
BELMONT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

History and Geography



Belmont is a small, inland settlement of Derniere Riviere in the Mabouya Valley. The community was formally known as Dennery Factory and later Dennery Farmco. It was historically estate land, owned by the Bernard family. Although prior knowledge of her origin remains unknown to residents, Belmont evolved from the arrival of migratory East Indians, who came to work on the estate as indentured labourers. The community was often referred to as an East Indian enclave in the Mabouya Valley, which is situated in the Dennery district. However, migration and inter-marriage have resulted in the generations of a mixed race or ‘dougl’, a common phrase in local parlance. These factors have caused a drastic decline of the original East Indian influence in the community.

The community is perched on a hillside with the Derniere Riviere River to the North and the Grand Ravine River to the south. It also embraces pockets of land known as En la Barre, Deville and Morne Panache. Many of Belmont’s older residents recall that the land was first rented by labourers who worked on the estate. One resident recalled and stated that “*after agreements between the land owner and labourers broke down, people began to squat on the land*”. Today, much of the



land in Belmont is owned by the Government; while a few residents own private plots. As a result, the community has earned the appendage of being squatters land. The land is categorized as either agricultural lands towards the west of the community or residential areas towards the northern, southern and eastern parts.



Since the community is bordered by rivers, residents must go through a bridge to enter the community. The road network allows residents and visitors to access the community through La Ressource, Derniere Riviere and Grand Ravine. Public transportation is occasionally available but since the community is not on the main route, most residents must go to Dernier Riviere in order to get a bus.



Demography and Housing

At the 2010 Population and Housing Census, the population of Belmont was estimated at 571 persons, with 194 households and an average household size of 2.95. The extended family was the most common type existing in the community followed by the nuclear and single parent family.



Many houses within the community are constructed from concrete, others are made from wood and concrete and a few are of wooden structure, namely plywood.

Health and Sanitation



Despite the fact that most homes have pipes for water, one of the chief problems which plague Belmont is the quality and quantity of water they receive. Firstly, residents complained of the regularity of the water supply. *“In a month, we can say we get water at least twice. Water is a very big problem here!”* lamented a community member. Some residents reported that the low supply of water was directly related to the low levels at the source, in the *En Pierre* River, where there is no pump to help supply the water. As a result, residents rely heavily on rain water as an alternative.

Secondly, when they do receive water the quality is so poor, that it would be risky to consume such. According to a community leader *“The water looks like mud, there is no way you can drink, or even cook with that!”* . Consequently, over 90% of residents refused to pay WASCO water bills; yet, there have been no disconnections. *“Dem people cannot expect us to pay for dat type of water they giving people. WASCO self know dat, dat is why they will not even bother to cut the water”* admitted a resident.

Residents also hire trucks to transport water from standpipes in the *Derniere Riviere* community and river at ten dollars (\$10) per drum and two dollars (\$2) per bucket. Some have tried to obtain water from the *En Pierre* River, but it has been proven insanitary as it is down slope from private property and has been contaminated. They also depend on the water truck for a regular supply which in unsatisfactory to residents. Lamentably, the rain water collected by residents is not stored properly, and as a



result, engenders mosquito breeding in drums, creating an even greater health risk within Belmont.

The chronic water shortages are affecting residents with flush toilets. They contend that they must have a pit toilet, in addition to a flush toilet due to the irregularity of the water supply. Residents are weary that a regular water supply may not return soon to the community, because they were already experiencing water shortages, and the damage done to the water intake at Derniere Riviere during hurricane Tomas has worsened the situation.



An Environmental Health Assessment conducted in the Community of Belmont during the period Nov-December 4, 2010, revealed that excreta disposal was a major health problem. The assessment found that the majority of pit toilets were unsatisfactory, as they were not insect and rodent proof. Some had collapsed sub-structures, holes around slabs, broken slabs and risers, and risers without covers. In some instances, some residents had no toilet.



This assessment not only captured other potential health issues which can impact negatively on the health of community members in Belmont. For example, the absence of pipe-borne water since the passage of Hurricane Tomas has driven residents to use untreated river water. The research demonstrated that out of a population of 198 persons who are sick in Belmont, hypertension registered as the leading cause, with diabetes as the other major illness.



The Solid Waste Authority provides a bi weekly service for garbage disposal. Public garbage collection is not widely used by the households which are not located on the main road. Thus,



the burning of garbage is widely practiced by these households. The prevalence of rodents in the community poses a serious challenge to agriculture and may be linked to the poor garbage disposal practices by its residents.

