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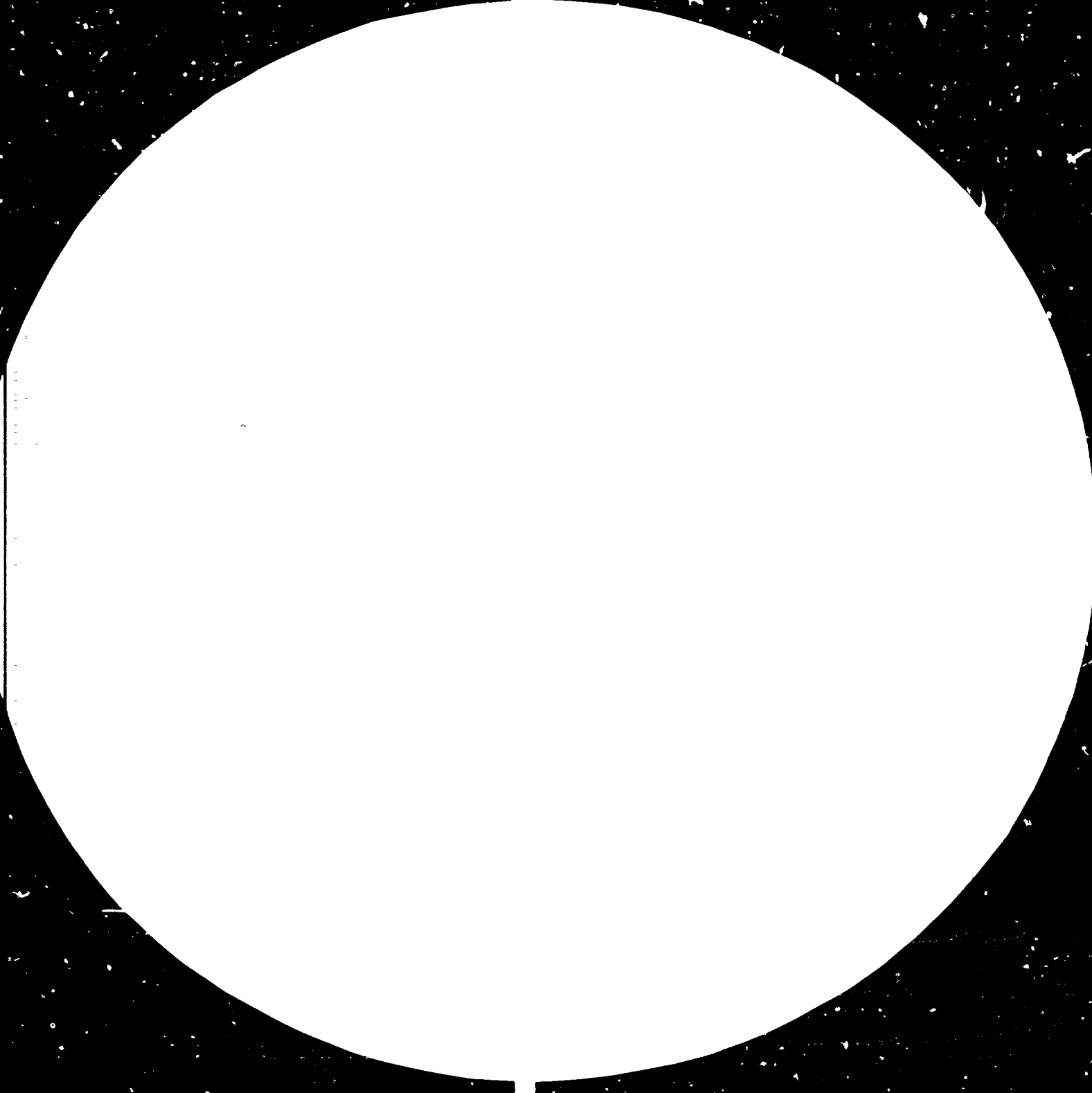
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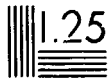
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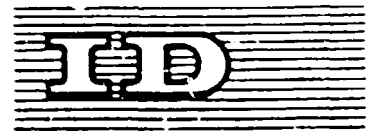
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Resolution Test Chart
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Joinery and furniture in Mauritius ^{1/}

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Geographical location:

Mauritius is an island in the Indian Ocean. It has an area of 720 square miles and is situated at about 500 miles east of Madagascar. It has a temperate climate and two prevalent seasons - summer and winter (winter is rather humid). The population of Mauritius is 900,000 inhabitants and is composed of various races. The G.N.P. is estimated at Rs. 4,800 millions ^{1/}. The main source of its economy is sugar, secondary products are tea, tobacco, agricultural and industrial products.

