



TOGETHER
for a sustainable future

OCCASION

This publication has been made available to the public on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation.



TOGETHER
for a sustainable future

DISCLAIMER

This document has been produced without formal United Nations editing. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries, or its economic system or degree of development. Designations such as “developed”, “industrialized” and “developing” are intended for statistical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgment about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process. Mention of firm names or commercial products does not constitute an endorsement by UNIDO.

FAIR USE POLICY

Any part of this publication may be quoted and referenced for educational and research purposes without additional permission from UNIDO. However, those who make use of quoting and referencing this publication are requested to follow the Fair Use Policy of giving due credit to UNIDO.

CONTACT

Please contact publications@unido.org for further information concerning UNIDO publications.

For more information about UNIDO, please visit us at www.unido.org

We regret that some of the pages in the microfiche copy of this report may not be up to the proper legibility standards, even though the best possible copy was used for preparing the master fiche



68115



Distr.
LIMITED

ID/WG.256/15
24 November 1977

ENGLISH

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

Seminar on Furniture and Joinery Industries
Lahti, Finland, 1 - 20 August 1977

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

by

F.J. Hitler**

* The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the secretariat of UNIDO. This document has been reproduced without formal editing.

** Manager, Grewals (Mauritius) Ltd., Port-Louis, Mauritius.

id.77-8417

As many other countries, Mauritius is trying to develop. In parallel with other sectors, the demand for furniture and joinery products will, therefore, automatically increase. Anyway, the present situation presents many problems and solutions for improvement could be obtained through UNIDO Technical Assistance.

Most of the industries are still at the craft - based system. Their products are distributed over the island with owner - managers working manually with some helpers. Only a few are better organized, usually in the main towns with some equipment and machinery to cope with better levels of production and standardization. Though generally wood-type furniture predominate, upholstery, contract, metal, bedding and rattan types of furniture are also fabricated but in smaller amounts.

The types of raw materials used cover a wide range but mostly hardwoods (local and imported) are used. In lesser volume particle board, locally manufactured from bagasse, plywood and veneers find their importance. There is some reticence on the use of particle board but the proper combination of particle board and veneers is proving more and more successful on the local market.

Local hardwoods are available in small amounts but some of them are very suitable for furniture manufacturing. A major reforestation programme should prove a very profitable long-term investment. Imported timber, mainly Teak, is therefore, the main raw material while Meranti is commonly used in framing. The local market shows a net preference for Teak but the latter is getting more and more expensive. Because of the long distance from the major suppliers of timber, fittings and finishes for furniture and joinery industries, and because of the long delivery delays, firms have to hold a disproportionately large stock of expensive items to ensure continuity of production and supply. In this respect, a co-ordinated purchasing body would be a practical solution. This problem of price and stock places many industries in a occasionally difficult position. Mauritius being a fairly humid place, an acceptable moisture content would be 17 to 18 per cent but for export to less humid areas, drying the timber in a kiln is essential.

Another factor hindering a proper development is the lack of proper training. It is usual for young boys to join the furniture industries after primary education and gain some training on the spot. After several years experience, they often open their own businesses. At a higher level, some schools and other government and religious institutions give a certain theoretical and practical training. But there is a need of training for people who are already engaged in the furniture and joinery industries particularly at management and middle management levels. This will lead to a better organization and development both at individual production unit levels and to country's standards. Better co-operation among the local industries would help, and mutual benefit could be derived by one and all. Actually, everybody prefers to do his own business and manage his own unit. Anyway, an association of furniture manufacturers does exist.

One aspect concerning the local industries is the lack of specialization and attention to a good level of finish and details. Furthermore, the need for proper design and creativity should be felt if ever local industries were to think of an export market. In fact, this possibility has never been deeply studied but if good products could be produced, there could be an interesting market in the neighbouring islands or even to South Africa. The structure of the local markets is by itself a limitation to development. People still prefer to bring their catalogue and have their furniture copied from a model in that catalogue. Mass production by well equipped and sophisticated industries has, however, started and there are signs that at least some people are accepting the supply of standardized units. This could be the start of an interesting future for exports because mass production would be the only way to bring down costs to permit local industries to find a market abroad. No doubt, a better standard of finish, design and quality should be reached, before thinking of export possibilities. Two basic types of furniture are made locally: the traditional reproduction Mahogany based style and lately the 'Peak European style.

As far as the Joinery Industries are concerned, similar problems are encountered. There is a lack of technical training and this again results in lower productivity. The use of equipment and machines is limited. Furthermore, there is a lack of standardisation. The demand for flush

doors for instance is interesting but here again as in the furniture industry, standardization is proceeding very slowly. The manufacture of wood louvered shutters is another example where standard sizes cannot be established because too often the specifications vary from one building to another. There is nevertheless a tendency for acceptance of standardization. The manufacture of kitchen units has started and architects have started to agree upon standard dimensions.

There are, therefore, good prospects in the field of furniture and joinery industries because the needs for residential and industrial buildings will progress more and more with the island's development. There is a lack of training but there is skill around, there is lack of co-ordination but the Association of Furniture and Joinery Industries has started to feel the big need for co-ordination; there is inadequate seasoning of timber but the installation of a drying unit is actually being seriously studied. No doubt, therefore, this sector will develop.

In furniture though, wood is the main raw material utilized, metal is also used but to a lesser extent. In joinery, on the other hand, metal plays a predominant part. Manufacture of tables and chairs is the area where metal is being mostly used. But unless timber is too expensive, it will be preferred.

