
CAFFIERE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY



Seated at the foothills of the Choiseul district approximately seven kilometres west of the village is the Caffiere community. It is a wind-swept community continuously brushed by the easterly trade winds, resulting in cool temperatures and a unique ambience much enjoyed by the residents and visitors alike. The main access road intersects with the Choiseul/Laborie highway near the La Fargue community which is in close proximity to the Roblot junction. The neighbouring communities include Morne Jacques and Dugard.



Residents are unsure of the origin of the name Caffiere but key informants agree that the name is derived from the word 'café', French for 'coffee', since the area was once a large producer of coffee.



DEMOGRAPHY AND LIVING CONDITIONS

As of 2010, the population of Caffiere was enumerated at 324 persons, with 171 male and 153 female. There are 113 households with an average size of 2.87. The dominant family clusters include the Felix, Theophane, Theophilus, Pologne, Erysthee, Cooper and Modeste families. Caffiere and the other communities of the Choiseul District are proud of their Amerindian ancestry. A small





but significant number from the local population have the easily recognizable facial features that clearly reveal their Amerindian ancestry.



Choiseul recorded significant contractions in population size between the 1990 and 2001 censuses. The substantial increases in populations of both Castries and Gros Islet during the referenced period, partially accounts for the loss of population and urban drift from the Choiseul District. It has been determined that large numbers of young people migrate to the north, ostensibly to seek improved economic opportunity.



Caffiere is in many ways different from the typical community of the island's landscape. The landscape is undulating; mostly flat with small hillocks concentrated on the western flank of the community overlooking the village of Choiseul.



Caffiere is best described as a scattered community with low housing density. Land tenure patterns appear to portray better distribution than in other local communities. Homes are not typically huddled together and the distances between homes are quite substantial.

Families typically own reasonably large tracks of land, which permits land succession without too much difficulty. Caffiere is



one community in which squatting on private or public land is not an issue of concern.



As in other communities throughout the country, with increased incomes, the characteristics of the housing stock has changed. Large numbers of homes are modernized and upgraded with wall additions mainly to bathrooms and kitchens. Most homes in Cafiere are constructed of concrete outer-wall. Smaller numbers comprise all timber and wood-concrete combinations.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES



Cafiére boasts a single playing field which is generally poorly maintained. As a result, there are no organised physical activities mainly due to the poor condition of the playing field. Young residents viewed the present playing field as “just a place for people to go and tie cows.” There are no other publicly owned facilities but there are three discothèques in the community where public events such as group and community meetings are held.



The community has access to all modern public utilities. There are land telephone lines as well as cellular phone service. Internet service is available but is currently beyond the means of the majority of families. Digital cable television is widely available from at least two service providers. By virtue of its location,





Caffiere residents are also able to view public television channels from the neighbouring island of St. Vincent.



The main primary health-care facility is the La Fargue Health Centre located about two kilometres away. St Jude Hospital is located at Vieux Fort and provides secondary and tertiary level care for residents. The health aides and a nurse visit the community periodically. When the need arises, a doctor is called to the community and he normally responds to medical calls expeditiously. When they do not visit, the aides and nurse call Caffiere residents regularly to keep them up to date with their appointment dates for themselves and their infants. In cases of emergency, only one ambulance is available to handle the rather entire extensive Choiseul district. This implies an inability of the emergency response system to handle two or more medical emergencies simultaneously.



Library and postal services are accessed outside the community. For example, mail is collected at the Choiseul Post Office. There are no church buildings at Caffiere but small Pentecostal group of approximately five individuals, led by a local lady pastor assembles at her residence for times of worship. Other residents must travel to the village or sub-communities in the district.





The community lacks many basic social facilities and amenities. There is no school in the area; however, the Dugard Combined School is situated two miles away. Some students may attend the Reunion Primary School as well, which is the same distance away from the community. Secondary education is accessed at the Choiseul, Piaye or Vieux Fort Comprehensive Secondary Schools. The Sir Arthur Lewis Community College provides post secondary education through its campuses at Castries or Vieux Fort. Most families do not own personal computers, but the situation is gradually changing as more young people obtain employment in the tourism and other services sectors and the construction sectors.

