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CURRENT STATUS OF THE FURNITURE AND JOINERY INDUSTRIES IN
GHANA, AND THEIR PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT*

by

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Ghana is a tropical country and some offices are air-conditioned and most of them are rot; but furniture and joinery need not be kiln dried in the country with exceptions of the Northern part where the weather is extremely dry, and furniture to that part of the country have to be kiln dried or the timber have to be dried there because when harmattan (hot dry season) comes during December and January, it is very dry. Unfortunately, furniture and joinery for local consumption is not dried.

However, the importance of the furniture industry in the economy of Ghana, leaves much to be desired. It cannot be over-emphasized that Ghana is a blessed country, endowed with abundant wood species.

There are about 104 wood species in Ghana, out of this number, only a few species are being utilized due to lack of technological know-how. Some of these species utilized are classified as primary species, and the others are called the secondary species.

This problem may be attributed to a number of reasons of which the following cannot be overlooked:

- a. lack of expert knowledge in extraction of timber;
- b. the timber resources of the country is not fully utilized; this is due to the fact that the cost of extracting both the primary and secondary species is the same, but the primary species have a higher price on the market. Loggers consequently prefer to cut only the primary species, leaving the secondary species virtually untapped.

There are about 21 registered furniture companies in Ghana, out of which only few are manufacturing knock-down furniture parts for export. The number of workers in these firms range from 100 to 300.

There are also a lot of "wayside" carpentry workshops. These have only a few workers, who are mostly apprentices. The operators of these small shops are usually the proprietors. Some firms do both furniture and joinery and most of the registered firms in Accra and Kumasi can go into export but have no kiln dryers and also lack technical know-how.

A lot of the larger manufacturers and some of the smaller firms are involved in other businesses besides furniture and/or joinery. Some of these diversified firms produce synthetic foam, mattresses and pillows. With the above practice, most manufacturers come to realize that furniture sales are far below, for example, foam sales etc. and thus tend to relegate the importance of the furniture industry to the background.

Ghana also needs more timber processing plants or saw mills to enable small manufacturers to buy timber at reasonable prices. Efforts to meet this demand is however beset by a myriad of problems of which the lack of capital plays a dominant role.

Furniture products include dining tables and chairs, desks and chairs, conference tables; hospital and school furniture, lampstands, coffee tables, bedroom wardrobes and bedsteads, serving trays, ashtrays, knock-down furniture parts and upholstered chairs and settees.

The designs are not very sophisticated and usually based on western patterns. The firm which is specializing in the export of knock-down furniture also receives patterns from their foreign customers. The traditional furniture designs are not very popular and are manufactured mainly for cultural purposes.

The marketing methods and strategies practised in Ghana are still primitive. Most domestic sales are made direct to the consumer. Only a few manufacturers sell their produce through departmental stores like G.N.T.C., Kingway Stores and H.T.C.

Showrooms sited in commercial centres are prominent features in the sales strategies of manufacturers to promote a smoother and faster distribution of products. A number of manufacturers engage in newspaper and signpost advertisements, and quite a few occasionally use radio and television.

Production of furniture for export is also at an initial stage. As mentioned above, only few firms specialize in the production of knock-down furniture for export; but one firm exports wooden products other than furniture. Most firms have shown interest in the export business

but find the bitter cold of external competition too hard to endure. This again, is due to lack of (a) experts (b) kiln dryers and (c) modern equipment. These have created a situation where most manufacturers export timber in the unprocessed form. This practice as will be shown later, is a big bottleneck in the wood economy of the country.

Statistical figures compiled by the Ghana Timber Marketing Board shows that for every ton of wood converted to furniture parts by an Accra furniture manufacturing company, the company earns \$ 1,808.00 ^{1/} in foreign currency. Thus if the 247.675 tons of wood and wood products exported from January to June 1976 had been processed in a manner similar to what the Accra furniture firm does, total earnings from this source would have been \$ 447,796,400.00 in foreign currency instead of \$ 47,038,890.00. Assuming conditions remain the same throughout the year, the export proceeds from this source would be totalling \$ 895,592,800.00 in one year. The need to export processed wood thus becomes more than obvious.

Future prospects for development by the furniture/joinery would be very bright if proper encouragement and priority is given to processing of furniture for export. The Government is accordingly taking steps to ban the exports of logs.

Training in furniture and joinery production has been initiated recently by the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi; but Production Management poses a great problem to firms who are intending to go into export. This problem is more pronounced with firms who are already engaged in the export trade. The lack of quality and precision of products is also a big thorn in our flesh.

The solution of these two problems seems to lie in the hiring of expatriate services. This solution is ineffective, as the expenses involved is too much for indigenous manufacturing firms. There are also instances where Ghanaians trained overseas do not stay long with local firms because of lack of modern equipment which makes the discharge of their duties rather difficult.

