

Caribbean Food Security & Livelihoods Survey

Natural Hazards and the Cost of Living Crisis

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO | August 2023

Successive shocks and crises over the last few years continue to reverberate on the food security and livelihoods of people in the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean. The pandemic and the cost of living crisis have severely affected peoples' purchasing power where more people are forced to make difficult compromises to meet their food and other essential needs. These trends are exacerbated by the ever-present threat of natural hazards in the region, which could be devastating for those already living in poverty and a tipping point for those on the margins.

To inform decision-making in the Caribbean, Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the World Food Programme (WFP) launched the Caribbean Food Security and Livelihoods Survey to highlight the impact of the pandemic, the cost of living crisis and the effect of natural hazards on food security and livelihoods over time.

This report analyses data for Trinidad and Tobago from the sixth round of data collection, which took place from 10 to 28 May 2023. It compares findings with five previous survey rounds conducted between April 2020 and August 2022.

Main results from the Trinidad and Tobago surveys

	May 2023	Aug 2022	Feb 2022	Feb 2021	Jun 2020	Apr 2020	
LIVELIHOODS	Disrupted livelihoods	60% ▲	57%	60%	61%	65%	72%
	Reduction/loss of income	45% ▼	60%	68%	75%	77%	40%
MARKETS	Lack of market access	50% ▼	49%	41%	55%	42%	15%
	Change in shopping behaviour	94% ▼	94%	93%	90%	87%	82%
	Increase in food prices	98% ▼	99%	98%	84%	76%	65%
FOOD SECURITY	Reduced food consumption	42% ▼	43%	44%	53%	53%	12%
	Lack of food stock	25% ▼	26%	24%	22%	17%	2%



May 2023

1100

Respondents

73% | 27%
Female | Male

Aug 2022

1459

Respondents

73% | 27%
Female | Male

Feb 2022

1576

Respondents

72% | 28%
Female | Male

Feb 2021

1103

Respondents

64% | 36%
Female | Male

Jun 2020

899

Respondents

67% | 33%
Female | Male

Apr 2020

535

Respondents

67% | 33%
Female | Male



Cost of living crisis

Trinidad and Tobago relies heavily on food imports, which make up 71 percent of all food trade (excluding fish; FAOSTAT, 2021). This means that local food prices are highly vulnerable to fluctuations in regional and global food markets. According to FAO's Food Price Index, global food prices have decreased by 23.5 percent as of May 2023 since the all-time high in March 2022. Food inflation in Trinidad and Tobago reached an all-time high in December 2022 but has been decreasing since. However, in May 2023 food prices still increased by almost 10 percent compared to 2022, continuing to affect purchasing power of many.

The majority of respondents from Trinidad and Tobago continue to report significant price increases in food, transport, gas and housing. Compared to August 2022, a greater proportion noted significant increases in housing, health and electricity in May 2023.



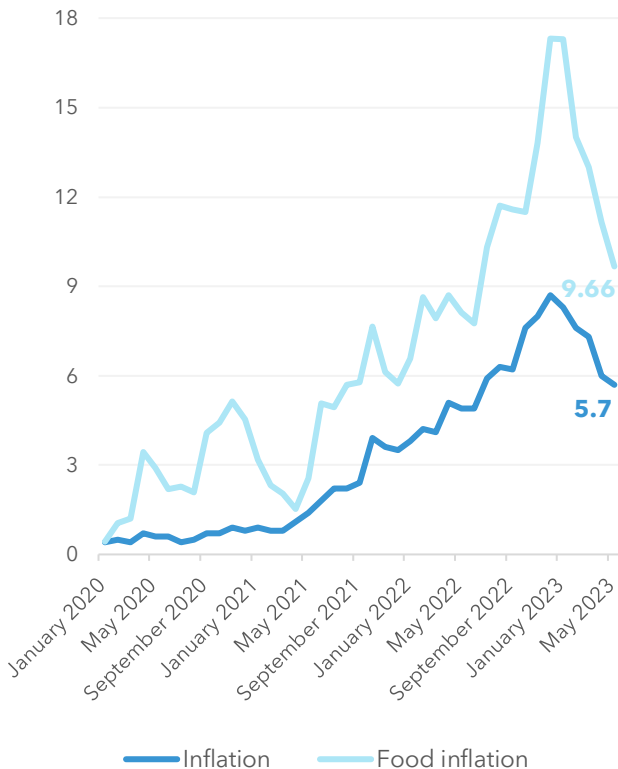
Natural hazards

Trinidad and Tobago is exposed to a wide range of natural hazards which pose a significant threat for climate sensitive livelihood activities and people's lives. Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) shows that there were 11 reported natural hazards in Trinidad and Tobago between 1980 - 2022. A large portion of these were floods (four out of 11) and storms (three).

