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THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY IN NIGERIA 1/

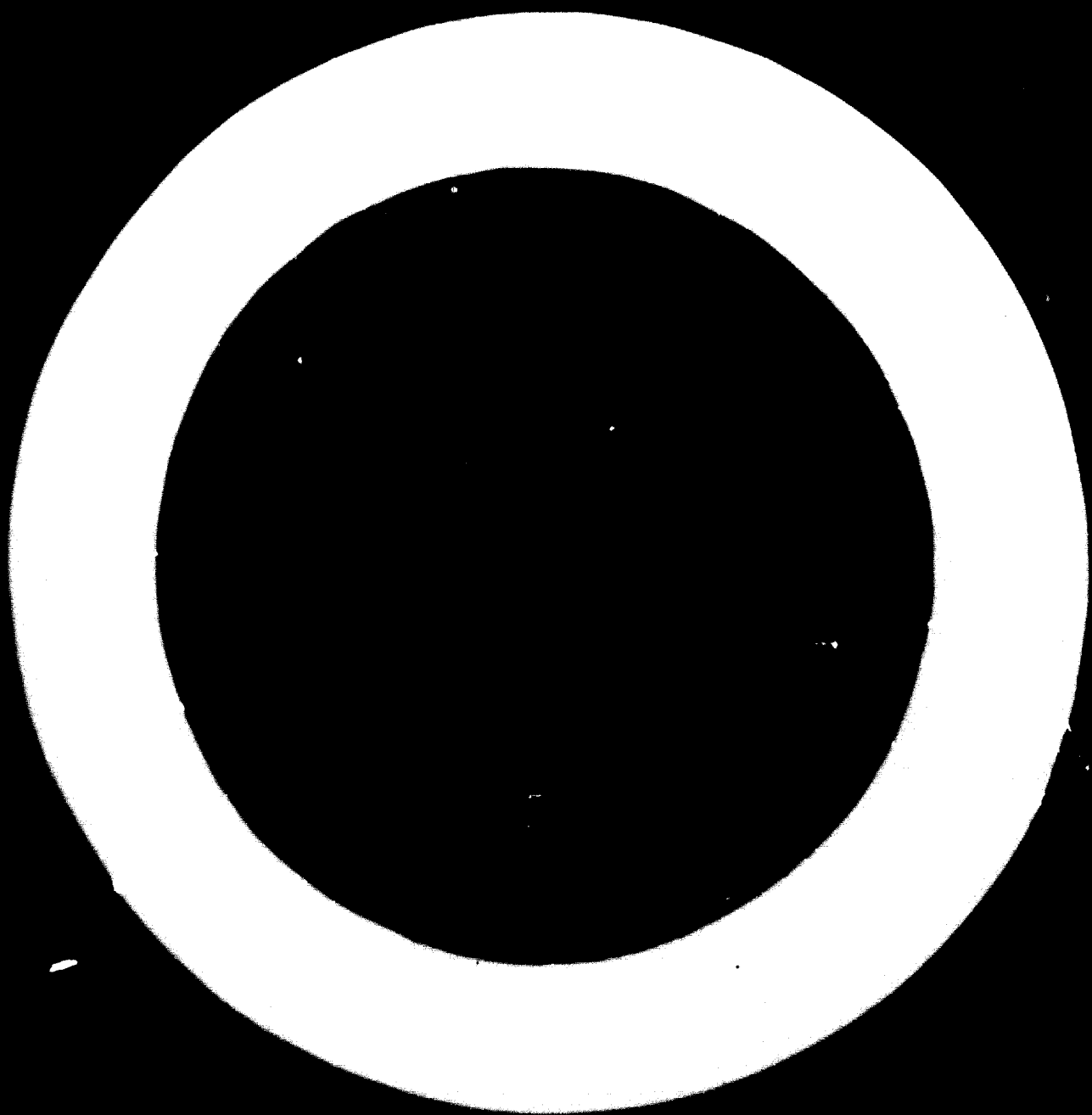
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Nigeria is divided into four climatic regions, this paper being concerned particularly with the Midwestern State which is sub-equatorial.

