Eustatius 202 people, Bonaire 401 people).
 - Seven group discussions were held with inhabitants.
 - Over 60 interviews were conducted with some 150 administrators, civil servants, professionals, representatives of social organisations, business people and citizens.
 - Conversations took place with around 70 citizens on the islands in their choice of language (Dutch, Papiamentu, English) at six events which were open to all.
 - Some 115 inhabitants gave their views on a special website.
-

1.3 Many departments and bodies

Many ministries and bodies are involved in the development of the Caribbean Netherlands. The ministries each made their own plans and set aside money. The plans of some ministries were based more on the state of affairs on the islands, whilst other ministries drew more on the Dutch standard. There was no uniform approach or vision. It is difficult to identify precisely who was responsible for which change. There may also be events over which policy has no influence, such as issues relating to health or public safety. Yet it is possible to establish in some areas what steps have been taken, what they led to and what the effect is for the population.

Box 1.3 Expenditure on the Caribbean Netherlands

In 2010 the islands were seriously lagging behind in all areas. The decision was made to give priority to improve the economy, education, healthcare, infrastructure (everything required to transport goods, people and information), social security and public safety. In 2014 central government spent over 248 million euro on this. The islands' executive councils also spend money. This brings total government spending for the Caribbean Netherlands to 316 million euro, i.e. 13,020 euro per inhabitant.

2 Results after five years

2.1 Economy

Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba are small islands with a few inhabitants. Most raw materials and products need to be imported. And it is more expensive to provide services or products for a small customer base than for a large one. All three islands are economically vulnerable because they have few different types of businesses. It is hard to determine whether that changed after 10-10-10. But inhabitants and business people are fairly negative about this. The islands were given a new tax regime. This was found to raise more than been agreed. That surplus income has been returned to the inhabitants and the businesses through measures. At the same time, life for the islanders quickly became more expensive. Between 2010 and 2013 wages on Bonaire rose by 6%, but prices by 10%. On Sint Eustatius, wages rose by 2% but prices by 16%. And on Saba wages rose by 6% but prices by 12%. In other words, purchasing power decreased substantially. That was not just caused by 10-10-10, but also by the rise in world prices and the limited competition on the islands. However shopkeepers did raise many prices after the introduction of the dollar in 2011, which was not the intention.

2.2 Infrastructure

Infrastructure covers everything relating to the transportation of goods, people and information. So roads and ports, but also water supplies, sewers, telephone and Internet. Extensive plans were produced for the three islands' airports in conjunction with Dutch experts. The Netherlands wants to contribute to making the airports safer, but something like the construction of a new terminal needs to be funded by the islands themselves. Plans have also been implemented for energy and drinking water, and further plans have been drawn up. The Netherlands contributed to this financially. One challenging issue is the roads, particularly on Sint Eustatius and Bonaire. The islands themselves are responsible for the quality and the maintenance, but they have no money for it. More and more unsafe situations are developing in the meantime. One major problem for Sint Eustatius and Saba was the slow Internet. That was resolved in 2013 with a new cable link with St Kitts. The undersea cable was funded by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. A lot of work on infrastructure is not yet visible to inhabitants and businesses. There is quite a long lag between plan and execution. This is normal. Investments are expensive, and there are always many interests involved.

2.3 Education

The schools inspectorate visited all the schools on Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius prior to 10-10-10. Almost all were unsatisfactory. Teachers were not well trained. Pupils were lagging behind. 'Challenging' and gifted pupils were receiving no separate attention. School boards had problems. Buildings and teaching materials were substandard, but have now improved substantially. It was agreed in 2011 that priority would be given to five aspects: raising quality, better teachers, school heads and boards, attention for special pupils, attractive vocational education and good buildings and teaching materials. Four of the twelve primary schools now meet the quality standards: one on Sint Eustatius and three on Bonaire. More will follow shortly. Other schools are already performing well in certain areas. But at no primary school are pupils who require additional care receiving the correct support. Of the three secondary schools, not one has achieved the basic quality level, nor is that going to happen in the near future. They have been through tumultuous times and are suffering from the fact that good leadership is not always provided to the schools.