There are two springs and three rivers in the community. These are used mainly for washing and in times of drought for drinking and other domestic purposes. The supply from the Water and Sewerage Company (WASCO) is very consistent in both quality and quantity.

There is a solid waste collection system in place undertaken every Wednesday and Thursday by the St Lucia Solid waste management Authority. This programme helps to ensure that the refuse generated by the community is properly disposed of and



augurs well for the proper sanitation of the community. Mosquitoes are a potential threat to the health of the community despite the relatively low rainfall.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND LIVELIHOOD

The main sources of income are derived from handicraft and agriculture. Like many communities from the Choiseul district, handicraft is a primary source of income. The craft specialization is basketry and other related products using cus cus grass (*Chrysopogon zizanioides*), locally known a vertivere. Extensive use is also made of the thread derived from broad leaves of the palama shrub in the manufacture of cuc cus products. The men of the community engage mainly in farming and home construction while the women work in mainly handicraft and agriculture to small extent.



Choiseul is known as the craft mecca of the island and given its rich cultural heritage influenced mainly from Amerindian ancestry, a wide variety of crafts are produced. A multiplicity of primary raw materials including, Cus Cus grass, Palama, Clay, Sisal, and local wood are used to produce baskets, table mats, hats, local chairs, wicker and pottery. Pottery products are very





common household items on the island as evidenced in our coal pots, clay souvenirs, jars and other similar items.

Caffiere specializes in the manufacture of craft products from cus cus grass. Another fiber used in the process is the screw pine; used to produce a thread that binds the plaited cus cus fibre together. Neither of the two plants is cultivated but they grow wild in and around the community. Cus cus is abundant during the rainy season. However, it can be very scarce during the dry season. In such circumstances, crafters explore the countryside as far south as Vieux Fort in search of the resource. In so doing they expend both time and energy, transport costs and down time, in search of grasses.

There are numerous possibilities to develop handcraft as an indigenous industry as it continues to thrive as a niche market. Some of the crafters are contacted by hotels to make items for the hotels' own use such as, doormats, lampshades and small baskets and table mats for setting tables. While the older crafters produce mainly door mats, floor mats and some basketry, there is considerable innovation on the part of the younger producers, who differentiate by producing hats, coasters, pineapple shaped artefacts, St. Lucia maps, exotic baskets and similar products. In recent times, dyes have been used to augment the natural colour of



the straw used, and to combine the straw colours with various shades of the primary colours. The cost of the dyes is proving quite prohibitive and the need to source cost effective substitutes have been expressed.



Many attempts have been made by Government and other agencies to make handcraft a lucrative industry for the residents of the Choiseul district in order to sustain the livelihoods of households. However, there is an urgent need to introduce mechanization into the manufacturing processes. This will over time result in a far greater return on investment and improved livelihoods for the crafters and hopefully attract the attention of the younger folk from Caffiere.



Another component which requires serious attention in the craft sector is marketing. The Choiseul Craft Centre is only located a mile away from the community, and there appears to be a lack of confidence in the ability of the Craft Centre to effectively market the products of the crafters. In the absence of effective marketing, the crafters create their own niche markets and sell their products to hotels and other institutions and buyers.



The demand for the craft products is satisfactory; nevertheless, there is some competition among producers due in part to the





absence of a comprehensive marketing arrangement, and the failure to recognize greater benefits that can accrue should the producers work together, and allow their respective enterprises to be driven by an integrated marketing strategy. Hence, a functional Craft Association or Cooperative is essential for marketing arrangements, sourcing of new markets, credit, raw materials, product development, and mechanization and sharing of business intelligence and technology.

The main crops produced in the community are sweet potatoes, tomatoes, pigeon peas, dasheen and yams. Even though the dry season can be particularly harsh because of the low to moderate annual rainfall in the district, a surprising large variety of cash crops are successfully are still grown in addition to the main crops. These include lettuce, celery, salad beans, arrowroot, carrot, cabbage, broccoli, pumpkin, ginger, turmeric, melons, corn, cantaloupe, sweet pepper, and onion. Added to that, some farmers are hoping to expand their crop base by producing fresh herbs like basil, mint, and tarragon and also improve their production of peas and beans. Cassava planting is becoming very popular and the crop fetches a good price because of the demand for farine. There are possibilities for local farine production with the main locally made equipment called the '*plateen*' still available in the community.