Recorded events between 1980-2022 affected over 250 thousand people in Trinidad and Tobago and resulted in total adjusted damages of USD 52 million. An earthquake in 1997 caused the largest natural disaster-related damages in Trinidad and Tobago resulting in 88 percent of reported total adjusted damages. The rest of the reported total damages were caused by floods and storms (USD 6 million). The last reported event was a riverine flood at the end of 2022 that affected 100 thousand people.

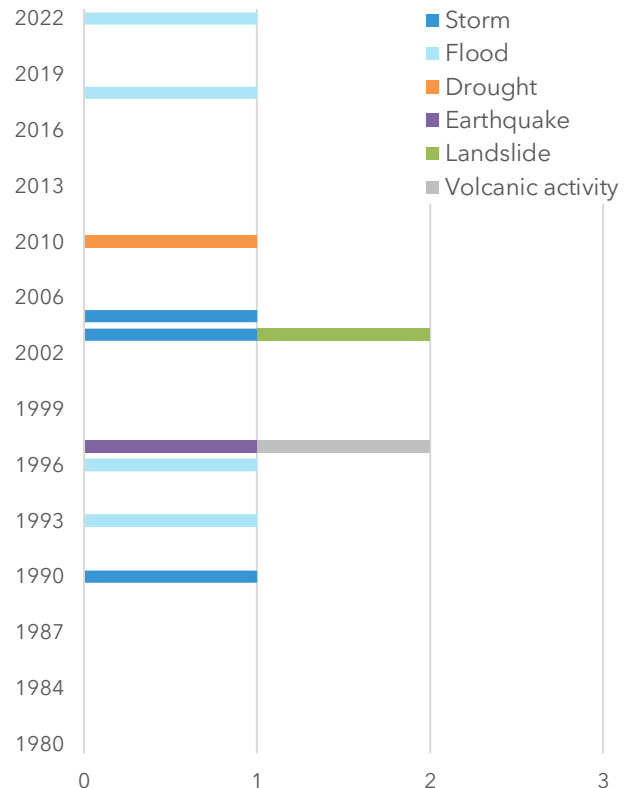
Inflation in Trinidad and Tobago (Jan 2020 - May 2023; %)

Point-to-point inflation rates. Source: Central Bank of Trinidad & Tobago, FAOSTAT and Trading Economics



Reported natural hazards in Trinidad and Tobago (1980-2022)

Source: EM-DAT





Livelihoods

The cost of living crisis continues to impact people's livelihoods in Trinidad and Tobago.

People continue to experience challenges to their livelihoods with 60 percent of respondents facing disruptions in the 30 days prior to the survey. Unaffordability of livelihood inputs remains the main driver, cited by 64 percent of those affected by disruptions. Respondents involved in agriculture continue to report high costs of inputs, especially for animal feed, fertilizer and tools.

Loss of income and jobs has been decreasing since the all-time high in June 2020, with 45 percent of respondents reporting that their household has experienced job loss or reduced salaries in 6 months prior to the survey. However, the proportion of those having to resort to secondary or alternative sources of income has been steadily increasing since June 2020, suggesting the continuation of economic hardship.



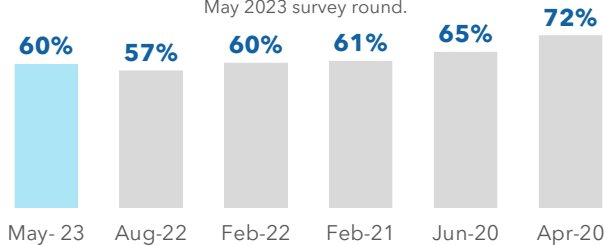
Markets

Half of respondents from Trinidad and Tobago reported challenges accessing markets in the week prior to the survey, which is very similar to August 2022. Lack of money to spend continues to be overwhelmingly reported as the main factor limiting market access, cited by 96 percent of those unable to access markets. Respondents have changed how they shop by increasingly buying cheaper and less preferred foods (74 percent) and purchasing smaller quantities than usual (59 percent of those that changed their shopping).