The striving for better teachers, school heads and boards has not yet led to better-run schools. In addition, many teachers and school heads who have received additional training change job. They often come from the Netherlands and are only on the islands temporarily. The choice of vocational training is now more extensive. More and more pupils can attend secondary vocational education on their own island. The benchmark was that pupils from the islands should be able to continue their education in the Netherlands without problems. It is impossible to determine whether that has been achieved. There are no precise figures for how many students from the islands go to study in the Netherlands, and whether they have trouble with the transition. One major bottleneck is the difference between the language which the children speak at home and the language at school. Sint Eustatius has therefore decided to switch to education in English, as Saba already did previously. On Bonaire children who speak Papiamentu or Spanish at home are still taught in Dutch. Another problem is that the schools have too few experts to help pupils who have learning or behavioural problems.

2.4 Healthcare

Healthcare on the islands is also supposed to reach the same quality level as in the Netherlands. No precise benchmarks have been set for this, but agreements have been made as to how it should be done. Hence all islanders have had compulsory medical insurance without personal contribution or excess since 2011. A list of the most urgent investments has been drawn up for buildings and equipment. A review has taken place of what medical care can be provided in the surrounding countries. And the Netherlands is helping the islands to comply with international requirements for combating infectious diseases. The health of the population of the Caribbean Netherlands has improved since 2004. In 2013 three-quarters of the population of the Caribbean Netherlands described

themselves as healthy. Bonaire now has a modern hospital with good staff, so that fewer people need to go abroad for medical treatment. Considerable advances have also been made in public healthcare, mental health, care for the elderly and care for addicts. Each island now has a Young People and Family Centre. The correct drugs are available. Dental care is mainly good. A helicopter is always available for urgent medical transport from Saba and Sint Eustatius. Nursing home care on Saba is still less satisfactory. The nursing home on Sint Eustatius is better, but does not offer appropriate daytime activities. Those are offered in the nursing home on Bonaire, however, where the standard of care is good. GPs on Saba work more to Dutch standards than the GPs on Sint Eustatius and Bonaire. A number of Dutch GPs have now been appointed on Sint Eustatius. GPs on Bonaire are receiving additional training.

Medical transfers to hospitals in Columbia and Guadalupe remain difficult because of the transportation, the long period of admission and the paperwork. But no better solution has been found yet in the vicinity of the islands. The improvements in healthcare are particularly the result of the new medical insurance and investments in buildings and equipment. The inspectorate was also very active by checking and advising medical staff and institutions. Also beneficial was the fact that the Dutch experts working on the islands have shared their knowledge and standards. This was partly agreed in advance, but partly also occurred spontaneously. This particularly applies to the transfer of medical and nursing knowledge from the Netherlands. The improvements have resulted in a substantial rise in the cost of healthcare. Physiotherapy and dental care have therefore largely been removed from the medical insurance package, just like in the Netherlands, to the anger and distress of many islanders.

2.5 Employment and social security

The Dutch level was not adopted as the standard for employment and social security. The differences with the islands are too great for that. If the minimum wage on the islands were to rise much higher, the Netherlands believes that this would cause an influx of people from surrounding countries. Benefits have been kept low in order to stimulate people to earn money. The Netherlands also believes that higher minimum wages and higher benefits are undesirable because of the economic situation. No plans were therefore made to improve social security. In principle the islands are still governed by the old Netherlands Antilles legislation, which has been given a fresh coat of paint. However the intention is to improve the provisions gradually, so that they come to resemble those in the Netherlands more closely. There has not been any indication of which provisions and when, but it has been stated that the economy on the islands must improve first. This is leading to great dissatisfaction. Civil servants, inhabitants and administrators on the islands sometimes feel deprived. Meanwhile there is great poverty amongst people who can no longer work, such as the elderly, the chronically sick and handicapped. It is clear that there is great need. Combating poverty will be given priority in the new Long-term Programme. However the lack of information about purchasing power, poverty and the

stimulation effect in social security is a handicap. That makes it difficult to take the correct steps.

2.6 Public safety

Since 10-10-10 the Netherlands has been responsible for supervising compliance with the law and the judicial structure on the Caribbean Netherlands. The agreements have been fulfilled, and substantial investment has taken place. The funding for the police on the islands rose from 7 million euro in 2010 to 15 million euro in 2014. The Royal Dutch Military Police (Koninklijke Marechaussee) frequently assists, particularly with detective work. The police stations on Saba and Sint Eustatius have been refurbished. Bonaire has a new police headquarters and is getting a complete new prison. The Public Prosecution Service on the island has been fully staffed since 2012. Yet the islands have not become safer according to the crime figures. The population on the islands, particularly on Bonaire, has grown faster than the number of police officers. Saba and Sint Eustatius have too few people for detective work. Additional training for the police requires a lot of time, partly as a result of the difference in language and culture. Saba and Sint Eustatius, which were dependent on the neighbouring island of Sint Maarten for many aspects of public safety, suddenly had to call upon the remote Bonaire after 10-10-10. That results in problems in implementing punishments. Many international standards apply in the area of public safety, such as for prisons or aviation. The Ministry of Security and Justice is helping the islands to comply with those standards.