The total annual rainfall ranges from 60 inches to more than 120 inches per year. Relatively humidity is normally over 90% in the early morning, but falls to between 60% and 80% in the afternoon, whilst temperatures vary between max. 35°C and 20°C (75°F to 85°F). Generally, the furniture is used in houses without air-conditioning, but in new projects for the Government offices under construction air-conditioning will be installed. Owing to the State's hot humid climate we are faced with the following problems:

- a) Planing the timber to obtain the smooth fine surface is somewhat difficult because of humidity.
- b) During painting and especially spraying it is hard to avoid the effects of humidity.
- c) The joints and the overall shape of furniture are sometimes deformed by the changing degree of humidity.

Nigeria has rich hardwood resources, particularly in the Mid-West State. It has the second largest saw-mill in the world (The Africa Timber and Plywood Sapele).

They have commercial timbers such as Sapele Wood, Africa Mahogany, Agba, Black Afara, Ebony, Africa Walnut etc. As a result of this natural abundance of wood, no timber is imported at all.

Air seasoning is the most common method of drying: it is also the cheapest one the small-scale furniture industries can afford. The timber is stacked under cover to protect it from the rain, wind and sun. Of course, following this method of seasoning the timber is not satisfactory. The main problem is that the timber is attacked by insects and fungi, and we are always trying to overcome these problems. Furthermore, the boards takes longer to get seasoned for furniture work.

We mainly use plywood which is locally made to various

thicknesses in an almost standard size of 8' x 4' (244cm x 122cm). Plastics in sheet form such as formica are imported for use in furniture industries. All types of glue are imported; PVC sheeting and wood finishing materials are now manufactured in Nigeria, other materials for the furniture industry are obtainable in the country with little or no difficulty, but most of them are imported.

Generally, the labour force in the country is about 1 - 60 trained craftsmen. The majority of tradesmen often learn their trade from master craftsmen. This attitude has led us to have lots of small sheds all over the place: carpenters shops with very low standards and poorly manufactured furniture. There are a number of Trade Schools in the country, and boys trained at these schools enjoy better career prospects in the furniture industry. As for vocational training in the furniture trade there are a few courses in the Midwest State run by the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Education. I am sure this type of vocational training is carried out in other parts of the country. Moreover, to assist small wood working plants in the State, the Government of the Midwest State established in 1970 a wood utilization section in the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Benin City. The section provides instruction and demonstrations in improved production techniques, encourages the design of new products, and runs short courses. There is no higher technical education in furniture trade in the country and the best anybody can obtain is a final City and Guilds Certificate in one of the woodworking trades. Anybody wanting to get a higher technical education has to go overseas.

Furniture factories in the country do not normally employ a specialist in furniture design, so plants copy furniture designs from text books or the products of major furniture plants overseas.

There is an awareness of automation in the manufacture of furniture in the country as most furniture plants use

woodworking machines for planing, spindling, etc. The furniture factories in this country look forward to the time when it will be possible to manufacture locally woodworking machines or even have an assembly plant in the country, to ease the delay of getting woodworking equipment. Most of the plants use imported materials and the developed countries should try to set up plants or assist in the establishment of factories to manufacture such equipment locally. A Council similar to what they have overseas, e.g. The Furniture Development Council in Great Britain, should be established here to help develop the standards of furniture factories in the country.

Home marketing of the finished products is very encouraging, though as a result of wrong costing most well-finished products are sold at a high price thus leaving only well-placed people in the country to furnish their homes with good furniture. Moreover, there is no such thing as hire purchase schemes in most furniture plants. Generally, marketing any standards of furniture presents no problems as they are so much in demand. At present no finished products are exported.

The industry's future in the country looks bright. The source of raw materials, particularly timber, is assured as the country abounds in great number of commercial timber, while other firms produce items such as foam for upholstery and other things that are required in the furniture industry.

