

# Investing in Health through Support of Established Cultural Food Assets in Underserved Neighborhoods

Where:  
4811 El Cajon Boulevard  
San Diego, Ca 92115

## AFRICAN CARIBBEAN MARKET & THE LIVE WELL COMMUNITY MARKET PROGRAM

When:  
November 12, 2017

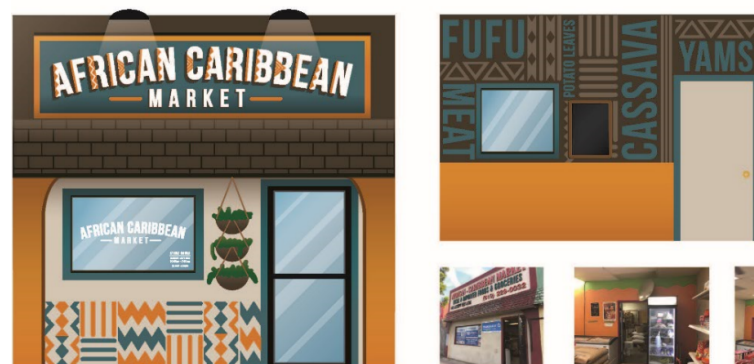
African Caribbean Market, owned by Christian and Grace Bempong, is a unique market in City Heights specializing in cultural foods from the Caribbean, and East and West Africa. Over the course of a year and a half, together with the *Live Well Community Market Program (LWCMP)* at UC San Diego Center for Community Health (UCSD CCH), African Caribbean Market has worked to become a healthy, inviting, community market by increasing and promoting their produce section, reorganizing their store layout to highlight food items by region, attending a workshop on produce handling, and finally undergoing a complete market makeover based on community input to attract new patronage and to encourage walking, shopping, and community social gathering on El Cajon Boulevard.

### STEPS IN THE PROCESS & OUTCOMES:

- 1. Design:** UCSD CCH partnered with San Diego State University's School of Art and Design to have student graphic designers work directly with market owners participating in the *LWCMP*. After an orientation and introduction from UCSD CCH, two student designers worked with African Caribbean Market owners to build a new brand and refresh their overall look with the goal of increasing patronage.
- 2. Resource Development:** Funds and in-kind support was identified from the County of San Diego HHSA, community-based partners, business improvement associations, market owner contributions, and supply donations from hardware businesses. Staff time for project leadership and coordination was provided by UCSD CCH with support from a paid landscape architecture consultant specializing in community placemaking initiatives.
- 3. City Heights Stakeholders Meeting:** On June 7th, after the market owners finalized colors and design elements, UCSD CCH shared the revised concepts and plans at a meeting with City Heights stakeholders and business owners to gather feedback and discuss implementation roles.



Christian Bempong, market owner, before the market makeover



Design students' initial artwork

**4. Community Input Meeting:** On September 1st, UCSD CCH co-hosted a community meeting at African Caribbean Market with the market owners to share the new designs. The meeting goal was to gather feedback from community members, shoppers, business owners and other City Heights stakeholders on market makeover designs and new opportunities for improved walking, shopping, and community social gathering along El Cajon Boulevard. Later, a professional designer revised the student designs to incorporate new feedback and add elements such as landscape greenery and shared outdoor seating.



Revised design with community feedback

**5. Call for Volunteers:** After finalizing the design, UCSD CCH and stakeholders promoted the community build day event to community members, shoppers, business owners, volunteer groups, coworkers, universities, and partner organizations to secure a minimum of 35 volunteers for project implementation.

**7. Community Build Day Event:** On November 12th over 50 volunteers with various levels of technical expertise showed up to paint the interior, exterior, and sidewalk, construct and stain benches, install and plant a vertical garden space, and assemble and paint planter boxes.



Volunteers in action

**8. Business Owner Feedback:** Market owners reported increased foot traffic and positive reception from shoppers on the new changes that highlight their healthy food offerings and unique cultural fare. The adjacent business owner of Mai Beauty Salon was inspired and repainted his own storefront to participate in the process. This owner also reported enjoying using the shared benches with pedestrians and customers alike.

**9. Conclusion:** This collaborative action project supported a broader vision for neighborhood-based economic development to improve the health of local residents and sustain the livelihoods of small business owners in City Heights. Additionally, this work highlighted existing important cultural food assets and showcased newly expanded fresh food options. This project generated two local media stories and received two awards for economic development and planning.



Volunteers and market owners



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