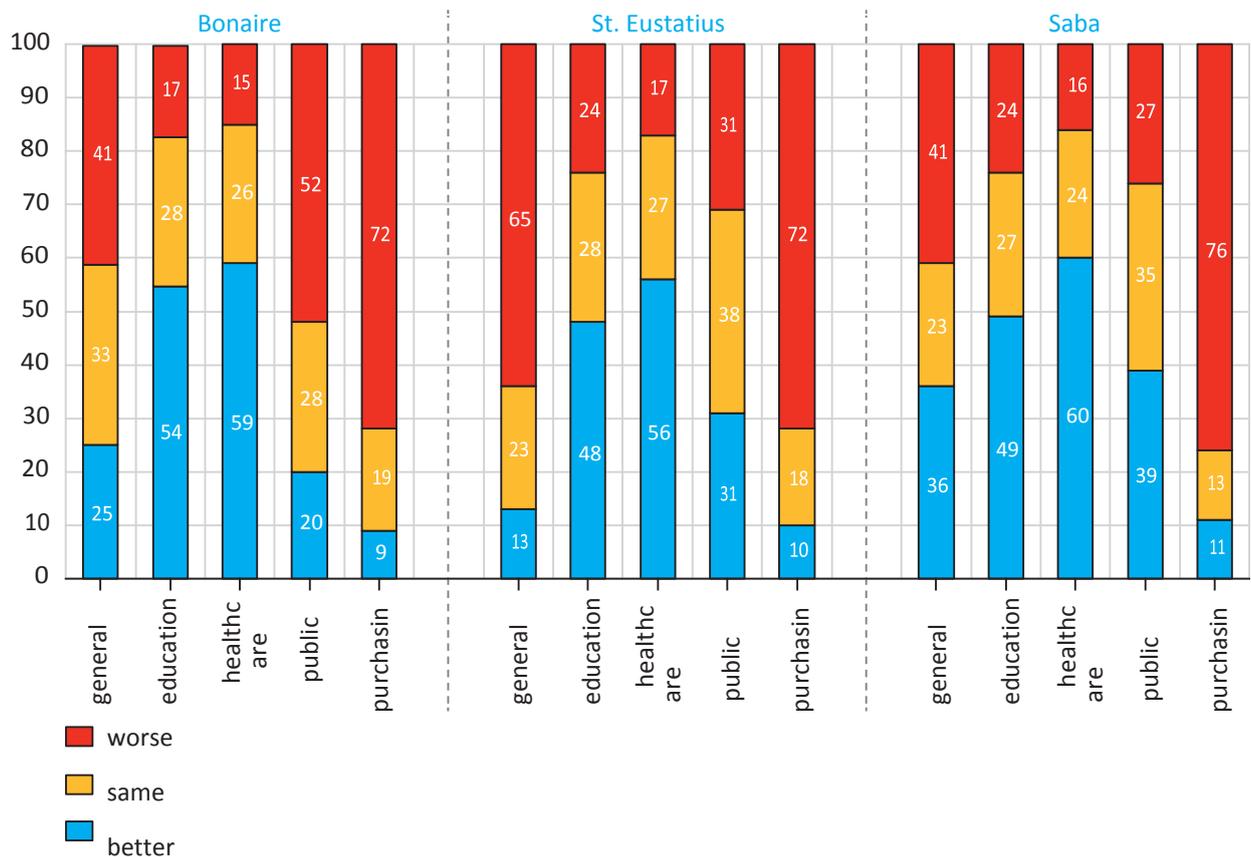
3 The views of the islanders

3.1 Situation after five years

The islanders were able to indicate whether the situation has got better or worse after 10-10-10. They were asked about their views on education, healthcare, public safety and purchasing power (figure 3.1). Healthcare comes out best, closely followed by education. The differences between the islands are not large. People are less positive about public safety. Here there are differences between the islands. On Bonaire in particular people feel that public safety has deteriorated. The worst rating is given to purchasing power: over 70% have less money to spend, some 20% see no change, and only 10% feel there's been an improvement.