Agriculture is slowly becoming diversified in the community as some farmers are engaged in livestock production such as sheep and rabbits, while a small number have indicated their solid intention to enter the lucrative pork market. A few are engaged in the production of freshwater fish. Modern agricultural techniques are employed by the farmers to improve the yield and quality of crops. Among the more often used production techniques are crop rotation, composting and use of both organic and artificial fertilizers.

The farmers sell their produce primarily at the Choiseul and Vieux-Fort markets. Some their produce is also sold to the Belle Vue Cooperative and they are now thinking of the supermarket chain Consolidated Foods Ltd as an alternative market for their produce. Farmers allude to the prohibitive cost of transportation of their crops as one of their main challenges, and requested greater support from the Ministry of Agriculture for easier access to fertilizer and other agricultural inputs.

Residents lament the absence of an Agricultural Extension Officer to serve the area. Farmers are left to fend for themselves without the much needed technical guidance. Farmers from the community are members of the Belle- Vue Farmers Cooperative. This Cooperative is established to meet the needs of farmers within the



Choiseul and surrounding districts. It provides low interest credit, agricultural inputs and marketing support to its extensive network of farmers. Government extension services have little impact on Caffiere.



Cock-fighting is a significant enterprise in the Caffiere community. Officially, the practice is illegal; notwithstanding, it is a popular pastime in communities throughout the island and is staged almost weekly at Caffiere. The practice is viewed as being a form of extreme cruelty by animal rights activists, but many are lured to the practice by its sheer popularity and the possibility of winning significant sums of money.



The retail sector comprises four grocery shops some of which sell rum. There are two rum shops and three discotheques. The discotheques serve as makeshift meeting places for the community.



Despite the contribution of hand crafting to livelihoods, conditions of chronic unemployment exist at Caffiere. The youth of the community are those more adversely affected. Since all craft is produced by hand, the manufacture of basketry and other expressions of hand crafting are a painstaking and laborious process and may have low rates of financial returns. Residents noted that most of the young people attain and complete at least a





secondary school education. Drop-out rates are also low and literacy rates among youth are very high. As a result, community leaders held the view that the youth are progressive and that most are engaged in academic activities or work outside the community in the Tourism sector. After finishing secondary school, the majority of young ladies go on to further their education at the tertiary level and/or go out to seek employment. As there are few employment opportunities within the community, employment is usually obtained within Vieux Fort town, or in the nearby Coconut Bay, Jalousie, and Ladera hotels.

SOCIAL ISSUES AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Caffiere residents are proud of their virtually crime free community. There are incidences of marijuana use among the young men but this is not generally perceived as criminal behavior. However, alcohol consumption is a major concern to community leaders. There are two rum shops and four alcohol vending grocery stores within the community. Alcohol is also consumed at cock fights and street parties. There is a strong sense of community felt in Caffiere because everyone in the community know each other and generally worked well together. There is a peaceful aura that continuously permeates the community.



Residents are proud of their folkways which include a herbalist and a folk masseuse called a 'punseer' in the community. Herbalists are a regular feature of the local folk health-care system. They use various combinations of herbs to bring healing from a variety of ailments and diseases; some of exclusively local definition such as "bless" and "apewedan". Residents stated that 'before we go to the hospital we use the bush medicine'. The premier herbalist is Mr Guy Monroe who has been practicing this craft for over twenty five years. He treats both young people and older persons and has a thorough knowledge of the medicinal potency of herbs and shrubs with healing properties. He offers herbal treatments for menstrual conditions, sexual disorders, diabetes and hypertension, constipation, infertility, colds & flu, and asthma. Treatment is free although a freewill donation is accepted. His clientele is drawn nationally, regionally and internationally.