Furniture and Joinery in Mauritius:

History:

Although Mauritius was discovered by early Portuguese and Dutch navigators, it was the French who first settled here. The French brought a few pieces of furniture along with them. Then came the immigrant workers who had no belongings. Furniture was then a luxury few could afford. Later the need for furniture was felt and a few workers were trained to make furniture for daily use out of primitive equipment and tools.

Raw materials:

Originally ebony was available in large quantities so were other varieties of timber. Today only pine wood and eucalyptus are found, and even so, their supply is scanty. Most raw materials for furniture and joinery are now imported, such as timber, plywood (commercial and decorative), glue, fittings, laminated sheets, blockboards, adhesives etc. At one time the government encouraged the manufacture of bagasse

^{1/} US\$ 1 = Rs 7,67

based particle board, but this product was not accepted on the local market due to technical and climatic reasons.

Building and developments:

Mauritius is located in a cyclonic zone and as such it has been realised that the buildings should be of reinforced concrete. Lately the government has undertaken vast housing schemes, as a result of which there has been a boom in the furniture and joinery industry. This sector therefore needs more planning and a better organization. Further the local population has not yet accepted the idea of furniture made out of particle boards. They prefer solid wood or plywood based furniture. They also insist on individual designs thereby making mass production impossible. This results in furniture being quite costly.

Training:

Recently, a few technical schools have been set-up by the government, and interested people are being trained in wood technology. What is immediately needed is a good infrastructure to run these schools such as proper machinery and equipment and properly trained staff to teach.

Workshops and equipments:

Most workshops are unplanned shelters where a few machines have been installed. Hence these do not provide furniture of good quality and installed equipment is being underexploited. This results in serious problems to our economy and also higher production costs for furniture.

The typical set-up is thus: in every small town there are a few carpenters who have set-up small workshops. They produce furniture which is poor in quality and based upon their working experience. The result is poor quality production at a high cost with a tremendous

waste of expensive imported raw materials and foreign exchange. These are around 25 such units in each of Mauritius' nine districts. Each unit employs around 6 untrained and unskilled workers.

On the other hand, there are about 20 medium and large units on the whole island. A majority of these units produce furniture of an average standard. Around half a dozen of these units produce furniture of a fairly high standard, both design- and comfort-wise.

The skilled labour available in this field is grossly inadequate. They consist largely of apprentices who have had training under experienced workers and have in turn come to be considered as skilled workers. Lately the government has made an effort to provide training to workers in well organized centres such as the Development World Corporation. In such centres they are trained under competent staff members and experts from various organizations.

Structure of the industry:

Small scale sector:

Number of units per district	25
Total number of units	225
Average employment per unit	6
Total employment	1350
Average Turnover per unit	Rs 60,000 (annually)
Total turnover	Rs 16,200,000
Cost of production	Rs 11,340,000
Profit	Rs 4,860,000
	30 percent
Average investment per unit	Rs 15,000 to 20,000

Medium and large scale sector:

Total number of units	20
investment per unit	RS 300,000
Average employment per unit	30
Total employment	600
Average turnover per unit	Rs 1,600,000
Total average turnover per unit	Rs 32,000,000
Profit	Rs 8,000,000
Expert: maximum	5 percent of production.
Materials used, generally:	Meranti wood, teakwood, plywood (commercial and decorative), laminates metal tubes.

Marketing:

Most of the bigger units being concentrated in the urban areas, the majority of the country in the rural areas are not catered to. The reason is that the economically stronger sections of society are located in the urban areas and can afford to pay the high costs for good quality. Thus with the majority of the country being neglected, a great market is lost. To reach this market products lower in price should be evolved. This can be done by having modular design, using more of particle boards and providing furniture of a good quality.

Foreign markets are not easily accessible due to various factors. It may be difficult to make an opening in one of them because of keen competition, the standard of the products and the freight charges.

For the development of the furniture industry in Mauritius, a close collaboration with developed countries should be maintained. Technological know-how obtained from these countries should be adapted to suit local conditions and produce higher standard furniture at cheaper rates.

Design:

Furniture should be designed by taking into consideration local conditions and materials available. They should be such that serial

production can easily be carried out without undue waste of material. So far, in the majority of cases, the furniture is copied from magazines, in the process the technical aspects are often neglected.

Conclusion:

As complete mechanization is not within easy reach of the local manufacturers, special help is required in this field to help produce economically, to help plan the factories in order to save more labour and to increase the output.

N.B.. The figures are the author's own assessment as no official figures are available.