Figure 3.1

Are healthcare, education, public safety and purchasing power better or worse since 10-10-10?



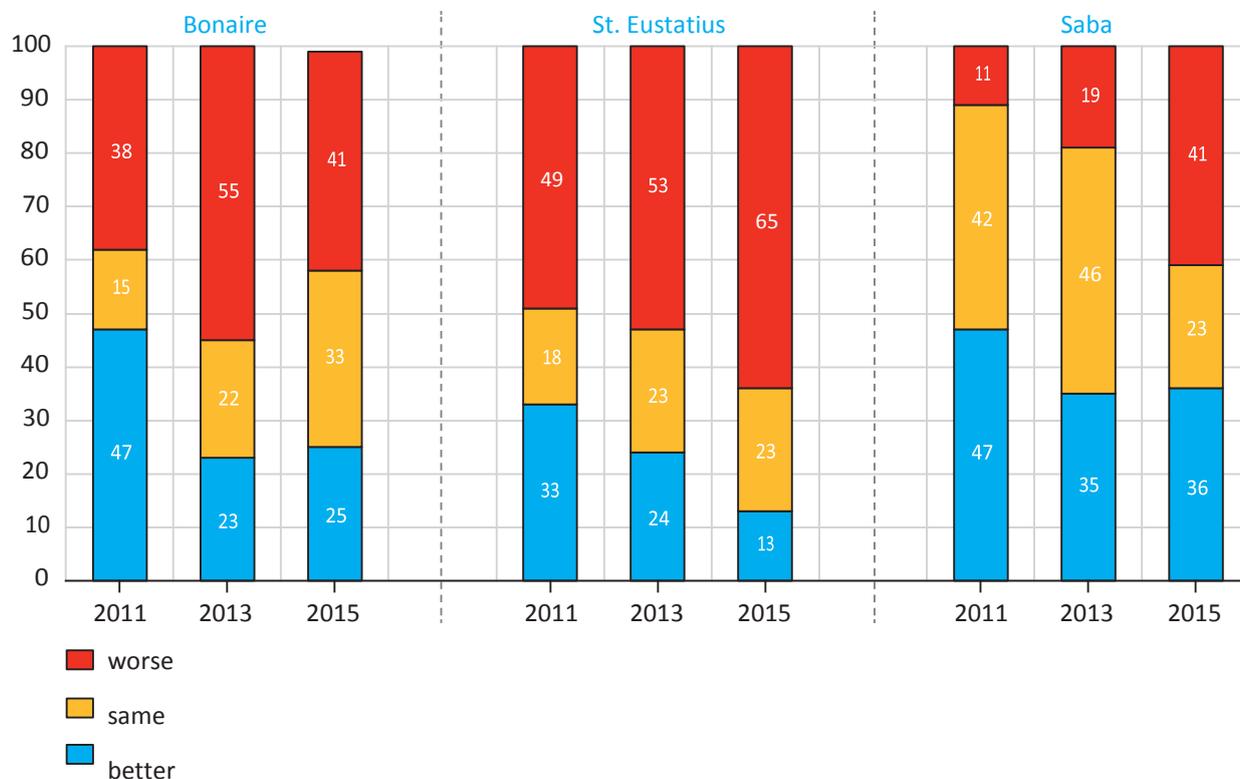
Source: Curconsult (bcn'15) scp processing

Islanders were also asked for their views in 2011 and 2013 (figure 3.2). In 2011 almost half the inhabitants of Bonaire and Saba felt that their island was doing better after 10-10-10. On Sint Eustatius that figure was one third. The positive views have diminished considerably now, in 2015. On Sint Eustatius only 13% feel that things have improved on

the island, 25% on Bonaire and 36% on Saba. People have also become more sombre about the future of the past two years, particularly on Sint Eustatius and Saba. Only a minority of the islanders look forward to the next five years positively.

Figure 3.2

Is your island doing better or worse since 10-10-10?