The folk masseuse in the community, Marjorie Charles is referred to as a "punseer". Using a variety of massage oils and other potions, individuals with sprains, muscle spasms and similar ailments are treated by the 'punseer'. The punseer at Caffiere plies her craft



from a small wooden house with a bed in her living room designated for that purpose. She has been providing the service for twenty three years, and her gifting was passed to her from her grandmother and mother. She undertakes massages for sprains, muscle spasms.



She also provides potions for “sweet couche”, a condition of mothers after giving birth, and ‘dewangement’, or dislocation of bones. She also provides medicine for shunk or oral fungus in children, and ring worm. She is believed to have the ability to remove bones stuck in the throat and can cure head-sores. Her clientele is drawn from the Caffiere community, Castries and other neighbouring communities.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

The existence of community organizations is presently very limited. However, in the past a number of groups existed. Among them was an active cultural group for the last decade called “Natewel”. The group comprised a large carnival band with approximately one hundred members. This band participated in the national and community Carnival festivities and has even won the title band of the community. A Kiddies cultural group has been in existence for a number of years. Some members were children upon formation but are now young adults. Members are drawn from Caffiere as well as





other communities. There was also once a vibrant Mothers and Fathers group which has become defunct.

Country and Western is popular in Saint Lucia and the Caffiere community is no exception. While this music is not indigenous, a large number of people attend the Country and Western dances across the island including Caffiere's adult men and women. The impact of the music in the community is embodied in the Caffiere Cowboys. This is a very popular group of male Country & Western enthusiasts who have been in existence for several years and has a large membership. The group is well equipped with a sound system and often holds dances in a local dance hall.

A Community Development Committee has been newly elected established to mobilize residents in working together to meet the priorities of the community. Sporting activities are organized on an ad-hoc basis but there are, unfortunately, no fully functioning youth groups. There is a partially functional youth group titled, the Future Starz Youth & Sports Cl.

The Caffiere Crafters Association is still being conceptualized and is intended to operate as the marketing arm of the craft producers.

This Association will assist in the procurement of inputs and other services for the producers. The success of the Association is the



means for the survival and expansion of craft in the community, but there is dire need for retooling and revamping the Association.

COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS

The St. Lucia Rural Enterprise Project (SLREP) provided some support to the crafters by introducing new product concepts and expanding marketing arrangements.



The main objective of the SLREP was to offer smallholders and resource-poor rural households, particularly female-headed households, the option to broaden their income base and reduce risk through a wide range of productive activities. The project design aimed to address the following constraints: limited production factors for non-banana farming, including planting material, water and improved cropping systems; the degradation of natural resources due to farming in steep slopes; weak marketing systems; the lack of access to credit; and weak community organizations in the provision and use of services.



The four main components that were included in the project design were: (a) production (including crop, livestock and microenterprise development); (b) marketing; (c) credit; (d) Community development.





Craft producers from Caffiere identified a number of gaps in the implementation of the programme, and unfulfilled promises coupled with a number of initiatives started but not brought to fruition. Therefore, the programme is not perceived as having had a positive impact on the community and the perceived failure of the project has triggered a measure of uneasiness on the part of craft producers.

Both the STEP (Short Term Employment Programme) and HOPE (Holistic Opportunities for Personal Empowerment) programmes have been implemented in the Choiseul District. The impacts of these programmes on unemployment in Caffiere have been negligible. Residents estimate that just a few persons, possibly less than ten persons, have benefitted. Community leaders expressed the hope that far greater benefits from the HOPE programme will accrue to the community in the future.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

1. Construction of Human Resource Development Centre
2. Construction of multi-purpose Courts
3. Improved marketing arrangements for crafters
4. Construction of bus shelter at Sauzay Gap.
5. Improved access to infrastructure
6. Construction of a library
7. Skills Training

Other Recommendations

- Mechanization and greater efficiency in the production of *craft*
- Explore fish farming option
- Experimentation with coir, the fibre extracted from dried coconuts. Coir is an abundant resource in St. Lucia which is sparingly used. It has great potential because of its versatility, strength, durability and aesthetic qualities as a craft product. It is extensively used in Asia and is the base material for exquisitely beautiful products with some potential for the construction of low cost housing.



IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAN

The Caffiere Development Committee will be responsible for putting this plan into operation.

