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THE FURNITURE AND JOINERY INDUSTRY IN TANZANIA*

by

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Introduction

Tanzania is a country rich in indigenous wood resources.

The total productive and semi productive forest area is about 18 mill. hectares; which is about 43% of the total land area. Of this only 13 mill. ha. are permanent forest estate; and about 25 mill. ha. are on public land, which is liable to be used for other purposes, mainly for agricultural development expansion.

The major part of the country's forest is of the Savannah-woodland type with sparse trees vegetation (about 50 m³/ha.) but carrying various fine hardwood species suitable for high class furniture like Muringa (*Pterocarpus angolensis*) Afzelia (*Afzelia quanzensis*) and Ngando (*Albizia antunesiana*). Dense high rain forest, occurs on mountain areas (e.g. Kilimanjaro and Usambaras) areas around inland lakes, and tropical lowlands. Although the high forest types are less extensive compared to the Savannah, they are generally more densely stocked (about 150 - 250 m³/ha.). Many fine hardwood species suitable for high grade furniture and joinery are obtainable e.g. Mvule (*Chlorophora excelsa*) Camphor (*ocotea usambarensis*) Loliondo (*Olea welwitschii*) Mfimbo (*Beilschmiedia - kwao*) etc.

At present the furniture and joinery industry is not very well developed throughout the country. The industrial development is confined to few areas with high population density particularly in urban areas. In most parts of the country the production is confined to small scale practice which can hardly suffice the local and overall demand.

The local market is steadily increasing with the economic growth and population; the present population is estimated by the Statistical Bureau at about 15 mill. by 1980 it will be 16.8 mill. by 1985 20.1 mill., and the year 2000 it is estimated to reach 32.1 mill. The rapid improvement of the standard of living for the bulk of the population, which is now beginning to show up is a result of the Government decision to encourage people to move into planned village communities; this will enhance the demand for furniture and joinery industry in general. This will induce a greater need for more decent homesteads and for other infrastructure, like schools hospitals and other public centres.

The Tanzania Government having taken serious consideration of the prevailing circumstances, is taking many positive steps towards guaranteeing self reliance in wood and wood products, now and for the future. Some

of the steps already taken are:

- i. Conservation of fine hardwoods for high value and quality works: this is by establishing in various parts of the country, several fast growing exotic forest plantations which are to substitute the indigenous hardwoods for general utility works.
- ii. Drawing long and short term plans for conservation and utilization of the country's wood resources. The plans are periodically reviewed.
- iii. The creation of Tanzania Wood Industry Corporation (TWICO) a corporation charged with development of wood based industries, marketing etc.
- iv. The creation of a Forest Industry Training Institute (FITI) to train Tanzanians on various skills in forest utilization including joinery and furniture making.
- v. The creation of small Industries Development Organization (SIDO) which take care and assists (among many others) small groups and community wood workshops in various parts of the country.

On these tasks the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania has obtained assistance and co-operation from many international Organizations such as UNDP, SIDA, UNIDO and CIDA.

Due to the fact that Tanzania is still a developing country, much of its meagre financial and skilled manpower resource is quite inadequate to cope with various necessary development programmes.

Further international assistance will still be appreciated to supplement the domestic efforts mainly in the field of:

- i. Manpower training and development;
- ii. Acquisitions of machinery and tools (which involves foreign currencies);
- iii. Various project evaluation and planning etc.

THE FURNITURE AND JOINERY INDUSTRY

The Tanzania furniture industry like any other country has been an age long business. However, for a long time it has been confined to small scale practices by enthusiastic individuals, in most cases their products were rough wood works mainly done by ordinary hand tools or by established small scale workshops with limited machinery.

For the past few decades, however, there has been a gradual increase in demand for the various furniture and joinery works; both in quality and quantity which the established factories could not meet.

At this juncture the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania in 1966, sought the assistance of UNDP for an overall planning the forest industries development in the country. A special fund project was set up. This resulted in the establishment of a pilot "Forest Industries Development Project" at Moshi with a pilot soft wood sawmill at Rongai, in Kilimanjaro region. This project was to cater for all fundamental aspects of the sawmilling and wood working industries including furniture and joinery.