Community Facilities



Belmont does not possess public facilities with the exception of a small community centre which is preparing to undergo a major facelift. A Government Daycare service is accessed at La Ressource while primary school education is accessed at the Dernier Rivere Combined or La Ressource Primary Schools. These schools are in relative walking distance from the community. Secondary school students attend the Grande Riviere and Clendon Mason Memorial Secondary Schools. Some students also attend high school in Vieux-Fort, Micoud and Castries.



Residents visit the La Ressource Health Centre for health services, supported by visits to the community by health aides. An essential service such as the postal service is found at the Mabouya Valley Post Office, located in Richfond. A small playing field which needs upgrading is used by the youth for sports and recreation. A number of small grocery shops, licensed and unlicensed bars service the area.



Residents' enjoy the comfort of electricity, cable television, internet, and telephone services, although mobile phone usage has contributed to the decline of fixed line telephones. Community members belong to one of the following denominations: Catholic, Pentecostal, Evangelical, or Seventh Day Adventist. An Adventist church is the only one found in the



community. Residents go the neighbouring communities of Derniere Riviere and la Ressource to attend church or church activities.

Community Organization



The Belmont Development Committee was birthed into existence through the SFA-2006 project which emphasizes community leadership. Apart from this committee, the Young Generation Sports Club and two other auxiliary organizations, namely the Eco Agro Tourism Project SFA 2007 (an EU funded project) and CARDI (Caribbean Agricultural Research & Development Institute) are providing organizational leadership for residents.



The Development Committee comprises of the president and seven other members who work in collaboration with members to make joint decisions which benefit them as a whole. The sports club seeks to develop cricket and football in the community as a means of keeping the young people engaged in healthy activities, while being an important source of entertainment and cohesion. The Tourism Project aims to recognize potential areas for development as a means of generating income and employment for members, while CARDI provides support for farmers. The SDA church not only provides spiritual leadership for members, it also creates a source of psychological support through counseling sessions offered and assistance to the poor.



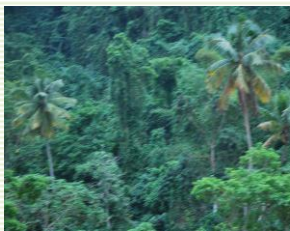


ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND LIVELIHOODS

Stemming from a plantation or estate community, most residents to this day rely on agriculture as their primary source of income. They engage in banana farming and the cultivation of food crops and vegetables such as coconuts, breadfruit and okra. In the past however, the primary crops, which were harvested included sugar cane, *callaloo*, bananas and coconuts which were transported to Soufriere to be sold to the factory owners. Lime juice made from limes harvested on the estate, was extracted and exported to foreign territories.



Bananas are the main crop of the community. Therefore, land and employment is concentrated around its cultivation. Landholding is concentrated in the hands of private individuals or is owned by families where plot sizes average about one acre. Both men and women participate in the cultivation of bananas and as such are employed on the farms within the community. Most of the women who work on the farms are employed as farm hands. Credit access is also linked to the banana industry in the community as residents utilize the La Ressource Credit union in order to facilitate financial transactions.



Despite the decline in the banana industry, many farmers still depend on bananas as their main source of livelihood. However, the passing of Hurricane Tomas in 2010 has left farmers in a precarious position. Causing total devastation to crops and sheds in Belmont, Hurricane Tomas have left farmers with no immediate alternatives for earning an income. This alarming





situation is captured by a male resident who bawled and stated *“Nowadays cry I crying! Nothing, nothing! People crying everyday! We have a lot of work to do, and we have to wait till June or July to sell again. What we suppose to do now. We need to eat”*.

Those who depend on farming such as this male resident has been cut off and left to drown in the floods of unemployment created by the hurricane. Subsequently, due to financial strains, many farm owners remain unable to employ younger workers to assist them in the fields. Nevertheless, the prevailing spirit of the farmers has driven them to clear and replant, in the hope of recuperating from the effects of the hurricane.

The resilience of the human spirit comes to life even in the face of adversity, and the people of Belmont are no exception. With agriculture in an unfavourable position, some farmers are opting to seek employment in the construction industry. They find it difficult to depend on this alternative, as it is seasonal and depends on availability and competition. On the other hand, the tourism sector is not viewed as a viable option because according to residents, earnings are lost when one is engaged in this sector. A resident held the view that *“When we go all Gros Islet to work at the hotels, the little that we make we have to spend it on transportation and food. At the end of the day we are left with almost nothing. That makes no sense”*. Nonetheless, women still attempt to secure an income by working as waitresses, housekeepers and kitchen assistants in the tourism sector. They also perform odd jobs such as housekeeping and ancillary staff in the public sector.

One emerging form, of livelihood is the short term employment that residents are engaged on the banana fields in Martinique.



Many former residents now live permanently in Martinique and assist their families back in the community. This has provided a cushion for many households especially after the hurricane in receiving money and goods.