One typical aspect where know-how could help is in the line of parquet flooring. We have a local timber which can be used for that product, but the fact that no proper machining technology has been developed means that this industry is progressing very slowly and the cost of production is quite high.

The maintenance, sharpening of saws and knives, is not done using a modern technique and here again training would help.

We have mentioned timber drying. This aspect is actually being studied in depth in Mauritius. Technical know-how and advice would be helpful.

UNIDO technical assistance could cover a wide range of topics. The main ones could include the following fields:

1. plant lay out and design: proposition for plant layout for both furniture and joinery industries covering the main items of buildings, effective use of space, power, light, ventilation, etc.
2. safety measures: proper use of protective equipment, dust and waste extraction methods and equipment for same.

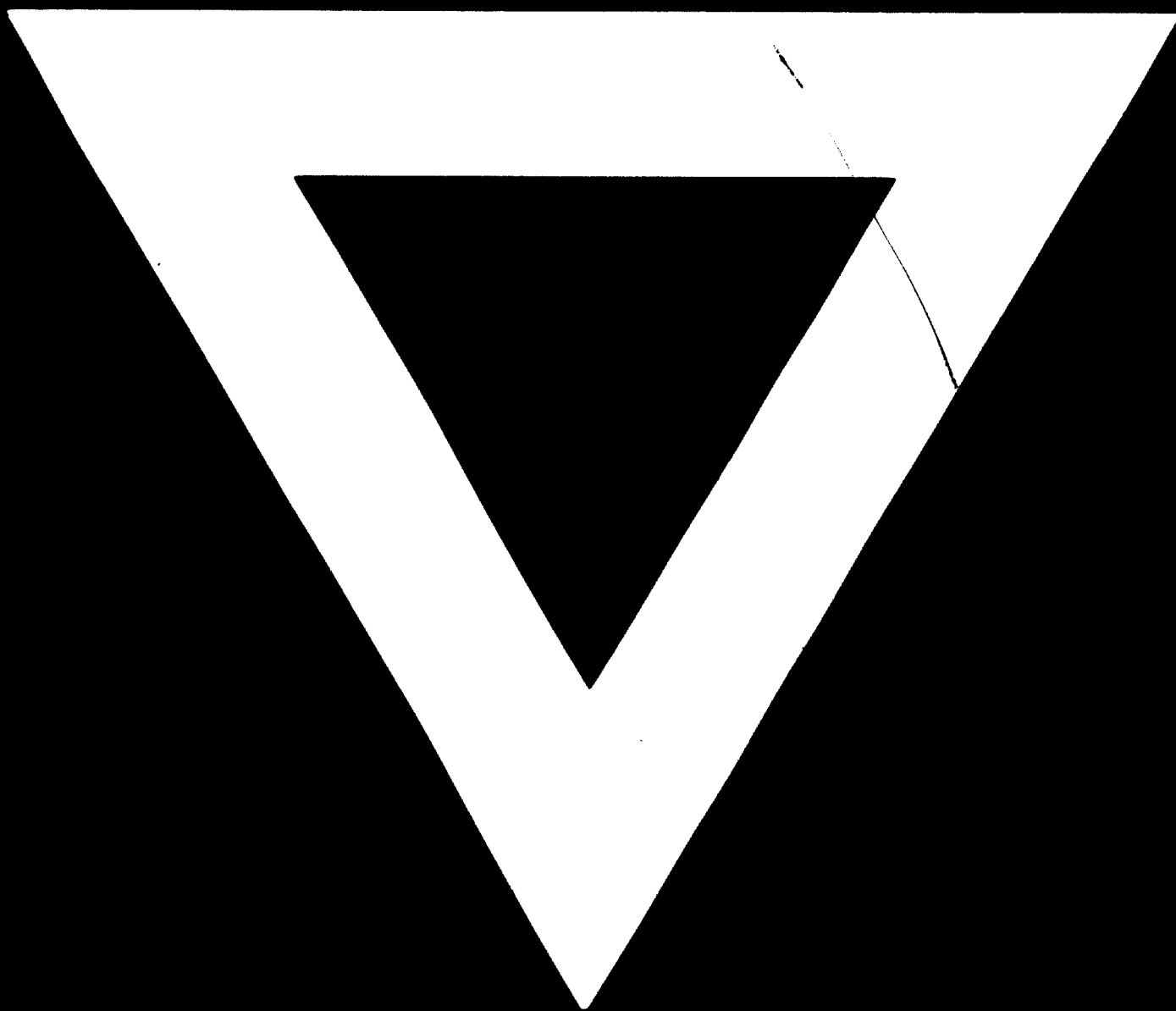
3. wood working equipment: choice of wood working equipment for sawing, cutting, planing, sanding, veneering. Theoretical background of cutting and preparing wood for specific uses is essential.
4. processing of wood: theory of impregnation, drying, gluing and finishing of wood.
5. maintenance: maintenance of machines, saws, knives and other tools.
6. furniture manufacturing and processing: study of production methods in the furniture industry.
7. joinery processes: selection of machines.
8. management: study of cost and reduction of same in furniture or joinery industry.
9. quality control: the importance of quality and methods of controlling it.

Inevitably, therefore, as can be concluded from the above, the furniture and joinery industries will develop on condition that the following basic factors: training, know-how, design, equipment and machines, raw materials are improved, and that investments are made in this sector.

Development is a must if Mauritius wants to achieve a diversification of its economy. UNIDO technical assistance is, therefore, welcomed in this line which is still very young in Mauritius,



C-674



78. 11. 10