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THE PRESENT SITUATION OF FURNITURE AND JOINERY
INDUSTRIES IN UGANDA 1/

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INTRODUCTION

Following the evacuation of the non-citizen Asians from Uganda, and the declaration of the "Economic War" in the country; it became imperative for the furniture industry in Uganda to change structure.

Before the expulsion of non-citizen Asians, about 98% of the total number of saw mills in Uganda and approximately 95% of the furniture and joinery industry was owned and managed by the non-citizens. There was a great deal of uncertainty in all the woodworking industries before November 8th 1972, the date when all non-citizen Asians were to have left Uganda.

Most of the Ugandan Citizen Asians had also abandoned their businesses, fled the country to join their relatives in other countries.

On 8th November, 1972 the Government announced that all Asian Citizens who had run away from their businesses and were not in the country on November 8th 1972, would not be allowed to return.

Their properties and businesses were declared "ABANDONED" and were later placed in the hands of a newly created body "THE DEPARTED ASIANS' PROPERTY CUSTODIAN BOARD".

PRESENT STRUCTURE OF THE INDUSTRY

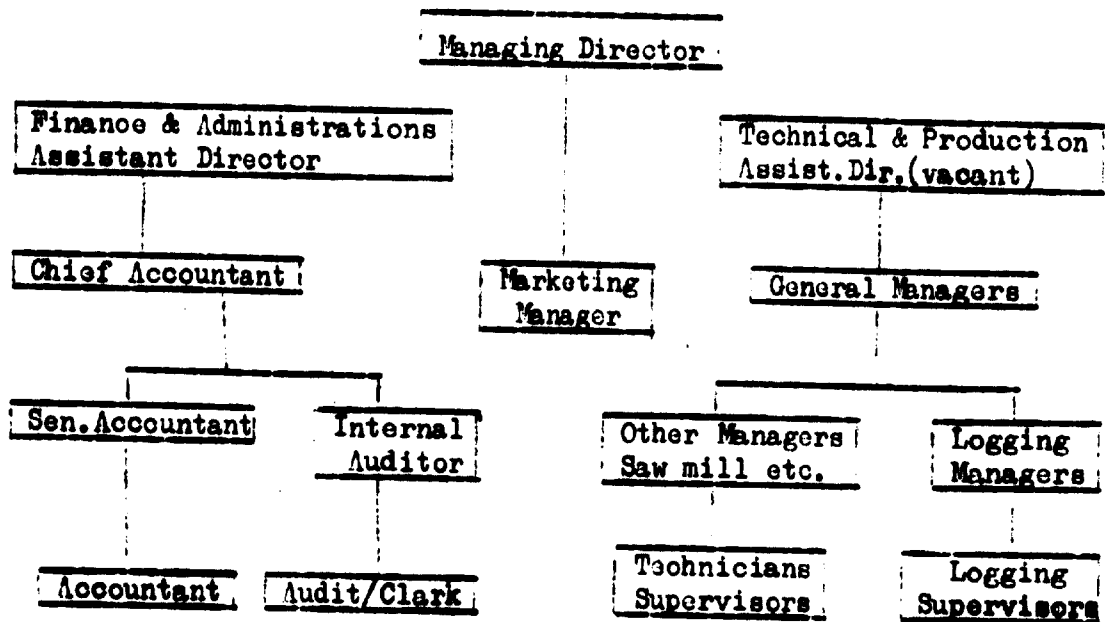
The role of woodworking industries in a developing country like Uganda cannot be over-emphasised, similarly the Government of Uganda could not sit and watch its forest industries go to rot.

The Government, therefore, acted quickly and placed most of the large saw mills, woodworking workshops, paper, chipboard and plywood factories into the hands of the Forest Department which is up to now either care-taking or running them. The smaller saw mills and woodworking workshops were allocated to individual Ugandans who are now running them.

In 1973 the Forest Department went a step further to keep the industries running. It formed a new organisation known as the Uganda saw mills project under the chairmanship of the Chief Conservator of Forests (Uganda).

A full-time Managing Director, formerly the Senior Utilisation Officer Forest Research Centre, was appointed, then later followed the appointment of Deputy Directors, General Managers and Managers for individual saw mills and wood workshops.

SET-UP OF THE SENIOR STAFF ORGANISATION CHART



In order to fill the above-mentioned posts and many others which have not been mentioned here, the Government had to draw qualified foresters from the Forest Department. There are already five graduate foresters of the rank of conservator and assistant conservator. There are also two senior diploma foresters, more than eleven diploma foresters and more than a dozen forest rangers with certificates.