During the same time there was a general development in different sectors at district, regional and national level for the formation of organization involved in different venture towards development of small scale industries. Some of such organizations are "District Development Corporations"; Small Industries Development Organization, Tanzania Wood Industries Corporation etc. These organization apart from manufacturing other types of products were also involved in the production of furniture and joinery materials.

The establishment of these organizations made it easier for them to obtain Government and Bank assistance for purchasing machinery, development of infrastructure and working capital for the factories.

The main types of goods produced by these factories are:

- i. House-hoid furniture;
- ii. Officer furniture;
- iii. Furniture for schools and other institutions;
- iv. Prefabricated house components;

- v. Packing cases (Tobacco cases and tea chests)
- vi. Doors, windows and frames etc.

The Furniture Industry

1. Main Types of Materials Used and Availability (Wood Based)

Most of the furniture made is of fine hardwoods, very high quality and grade. Average 90% solid wood (85% hardwoods and 5% softwoods). For the remaining 10%, plywood, chipboards and fibreboards are used. Plywood is available from plywood factory in Moshi town. Chipboard from factory at Mombo 210 km and fibreboard from another factory at Arusha 80 km from Moshi. The plywood, fibreboard, and chipboards are produced by subsidiary companies of state owned Tanzania Wood Industry Corporation.

2. Other Materials and their Availability (None Wood Based)

Table III

| ITEM | SOURCE OF SUPPLY |
|--|-----------------------|
| i. Wire nails | Locally made |
| ii. Wood screws (various types and sizes) | Imported |
| iii. Varnish and polish for finishing work | Locally |
| iv. Glues for joints | Locally (Henkel, DSM) |
| v. Cushion sponge | Locally made |
| vi. P.V.C. cloth for cushion | Imported |
| vii. Poplin cloth for cushion etc. | Locally manufactured |

Prefabricated Wooden Houses

Pre-fabricated wooden house industry is quite a new introduction in the country; coming with increased supply of cheap softwood timber from plantations. The demand is growing rapidly mainly from public institutions expanding and developing activities throughout the country, requiring urgent houses for their employees, office blocks etc. One serious draw back is the present inability to offer much lower prices as could be desired; this situation is caused by factors, such as higher taxation on timber higher prices for auxiliary materials such as chemicals glues, paints and all ironmongery. On the other hand costs for pre-fabricated houses is much lower compared to concrete block houses by about 33%, which is an element of

labour cost saving.

Problems

Like other sectors in the developing economies, the industrial production of many products as well as furniture, is seriously affected by lack of development in other fields. It is always not possible to solve one problem in isolation, since most of them are interdependent. The furniture and joinery industry in the country is seriously suffering mainly from:

- i. Lack of highly skilled workers, managers, and planners.
- ii. Inadequate machinery of correct design and type for the work.
- iii. Lack of spares, repairs and servicing facilities for the available machinery.
- iv. Lack of funds in foreign currencies for purchasing new machinery as and when desirable to do so.

Lack of skills is due to inadequate education and technical training facilities, which are normally factors caused by lack of funds. This lack of skill hinders rapid advance in technology for developing other sectors which should increase production and generate funds for further development on various aspects including the furniture industry.

Conclusion

Furniture and joinery industry in Tanzania has still got a long way to go to achieve a recognizable standard of production status. It is obvious that the industry is confronted with various operational and planning problems which are hindering their rapid growth.

At present there is a great need for assistance in trying to overcome or alleviate some of the major problems. The importance of machinery, equipment, tools as well as training aspect can not be overlooked. On the other hand, assistance from foreign sources in any form categorized previously, should take in mind the necessity of providing that assistance which is in accordance with the limitation of the highly specialized machines which specialist maintenance or replacement can not be obtained locally.

Efforts are still being made to see to it that the industry overcome most of these problems and guarantee a better and sustained supply both in quality and quantity for the people who depend and need the products.



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