Respondents continue to report increased prices in commodities, especially food. Majority of respondents (98 percent) reported an increase in food prices over the 3 months prior to the survey. The most significant price increases in non-food items have been observed for transport (62 percent), gas (52 percent) and housing (51 percent).

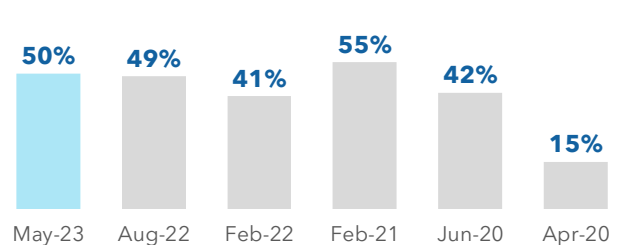
Respondents reporting that their ability to carry out livelihood activities was affected in the 30 days prior to the survey

Recall period was changed from 2 weeks to 30 days in the May 2023 survey round.



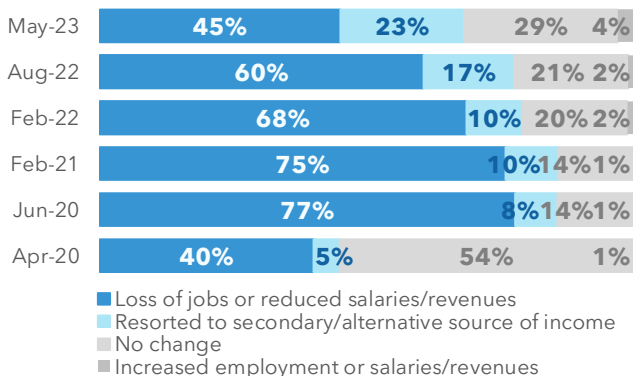
Respondents unable to access markets in the 30 days prior to the survey

Recall period was changed from 7 to 30 days in May 2023.

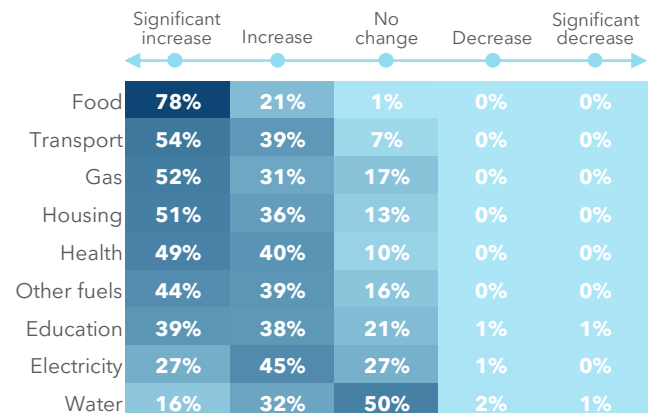


Has your household income changed in the 6 months prior to the survey?

Recall period changed from "since COVID-19" to "in the 6 months prior to the survey" in May 2023 survey round.



Respondents reporting a change in the costs of the commodities in the 3 months prior to the survey





Food consumption

Food consumption patterns continue to be alarming, with 73 percent of respondents skipping meals, eating less preferred foods, or going an entire day without eating in the week leading up to the survey. These results are a slight improvement compared to August 2022 (79 percent).

Respondents are meeting immediate food needs by employing negative coping strategies.

Respondents in Trinidad and Tobago may be compromising their wellbeing and future livelihoods by selling productive assets (30 percent), spending savings (77 percent) or reducing expenditures on health and education (65 percent).

One quarter of respondents have no food stocks at home, while 37 percent reported having less than a week's worth of food supplies. This is very similar to the results from August 2022.

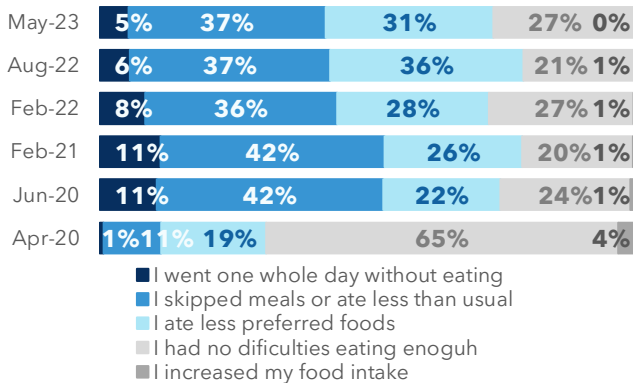


Food insecurity

Using the FIES methodology it is estimated that 61 percent of the respondents in Trinidad and Tobago are food insecure. Out of these, 25 percent are estimated to be severely and 35 percent moderately food insecure. The food security has been worsening since 2021 but remained similarly high since August 2022. The prevalence of severe food insecurity is similar in Trinidad and Tobago compared to the regional survey average.