TRAINING

There are several vacant positions in the Forest Department today but if training is stepped up the problem of staffing should be over in the not very distant future.

The shortages have now been tackled from various angles. For example, Makerere University, Kampala, has an intake of about fifteen forestry students every year of whom about 50% are Ugandans. Nyabyaya Forestry College the only forestry college in the country which used to take about 10 diploma and 30 certificate students, has from this year almost doubled, its intake. Technical schools have also raised their intake for carpentry and the entry qualification raised to ordinary certificate level.

The Forest Products Section which had been training technicians during the Asian days has since the declaration of the economic war stepped up its training facilities to try and cope with the man-power requirements, in both Government and private saw mills and woodworkshops.

FINANCE

From the time of take-over of the forest industries the Government did not allocate any funds to the project. The management started to run the factories on money derived from the furniture or timbers which were either left behind by the former owners or timber cut and furniture made by themselves. Up to now the project has remained buoyant on the money raised by themselves.

PRESENT PROBLEMS

During the economic war the country had inevitably to experience some difficulties which needless to say, are the sort of difficulties expected during any war.

The Uganda economic war, therefore, brought with it adverse problems for both the Government and successors of the individual businesses.

TRANSPORT

To quote the official figures; there were 12,000 lorries in the country before the departure of non-citizens. Following their departure the number dropped to only 4,000. The departing Asians, therefore, either damaged or smuggled out of the country over 8,000 lorries.

The saw millers and woodworkers were badly affected by this move. Hauling of logs from the forest and transportation of raw-materials like timber and other finished products of furniture has become a great problem.

MAN POWER

It is a well-known fact that no country in the world is entirely self-sufficient in its skilled man power. In Uganda worse still when the departed non-citizens were still in the country, they monopolised most of the technical positions and industrial specialisation. The wood-working industry, therefore, found itself without experienced technicians and woodworkers to run the industry.

Other fields like furniture design and cutting tool maintenance were badly hit.

LACK OF SPARE-PARTS

The greatest cause of headaches in the woodworking industries today are spare parts for various machineries. Uganda being a non-industrialized country means that the great bulk of spares must come from overseas. Broken down lorries and tractors is the order of the day. This is not only common in the organized saw mill project but even worse in the private saw mills.

At least in the project the Managing Director has widely travelled and is more versed in these affairs, unlike the inexperienced private saw millers some of whom are managing saw mills and woodworkshops for the first time. The depletion of foreign exchange brought about by the departure of non-citizens due to their dirty tricks has largely contributed to lack of spares.

CURRENT PRODUCTION

Below are the production returns in 1970/71 and 1972/73 financial years.

<u>PRODUCT</u>	<u>QUANTITY</u>		<u>+INCREASE</u> <u>-DECREASE</u>
	<u>1970/71</u>	<u>1972/73</u>	
Plywood	1,167,091 m2	418,974 m2	- 63%
Chipboard	109,199 m2	118,199 m2	+ 8%
Sawn Timber	87,771 m3	31,732 m3	- 64%
Paper	1,266 tons	1,304 tons	+ 3%
Matches	74,054,240 boxes	58,270,680 boxes	- 27%
Furniture	Unknown	Decrease	

There is a sharp fall in the production of plywood and sawn timber which is true evidence of the problems outlined above.

PRESENT DEMAND

Due to the regular breakdown of machines, lorries, tractors and others there is now a very big shortage of furniture in the country.

Since the economy of the country was placed in the hands of the citizens, the demand for furniture and joinery has almost doubled. Thousands of people have left the villages to take up businesses and other jobs which were left behind by the non-citizens: Hence the demand to furnish their new homes.

This demand has resulted in very high prices, some of which have more than doubled.

FUTURE PROGRAMME

The consolidation of future expansion of the wood industry in Uganda is based on the plan to form a Corporation for the industry.

It is planned that the following projects will be undertaken in the near future.

PARQUETRY FLOORING

With buildings and machinery already on site it is planned that two parquetry flooring block factories be established, these will be in Central and Western Uganda where the biggest saw mills are found.

VENEER AND PLYWOOD FACTORY

It is planned that a veneer and plywood factory be established in the Western part of Uganda. Sliced veneers will be manufactured and decorative plywood made. The funds for this project are expected to come from the East African Development Bank.