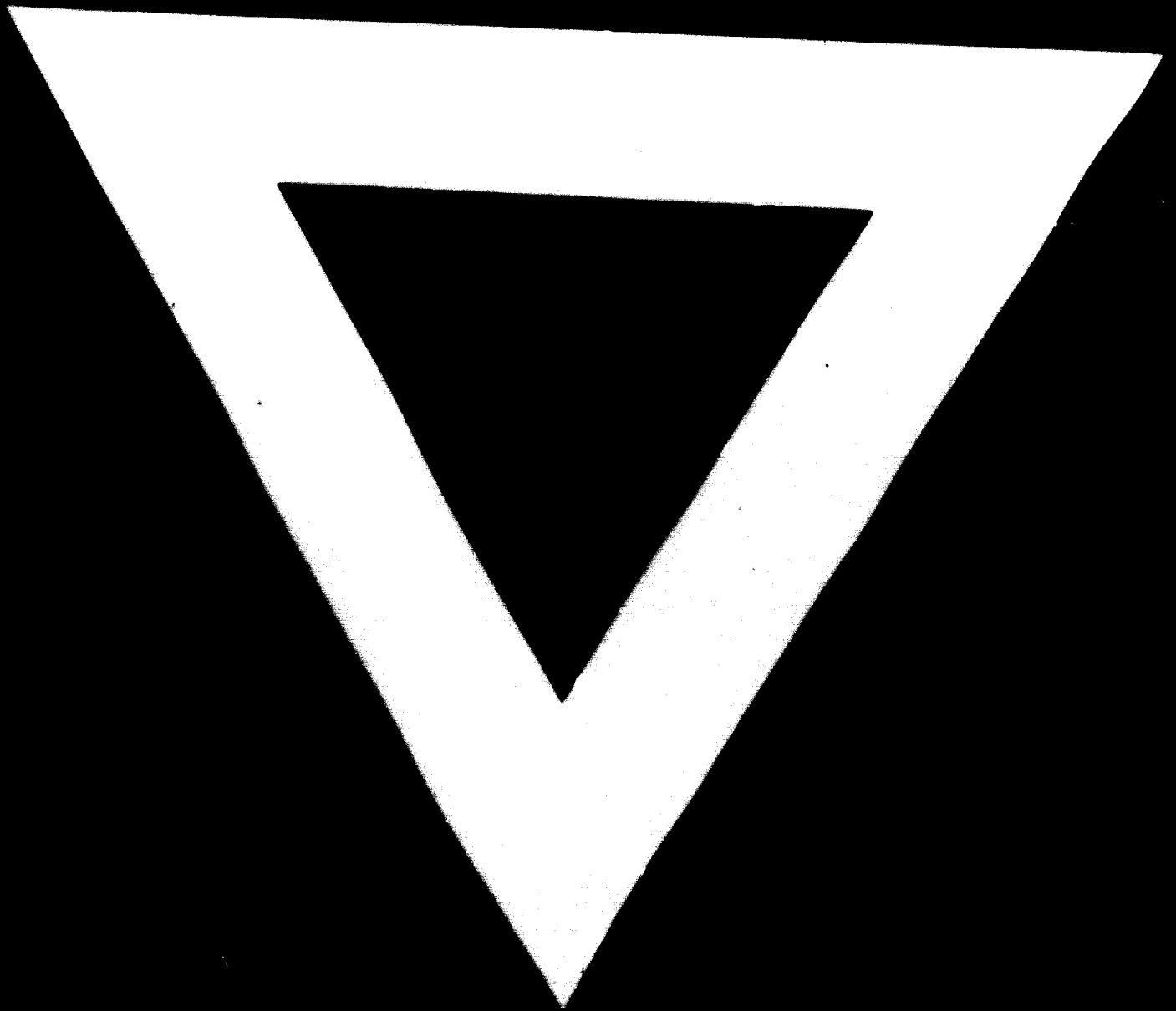
Product quality will rise as the industry is aware of the need for improvement and development of the existing products. Most furniture manufacturers in the country have realised the disadvantages of using inferior materials, e.g. badly seasoned timber. The need for comfort, e.g. in the design and construction of various types of household furniture and office furniture, is now of great importance to furniture manufacturers in the country. The general objective of most manufacturers at present is to provide

customers with well-finished wood products at a reasonable price.

With regular raw material supplies, improved techniques of production, well-finished wood products and steady markets, the furniture industry in the country, particularly in the Mid-Western State, can look forward to the future with confidence.







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