There are many social problems that are manifested in the community. Idleness, crime, drug use are prevalent among the young men. Youngsters drop out of school and end up on “the block” because the parents are unable to send them to school or pay school fees; there is a lack of parental supervision, an occurrence which the residents said produced disrespectful children, increased “youths on the block” and stealing. Many maintained that parents have to train their children in the right way from an early age and to keep open communication with them. Residents highlighted persons with disabilities, the elderly poor, victims of drug abuse, inmates of penal and custodial institutions and youth in poverty as the most vulnerable groups.



All community members are concerned about the adverse effects that unemployment has, not only on themselves, but especially on the youth of the community. Belmont has requested Government assistance in creating sustained employment through the building of a juice factory or any other similar and suitable alternative to farming, as well as training in which she would be able to reap long term benefits. Leaders have even contemplated prayer as an answer and workshops for community spirit building, appreciation and unity among the residents are perceived as important initiatives.



Community Intervention



An Environmental Health Assessment was conducted in the Community of Belmont during the period Nov-December 4, 2010. The assessment revealed that excreta disposal was a major health problem. While most persons have a means of defecating, some latrines are not properly constructed and thus, have widely contributed to the presence of flies, mosquitoes and cockroaches in the area. This problem was minimized by the Ventilated Improved Pit (VIP) project initiated and funded by the St. Lucia Social Development Funds (SSDF), which involved rebuilding latrines, which were destroyed by hurricane Tomas in 2010. The VIP model will also mitigate against sunken toilets due to the clay type of soil which expands in heavy rains. The newly constructed latrines have proper covering, which helps to decrease the problems of flies and rodents faced previously by the community. In addition, to the physical structure, residents have been given several sessions on health education.



POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY

The Belmont community was identified as one of the poorest and was selected for the Country Poverty Assessments in 1995 and 2005/2006. The identification of the poorest communities in St. Lucia was done using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. With the use of data from the Population and Housing Census 1991, and on the basis of housing characteristics, educational qualifications, household income, and environmental conditions, a database was created and the information processed to generate a ranking for each community through a living conditions index. The community-level situational analyses yielded



data on the perceptions and concerns of households in twelve poor communities.



Both Poverty Assessments supports the notion that poverty was more pronounced in the rural area. It also disclosed that the highest level of self perceived poverty were in communities that were considered remote. While Belmont was not analyzed as a single community, the causes of poverty perhaps could apply to this rural settlement which also relatively remote. Some of these causes include:



1. The decline in earnings from the Banana Industry. Falling banana earnings have hurt the farming sector and small farmers in particular.



2. The limitations of the existing safety-net because of the inadequacy of resources. The fiscal difficulties prevented the government from expanding expenditure on the social services generally and on the social safety-net specifically. Thus as poverty inducing conditions increased, the Government has found itself with less resources to address the problem through alleviation.



3. Limitations in physical infrastructure. Poor access roads, lack of communications, absence of potable water, and inadequate electricity supplies limit possibilities for non-agricultural activities in certain communities.



4. Weaknesses in social infrastructure. The unwillingness among the young population to accept and use family planning services results in a high population growth rate which places a strain on social services e.g. health, education. Additionally,



there is a lack of daycare and pre-school facilities, within the economic and geographic reach of poor women, preventing them from participation in the labour market and in training.



5. The general deficiency in the capacities necessary to support alternative activities. The educational and training systems of St. Lucia are not geared to upgrading the existing workforce to respond quickly to changes in trade and technological requirements. As such, the incremental supply of skilled and knowledge intensive human resources is inadequate to make St. Lucia attractive as a source of cheaper skilled labour.



6. Absence of community organization. The absence of Local Government organization results in poor mobilization of local effort to surmount problems within the community. There is also a lack of community spirit in some villages which prevents the poor from addressing problems collectively.



Although some may think otherwise, it is believed that Belmont has strong community spirit and social bonds among her members, especially among the young men, who have strong social support networks in the face of unemployment. One young man stated, *“We’re there for each other, if one cook and another don’t have, he would give the next man.”* Belmont is comforted with a community spirit that was evidenced by the grand *coup-de-main* called by the Development Committee to construct toilets for many households after hurricane Tomas.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Through consultation with residents they outlined some initiatives that were key to the advancement of development in the community.

1. Agro Processing Plant
2. Proper Excreta Disposal
3. Water Storage and Treatment
4. After School Programme
5. Skills Training
6. Daycare/Preschool
7. Capacity Building
8. Care for the Elderly
9. Road Rehabilitation & Drainage
10. Health Facility
11. Playing field

Implementation of Plan

The Belmont Development Committee will provide leadership and oversee the implementation of these initiatives by the community.