TIMBER HOUSING UNIT

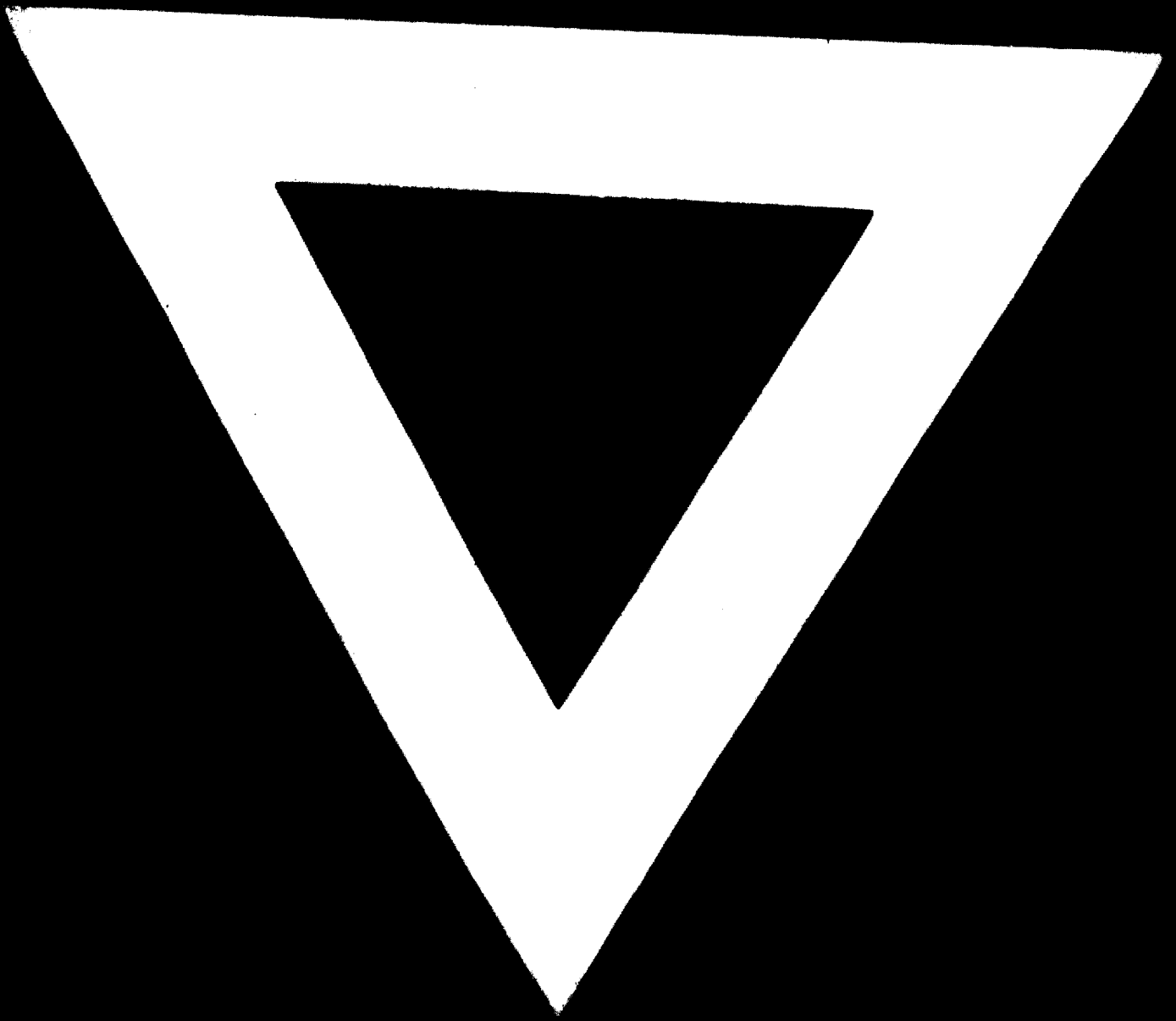
There is now a small housing unit which is a fore-runner of a much larger one. The unit will concern itself with building of basically wooden houses for the public on contract basis.

CONCLUSIONS

In view of the present problems facing the furniture and joinery industry in Uganda it is important that UNIDO joins hands with the Uganda Government to try and save the situation immediately.

The main fields in which UNIDO can help effectively are:

1. Provision of funds to buy new machines.
2. Arranging short-term courses for the Ugandan technicians who are handling the industry in different aspects.
3. If this is achieved the furniture and joinery industry has the brightest future in Uganda.



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