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THE PRESENT STATUS AND PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF  
THE FURNITURE AND JOINERY INDUSTRY IN ETHIOPIA\*

by

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Ethiopia is a country located in the East African Horn, about 9° North of the equator, surrounded by Kenya and Somalia in the South and South East, by Sudan in the West and by the Red Sea in the East. Its population is estimated to be between 30 and 32 million. Its capital Addis Ababa, is the seat of Economic Commission of Africa, the Organization of African Unity and many other international organizations. Recently Ethiopia has adopted a socialistic form of Government.

Ethiopia, a high plateau, is enjoying an excellent weather throughout the year. Due to this favourable weather, a variety of good quality trees are grown in its forest. There are several types of high quality wood species in Ethiopia. The main types that are used in the furniture and joinery industries are:

Kararo, Zigba, Kosso, Wanza, Bissana, Tead, Tikur Enchet (Black Wood) Olive, Sembo, etc.

Kararo is equivalent to light Elm

Zigba is equivalent to Limba

Bissana is equivalent to Limba

Wanza is equivalent to Teak

Kosso is equivalent to Mahogany

Sombo is equivalent to Elm

Tikur Enchet (Black Wood) equivalent to Makoré.

However, for many years, people have cut down the trees and burnt the forest without care and without any programme or action for replanting. Therefore, Ethiopia's forest today is at a very critical state. The existing forest is estimated to cover only about four per cent of the country's area. Unless strong measures are taken for reforestation now, the nation will face a catastrophic problem of shortage of wood for all domestic end uses and for export which is now one of the major items in the country's foreign trade.

Modern furniture industries were introduced in the country after the Second World War. Until then handicrafts were the main source for the nation's supply of furniture. Therefore, even today one can safely say that modern furniture and joinery industries in Ethiopia are yet at their early stage of development.

At present there are three government-run modern furniture factories in Addis Ababa. There are other hundreds small industries and thousands of handicraft centers all over the country run by individuals and associations. The annual output from the three government-run factories, comprises about fifty per cent of the nation need of furniture.

The remaining fifty per cent are supplied by the small privately owned companies.

Regarding marketing, Ethiopia has a tremendous market potential in the immediate neighbouring countries and the Middle East. However, its problem is that being one of the less developed countriss in Africa, it cannot stand the competition on the market for the following reasons: all machinery, spare parts and tools for these industries are imported, few raw material supplies are processed locally; these are particle board, plywood, hardboard, rubber foam, metal tubes, etc. The other raw materials which represent some fifty per cent of the furniture company's cost are again imported from abroad. The main imported items are veneer, paint and adhesive of all kinds, upholstery fabrics, springs and fittings such as hinges, handles, locks, screws, sanding paper, welding electrodes and many others that are necessary in the manufacturing industry.

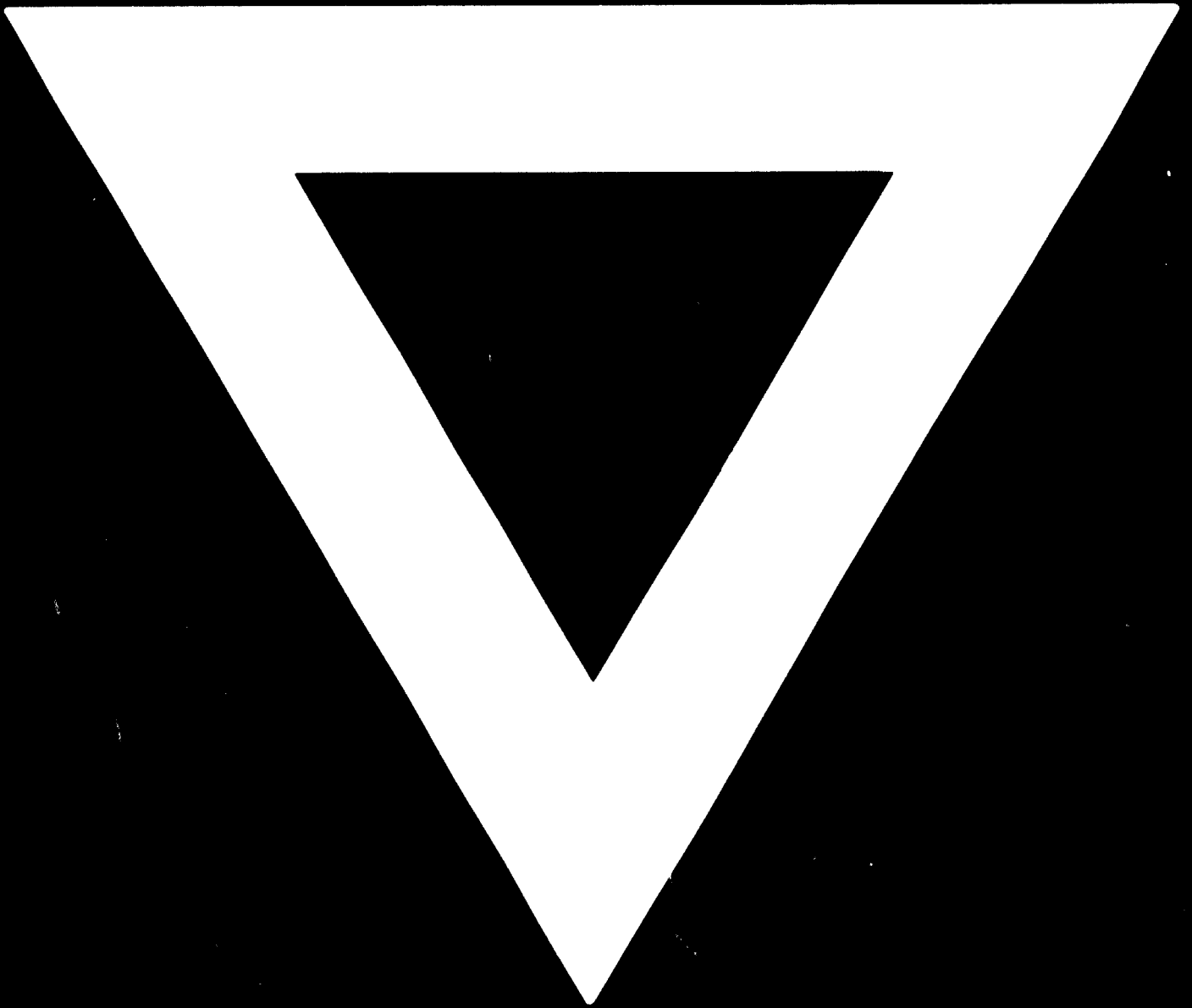
These no doubt make the furniture very expensive. The problem facing the industriss are many and various.

1. The shrinking of the country's forest resources is the main one and reaches catastrophic proportions. Many of these trees can not grow in nurseries. They are best grown under the natural condition. Besides it takes over a hundred years to grow them for maturity. Furthermore, the reafforestation programme needs a heavy long term investment and experienced expertise to make effective result of the programme and international financial assistance.
2. The rising cost of raw materials and the difficulties of acquiring spare parts whenever needed are another long outstanding problem. It is obvious that the effect of world wide inflation reflects more on the lesser developed countriss than the developed ones.

3. Lack of technical know-how is the other burden of the lesser developed countries. There are few training schools whose standards are not to the levels needed by the industry.
4. Research centres for new product development and marketing both locally and on the export markets do not exist and have to be established as soon as possible.
5. Last but not least, the industriss have to start a programme of proper grading system for wood products.



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