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## BALCA DEVELOPMENT PLAN

### HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY



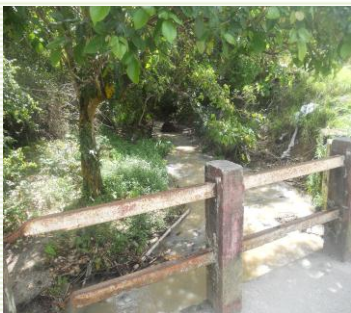
Located deep in the interior on the north west of the Laborie district, is the remote community of Balca. It is approximately two miles from the Vieux Fort-Soufriere Highway and can be accessed from the communities of Park Estate and Piaye. Traversing through any of these roads to Balca can be extremely difficult for vehicular traffic as the roads leading directly to the community are in a very deplorable condition.



The main road throughout the community is also in an appalling state for a number of years, and residents have attributed poor drainage as a contributing factor. Residents have noted that the poor condition of the road has resulted in many mini bus operators to discontinue service into their community. While the public buses ply the Piaye and Saltibus route, they do not enter the main Balca settlement.



The Balembouche River runs along the east of the community of Balca and serves as a source of natural irrigation for subsistence farming. The source of the river is believed to be at Saltibus.





The name Balca is thought to be derived from the Hindi language. While no official meaning is given of the word, it is believed to have evolved from the word “Calcutta”, a major Indian city. Thus, the Balca community evolved primarily as an Indian enclave, where East Indians came to St. Lucia as indentured workers on the sugar estates and settled in the community. With its close proximity to the Balembouche estate, the East Indians made up a large proportion of the employees on that estate.

As with many other areas, racial conflict between residents of African and Indian descent in the community was common. However, this has reduced over the years because of the increased number of interracial relationships and marriages which serves as a sign of more cordial relations between the races. The intermingling of Indians and African is not the only legacy of slavery and indentureship which Balca inherited, a less savoury reminder of these times is the system of land ownership in the community. During slavery, the plantocracy owned and controlled the more fertile and flat land, leaving the marginal lands to the African slaves and indentured Indians. This pattern of land ownership is still very much evident in Balca.

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## DEMOGRAHY AND LIVING CONDITIONS



The 2010 Census records the total population of Balca as 221 including 106 female and 115 male living in 75 households. The average household size is 2.95 persons. Its rich ancestral connection to India has resulted in the majority of residents of Balca being of East Indian descent.



Almost all the houses in Balca are well maintained and are made from wall. This housing stock is due in large measure to the virtually free availability of sand from the river which runs from the community.



Most of the land in Balca is family owned. For persons desiring to move out of the family houses, land is readily available for building. However, difficulties may arise if persons are desirous of using the land for collateral because the land is collectively owned. Land tenure in the community also poses major development concerns insofar as development of the infrastructure is concerned. For example, the construction of a Human Resource Development Center is high on the community's priority list. However, no crown land is available within the immediate vicinity of the





community and purchase of land for this purpose is beyond the scope of the current project.



All residents now have access to piped water. Although most houses have piped borne water, many residents utilize the river for washing and other household chores especially in times of drought. A few houses have toilets and majority still use ventilated pit latrines. The Solid Waste Management Authority collects garbage bi-weekly. Residents boast that garbage is neither burnt nor buried and that the discretion of residents has lead to the community being relatively free from rodents or mosquitoes.



The residents of Balca have access to some basic telecommunications facilities excluding land line telephones and internet service. Cell phones are widely available from the two local service providers for general and for emergency purposes. Cable Television is also available.



Diabetes and hypertension seems to be a growing concern for residents as many revealed that a number of older residents are suffering from these life threatening conditions. Another



health issues which is a major concern, is the number of mental health patients who live in the community.

### **POVERTY, ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND LIVELIHOODS**

Balca community participated in both the 1995 and 2005/6 Country Poverty Assessments. Although Balca has been identified by the Country Poverty Assessments as one of the poorest St Lucian communities, it must be noted based on accounts from residents that love of this community is such that there has been very little out migration.

Most residents held the view that the community was a better place ten years ago; the conditions of better economic wellbeing at that time occasioned by a declining but still viable banana industry. Having been employed on the estates, some were even allowed to cultivate small private plots. The loss of income, then and now, has been a major setback for the community and many believe that it has contributed to poverty.

Today, agriculture is no longer a significant income earner for residents. Thus the local economy is extremely weak. The



community is characterised by its scarcity of jobs, but men engage primarily in agriculture and construction in the towns of Vieux-Fort and Soufriere. Some of the men from the community are also engage in fishing, which necessitates travelling to coastal areas such as Black Bay and Vieux Fort to earn a living.



Women are employed in tourism and the services industry outside the community as well. There are few viable self employment opportunities for people who are engaged in sand mining, brick making and furniture construction. There are five shops in the community, in which three of them are solely rum shops.



The rural character of Balca creates conditions which are ideal for production of a large variety of crops. However, almost all farming activity is practiced on a subsistence basis. Families within the community are fed and supported by the limited subsistence farming. The main crops grown in the community are sweet potato, tomatoes and cassava. Crops such as dasheen, plantain, yams are also grown on a small scale.