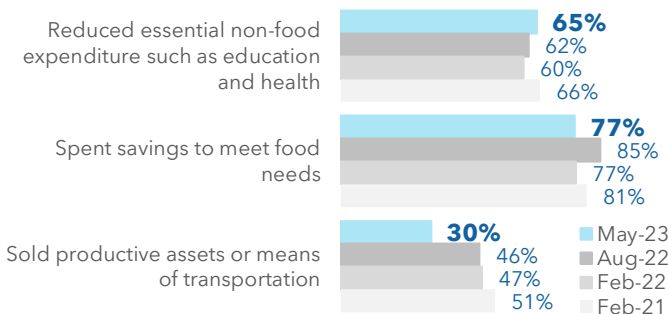
The negative experiences most often reported by respondents in Trinidad and Tobago were "eating only a few kinds of food" (71 percent) and being "unable to eat healthy and nutritious food" (62 percent). Alarming, 25 percent of respondents went a whole day without eating in the 30 days prior to the survey. All negative food related experiences were more widespread among poorer and younger respondents.

Which statement best reflects your food situation over the past 7 days?



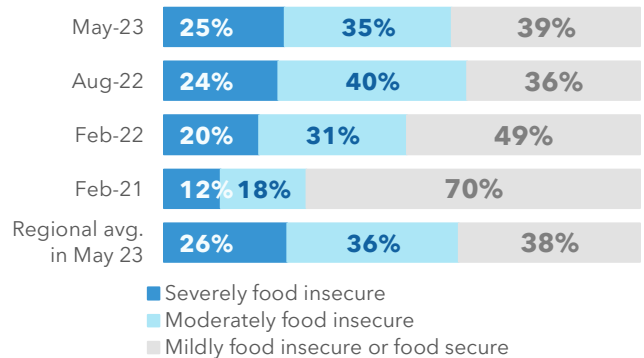
Households' coping strategies

Multiple choices could be selected. New answer option added in May 2023 - "already carried out and cannot continue to do so" in addition to "yes", both are interpreted as if the strategy has been carried out.



Prevalence rates of food insecurity in Trinidad and Tobago

Based on FIES methodology.



"Every week I go grocery I keep buying less due to the constant price increase on food items." - Male, 39

"The increase in food prices affected how I cook. I cook on a Sunday and portion out my food for the week to avoid wastage. I do a meal plan and buy foods that are on sale or close to expiry to include in my weekly menu." - Female, 46

"No money to buy food or pay bills, drowning in dept and it seems no way out. Haven't made groceries list for more than a year just go and buy enough for day then think about the other day when it comes." - Female, 53



Resilience capacity

A range of natural hazards have affected nearly a third of respondents in Trinidad and Tobago over the 12 months prior to the survey. The main reported hazards were floods (18 percent) and heatwaves (11 percent). Of respondents affected by natural hazards over the last year, 48 percent reported moderate and 17 percent reported severe impacts on their livelihoods or income.

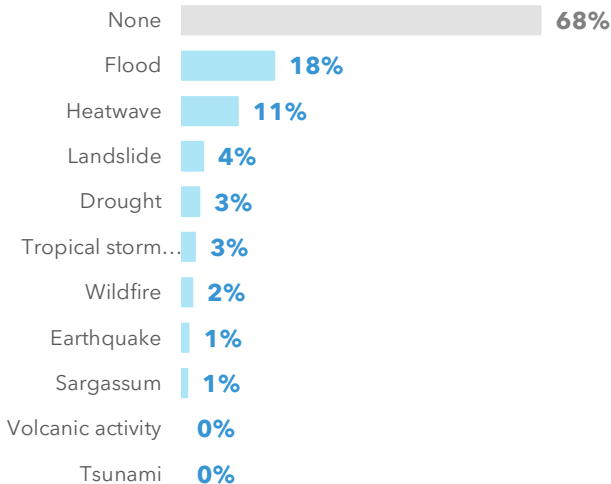
The Resilience Capacity Score (RCS) indicator was used to measure respondents' perception of their resilience to natural hazards. The method uses nine statements and respondents rate their level of agreement with each, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. These generate a score that acts as a marker of overall subjective resilience.