Source: Curconsult (bcn'15) scp processing

3.2 Public administration

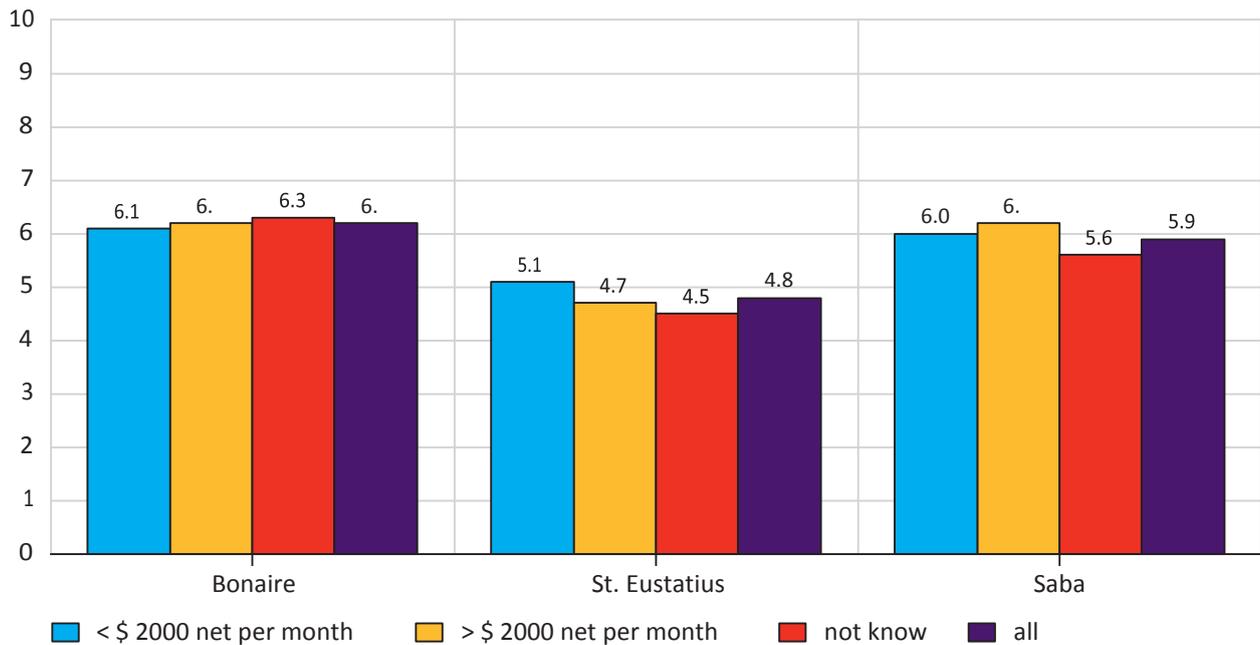
The population does not feel that the public administration is doing very well. If they can give a rating, the local administration, the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland and the government in The Hague received many ratings of 'unsatisfactory'. The Rijksdienst comes out best, and the government in The Hague worst. The islanders do feel that the Netherlands is doing its best, particularly with regard to healthcare and education. But they feel that the government in The Hague is not listening well to the islands. And even when The Hague does listen, still nothing happens. They are thereby particularly referring to the difficult financial situation. They also feel that The Hague imposes rules which are not appropriate for the islands. Civil servants and politicians in The Hague do not understand the local reality and problems, according to them. The local administration also receives a poor rating. The general view is that it might be doing its best, but that is still too little. Hence there is the complaint that local administrators provide insufficient social housing, or make too little use of pools of funding from The Hague.

3.3 Personal happiness

The islanders were able to give a rating of their personal happiness. The inhabitants of Sint Eustatius give uniformly poor ratings (figure 3.3). It doesn't matter whether they are earning a lot or a little.

Figure 3.3

How would you rate your personal happiness?



Source: Curconsult (bcn'15) scp processing

On Sint Eustatius 64% are unhappy with the situation on the island, and only 7% are happy with it. Of the Sabans, 41% say they are unhappy and 15% happy, whilst on Bonaire 24% say they are unhappy and 15% happy. These are low scores by Dutch standards. Inhabitants of the European Netherlands give their life a rating of nearly 8. And 85% describe themselves happy or very happy.

4 Life according to citizens, professionals, civil servants and administrators

In order to explore the story behind the figures, many interviews were conducted on the islands with citizens, administrators, civil servants, business people, representatives of social organisations and professionals. Many islanders have multiple positions in society, incidentally: apart from being inhabitant they may also be a member of the island council or a business person. What's important is their views. The people interviewed blame many problems on 10-10-10. But there were also problems long before then. Many people have long been poorly educated. Poverty also existed previously, as did problems with raising children, absent fathers, the poor state of the roads and transport between the islands. The fact that the islands have become part of the Netherlands did put a spotlight on these issues as a result of the high expectations.