In recent times, Balca has been affected by the downturn in the coconut manufacturing industry. Some of the community's farmers once depended heavily on copra production to earn a living. With the decline in the coconut industry, many have lost their livelihoods and the land which used to produce the copra crop is now mainly underutilized. While a fraction of farmers still continue to produce copra, road conditions and lack of reliable transportation continue to severely affect the production and transportation this cash crop.

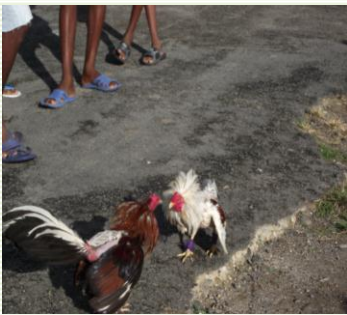


Some residents in the community engage in small scale sand mining which is extracted from the Balembouche River which flows through the Balca community. The availability of “free” sand is identified as a major contributory factor to the quality of housing plant in the community. Despite conditions of chronic poverty, most dwelling units are constructed from concrete. Sand mining from the Balembouche River has been practiced for several generations. However, high rates of extraction are not sustainable and in the future, the community will have to look to alternative sources for this vital building material.





A small proportion of residents, mainly older persons are supported by remittances from relatives especially children who live abroad. Charcoal production is practiced on a small scale as well as the rearing of pigs.



There are no obvious tourist attractions in the community. Future community-based economic development may therefore have to be based on light manufacturing, agriculture and agro -processing. In the absence of a viable economy, cock-fighting, although not mentioned by residents as an economic activity, is certainly an important economic factor in the lives of the people of Balca. Large numbers of people place bets on the outcome of the fight. Fighting cocks can be sold for up to EC \$1000. Occasionally, cock fighting enthusiasts participate in tournaments in Martinique and St. Croix.



Underemployment and unemployment are important issues that affect the Balca community. The high prevalent rates of poverty are manifested by the attendant high unemployment rates. The dearth of professional skills among the population results primarily in engagement in low wage employment opportunities. High drop-out rates from both the secondary





and primary schools help to compound the unemployment issue.

### **COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

The Balca playing field is the sole public facility within the community. The nearest primary schools are in Piaye which is less than two miles away and Riviere Doree which is less than three miles away. Secondary school education can be accessed in Piaye and La Fargue almost 3 miles away and further in the town of Vieux-Fort. A benevolent resident allows the community to hold meetings at her dance hall establishment since there is no facility for a public gathering.



Residents with health concerns can access care at the Saltibus Health Centre. The preferred health-care option in most cases, however, is a visit to the local masseuse or “punsair” who would diagnose and treat a wide range of ailments with bush medicine, massages and other potions. There are also Community Health Nurses and Health Aides who come monthly to visit specific elderly person afflicted with diabetes, hypertension or other chronic health conditions.





The closest a day care center is available in Saltibus, but residents prefer the option of family members caring for their children until those children are old enough to attend primary school. There are no church buildings within the community. Residents attend religious services outside of the community. A significant number of residents belong to the Anglican faith and other Christian denominations.



### **COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITY LIFE**

Balca has a very active community development organization called Balca Youth and Community Organization (BYCO). Functioning under this organization is the Sports Committee. This committee essentially comprises of representative from the Balca youth group and other unattached members of the community. They are dedicated to identifying and seeking interventions that would help meet the needs of the wider community. The community is very actively involved in sporting activities especially cricket and has produced a number of national players.



Also functioning is a vibrant Country and Western dance group which was birthed out of the presently dormant Mothers





and Fathers Group. The Balca Development Committee is newly created organization and is instrumental in translating the concerns and priorities of residents into development actions.

### **COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS**



In 1995, a sanitation programme was launched by the Ministry of Health in the community. It was a pilot programme that used new VIP (Ventilation Improved Pit latrine) technology and promoted a 2-chamber pit toilet system to replace the old traditional systems. This initiative resulted in improved disposal of human waste and a lessening of the incidence of intestinal parasites since each household had a pit latrine. Today, with the advent of potable water many residents have now upgraded to flush toilets with a few pit latrines in use.



Few Government extension agents work within Balca. The Community Development Officer is the notable exception and his attempts at advocacy on behalf of the people in the communities of his district are well recognized.





The ruins of an old bus shelter along the Piaye/Saltibus road and at the Balca junction are currently being refurbished by the St Lucia Social Development Fund (SSDF) SFA 2006 programme. It will provide much needed shelter from the elements to students and other commuters from the community.



### **COMMUNITY PRIORITY LIST**

After a number of community meetings, a list of intervention areas was identified and is listed below in order of priority:

1. Construction of a Human Resource Development Centre
2. Improvement of Road to the Community
3. Improvement of playing field surface and construction of support infrastructure
4. Access to fixed telephone lines/internet
5. Bus shelter at entrance of community
6. Skills training programme





7. Construction of Multi-purpose Court
8. Construction of Playground for children
9. Construction of Roman Catholic Church Building

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAN**

The Balca Development Committee is responsible for the implementing the Community Development Plan.