Based on the RCS, 40 percent of respondents have low capacity to cope with, recover from and adapt to natural hazards. Only 5 percent of respondents are highly resilient, while 55 percent of the respondents have medium resilience capacity. Lower income groups and younger respondents have the lowest overall resilience capacity.

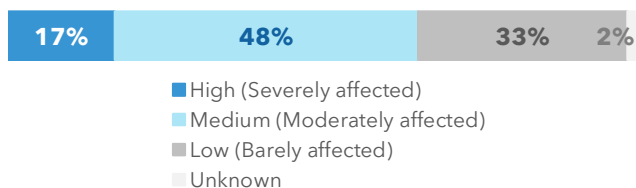
Out of the nine resilience characteristics, respondents scored the worst on the financial (i.e. access to financial support) and institutional capital (i.e. support from government or other institutions). On the other hand, respondents feel that they are better equipped with information capital by having access to early warning information to deal with natural disasters, and human capital, in that they learned lessons from past hardships.

Natural hazards that affected respondents in the 12 months prior to the survey

Multiple choices could be selected.

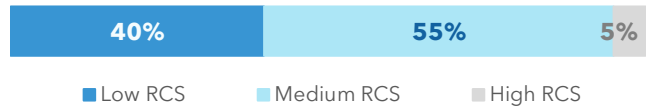


Level of impact on livelihoods or income for respondents that were affected by natural hazard(s)



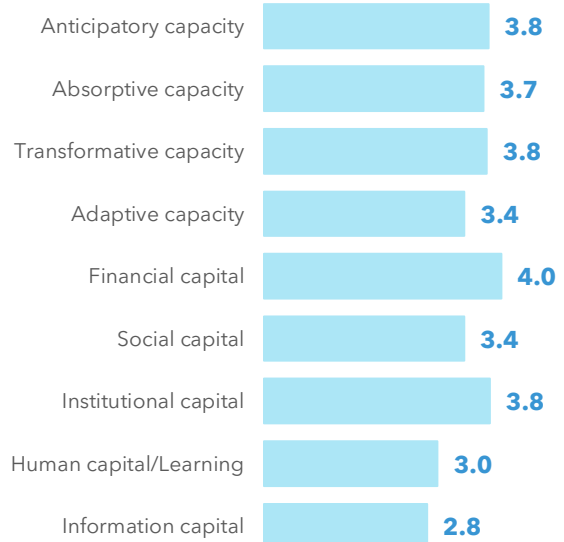
Overall resilience capacity

Resilience capacity score (RCS)



Average score for the nine resilience capacity characteristics

Scores range from 1 (high resilience capacity) to 5 (low resilience capacity). Higher score means lower resilience capacity.





Worries and sentiments

Inability to meet essential needs (46 percent) and food needs (36 percent) are the top concerns among respondents in Trinidad and Tobago, followed by unemployment (34 percent) and concerns over decreasing savings (29 percent) and violence or crime in the community (27 percent).

Eight percent of respondents have received assistance from the government in the year prior to the survey compared to 15 percent in August 2022.

Two thirds of respondents expressed negative or very negative sentiments. Respondents were given the space to provide more nuanced insights on how they are coping and adapting. Out of the 1,100 respondents in Trinidad and Tobago, 389 responded to the open-ended question. Responses were analysed with Chat GPT to categorize and determine the degree of positive and negative emotions.



Main differences

Differences in results among respondents were most pronounced when comparing income levels.

Households that reported below and well below average incomes show the poorest results on all key metrics of well-being and are at risk of further falling behind economically. Correspondingly, those with lower level of education and those relying on informal labour or assistance also performed worse.

The results suggest that younger respondents face greater challenges compared to older respondents, Respondents living in rural areas or in mixed households were also performing worse across all well-being metrics. Finally, women reported experiencing greater challenges across majority of metrics compared to men.

Figures showing the most severe differences are included below.

Main worries expressed by respondents

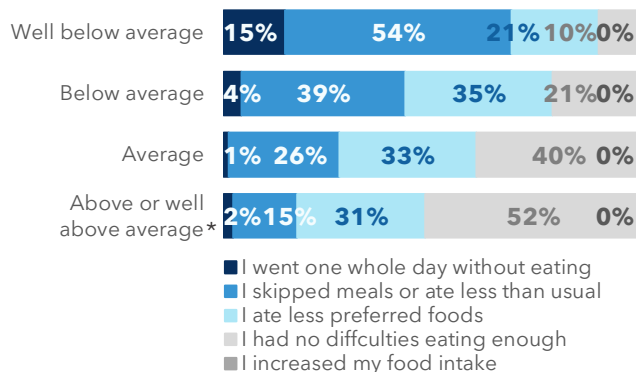
Multiple choices could be selected. Answer options were adjusted in May 2023, adding new options and removing Covid-19 related options that are now displayed as "Other worries".