UNIDO can help us with providing manufacturing firms in developing

^{1/} \$ 1.15 = US\$ 1.—

countries with experts who can train and lay the proper foundation for the future training of the local workers.

It is important to note however that UNIDO is already playing a remarkable role by organizing global seminars of this nature.

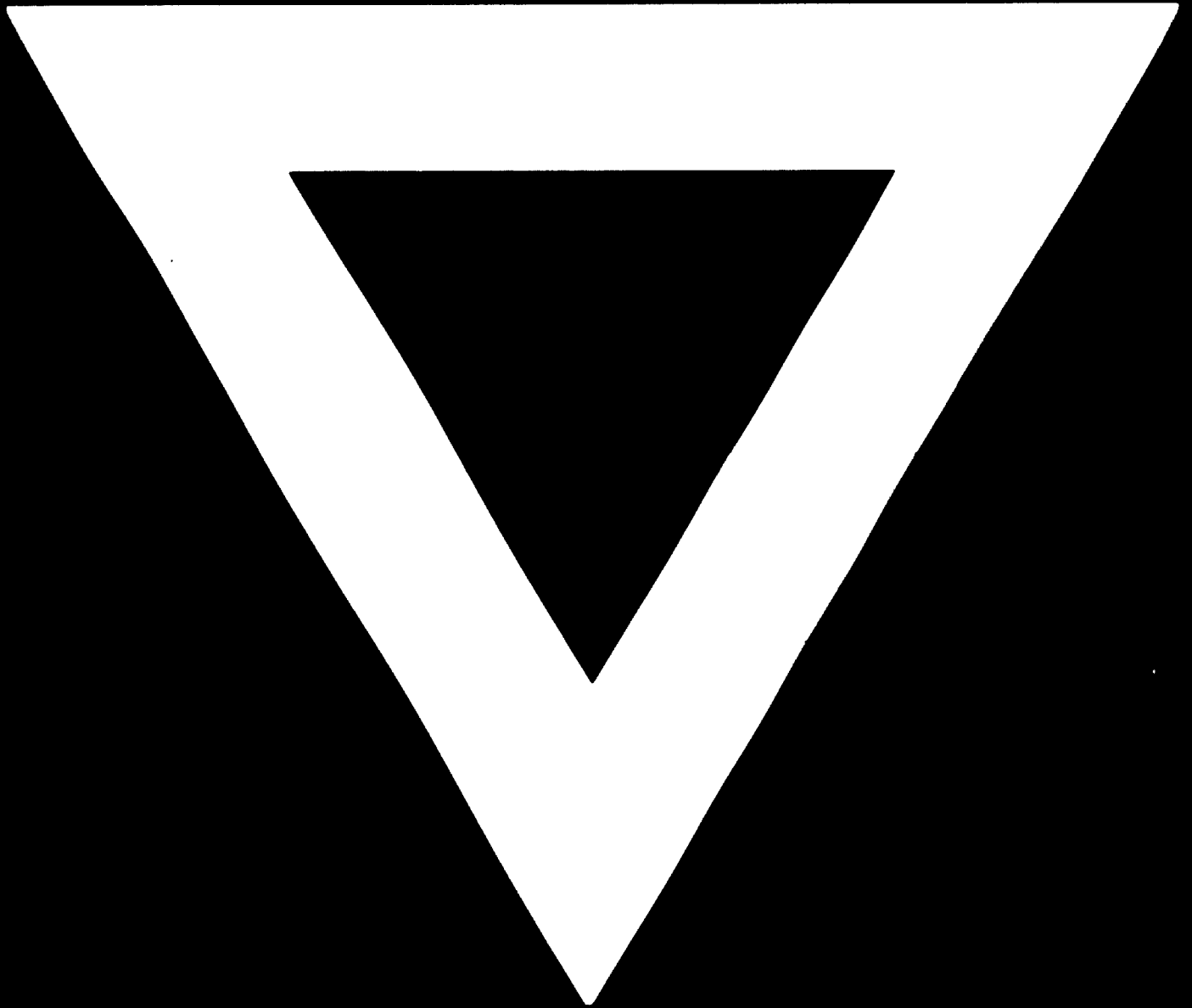
On the whole therefore, it is seen that the furniture/joinery industries need more help in the form of technical aid; and advanced countries can help by way of granting the local employees scholarships in overseas factories and higher institutions of wood technology, to enable the industries to stand on their own feet.

Our local financial institutions can also help with the provision of funds to increase curricular activities of technical schools, polytechnics as well as the Universities so that more skilled wood experts can be turned out, to assist in the development of the timber industry.

UNIDO can also assist firms to expand their operations by making available experts on-the-spot for the indigenous firms which cannot afford to pay the cost of experts, to help them become competitive on the world market. This will no doubt provide more job opportunities and increased employment for more and more people and lastly to boost their foreign exchange position.



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