4.1 Social consequences of weak economic position

Many citizens feel that their quality of life has worsened since 10-10-10 in almost all areas. Social workers echo this. Poverty and social problems have become more intense since then. People are unsure about the future, whether their island will ever be sorted out. Citizens, professionals and administrators feel that the Netherlands allow the islands to their fate socially and economically and is unwilling to recognise how great the need is. It is often impossible to live on one salary. It is not just citizens who report this; professionals and administrators say the same. The prices in the shops have risen to great heights. Water, sewerage and waste processing have also become more expensive (partly as a result of investments, such as in the water supply on Sint Eustatius, the sewers on Bonaire and waste incineration on all islands). Some islanders therefore have several jobs, or their own business alongside their job. People with their own house are trying to rent out apartments. There is virtually no saving. Elderly people are increasingly going to the food bank. On all islands citizens feel that crime is increasing, particularly theft. There are noticeably frequent references to stealing the necessities of life, such as food and clothing. Because parents work many hours they have less time for their children. The many single mothers are suffering the greatest poverty. Professionals in healthcare and education are worried. Young people are living on the street and 'raising themselves'. The lack of money means that children have few toys, which is bad for their development. More and more children are going to school without breakfast. The parents' stress is having an effect on the children. They bring the problems from home into school. There is a lot of aggression and disruption in schools. Teachers are worried about the number of pupils with behavioural problems, and often described teaching as difficult.

4.2 Debts

According to social workers there are a few families who do not have debts. People are increasingly borrowing money from one another. This regularly leads to problems if people do not repay on time. The elderly, single mothers, the chronically ill and the handicapped in particular are often dependent on family and friends because their benefits are too little to live on. The chronically ill and handicapped find it difficult to get a job. There is virtually no debt counselling on the islands.

4.3 Women and children are vulnerable

Citizens complain about the substantial rise in living costs. There is little social housing, and it is often also too expensive. The social housing fund has too little money from maintenance. There is no housing benefit for the islanders. Three generations of a family often live together in houses which are too small and with little money. This results in tensions. There are many indications of domestic violence, sexual violence and incest. Citizens do not readily talk about these issues. But social workers, teachers and the police are saying loud and clear: women and children are in a vulnerable position.

4.4 Language

For most islanders Dutch is a foreign language. Many people also have trouble reading and writing. On Bonaire this affects a quarter of the population. All official government and judicial documents are written in Dutch. Language is particularly a problem in education. There are arguments for and against teaching in Dutch. Opinions are divided amongst experts and islanders. Another problem with language arises when islanders go to hospitals in the region where French or Spanish is spoken.

4.5 Us and them

Many islanders believe that the Netherlands applies double standards. Although life on the islands is much more expensive than in the Netherlands, they receive lower benefits, no housing allowance and no child allowance until next year. Yet they have to follow the Netherlands when it comes to the age at which they receive a pension, the medical insurance provisions and same-sex marriage. Why is it the same in one case, and not in the other, many inhabitants ask. They also believe that the Netherlands is spending too much money on nature and the environment, whilst people can barely keep their head above water.

4.6 Expensive food, unhealthy eating pattern

Food prices are exceptionally high. Fresh products are unaffordable to many. The pattern of eating is unbalanced: a lot of fat and carbohydrates. More and more people are becoming overweight, and as a result they are developing diabetes, coronary and vascular disease and joint complaints. The islanders go to the doctor a lot. Professionals in healthcare are also angry that dental care and physiotherapy have been removed from the insurance package. People cannot pay for that care themselves, nor can they insure themselves separately or supplementary. This can have consequences for people's health.

4.7 Differences between islands

The social consequences of poverty are visible on all islands. It is hard to say whether the problems on one island are more serious than those on another. But people find it harder to get out of poverty on Saba and Sint Eustatius - small and remote islands - than on Bonaire. Social problems, particularly involving young people, are being suffered most severely on Sint Eustatius. Children's rights are thereby often being breached. According to citizens and social workers more and more young people are getting into trouble through crime, drugs and prostitution. There appears to be more 'silent poverty' on Saba, which is not to say that there is less poverty. Negative views about the Netherlands are stronger on Bonaire than on the other two islands.

5 Successes are more visible with less poverty

The fact that Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have become part of the Netherlands has brought many good things to the inhabitants. Schools, hospitals, police, water supply, sewerage and the Internet are now better than prior to 2010. But the social and economic troubles are greatly detracting from the situation. If there's less poverty, there are fewer social problems. The successes in other areas will then also be more visible. That will help citizens, professionals and administrators on the islands to believe in a better future.