	May-23	Aug-22	Feb-22	Feb-21	Jun-20
Inability to cover essential needs	46%	49%	43%	59%	57%
Inability to cover food needs	36%	54%	45%	61%	57%
Unemployment / Income loss	34%	41%	41%	41%	43%
Decreasing savings	29%	21%	12%	6%	10%
Violence/crime in the community	27%	18%	7%	5%	5%
Illness	26%	28%	47%	41%	47%
Inability to receive or repay loans	15%				
Child/dependent care	11%	16%	12%	6%	5%
Inadequate infrastructure	10%				
Natural hazards	8%				
Inadequate housing	5%				
Disruption of public services (edu., health)	2%	6%	10%	5%	7%
No access to services due to migration status	2%	2%	5%	12%	11%
Violence/abuse in the household	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Other worries	1%	14%	24%	18%	0%

Which statement best reflects your food situation over the past 7 days?

By perceived income level

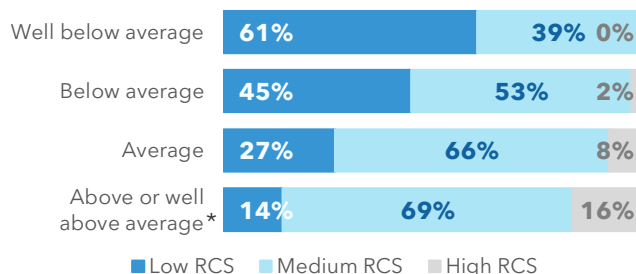
*Low response numbers in this category may affect results.



Overall resilience capacity

By perceived income level

*Low response numbers in this category may affect results.



COMMON THEMES ON HOW RESPONDENTS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO ARE COPING AND ADAPTING



"I faced the challenges of loss of income and struggle to buy school supplies, food and basic items. I had to spend less on food in order to pay bills. So my family eats less. We have little to no money to spend on entertainment and clothes so that is not a priority right now. Most of the money goes to food and education for my kids." - Male, 40

"Single mom...working on a part time basis, and everything is increasing. It's depressing and stressful, I have had to do many odd jobs for survival for my kids and myself." - Female, 37

"Increase in transportation fare, food, hygiene products and utilities while salary is still the same." - Female, 42

"My expenses for basic things, water, light, gas, food is more than my salary can support, I have to resort to "hustling". Making a few dollars here and there just to make ends meet." - Male, 37

"An upsurge in violent crime in my community (a constant spate of murders over the last few months) has led to constant anxiety and fear. I would like to leave the community but rent and housing is very expensive in my country and there simply aren't good affordable alternatives." - Female, 34

"The challenges I experienced over the past year was struggling to make ends meet, running out of food, money to pay rent and buy baby things. Sometimes toilet paper will finish and sanitary pads would finish and would have to make out without." - Female, 26

"The medication in the health center always running out. And those who can't afford have to borrow money to purchase it outside or wait for such a long time to get it." - Female, 36

"Increased food prices and shortages post pandemic. Bought cheaper alternatives and began to plant short crop vegetables for personal use." - Female, 65

"Flooding, low income and food shortage. No adaptation as flooding persists, no pay increase which factor to food shortage." - Female, 32

"I've experienced drastic change in my life. Bills keep piling up, no money to pay, no food to eat, when rain falls our house leaks a lot. My partner and I have to keep our kids home from school because of financial issues. We don't even have the necessities like deodorant, toothpaste and other hygiene products. We basically live for today while still trying to maintain our sanity." - Male, 26





INTERACTIVE DASHBOARD

The dashboard contains additional country-level data and analysis beyond the present report on the Food Security and Livelihoods Survey. It may take a second to load. Scan the QR code to access it or follow this link:

<https://analytics.wfp.org/t/Public/views/CaribbeanFoodSecurityLivelihoodsSurvey/Overview>

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REPORTS

The website contains links to all current and past regional and country reports on the Food Security and Livelihoods Survey. Scan the QR code to access it or follow this link:

<https://www.wfp.org/publications/caribbean-covid-19-food-security-and-livelihoods-impact-survey>