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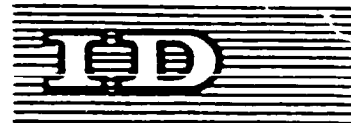


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10317



Distr.  
LIMITED

ID/WG.323/19  
7 January 1981

ENGLISH

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

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Seminar on Furniture and Joinery Industries  
Lahti, Finland, 3 - 24 August 1980

THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY IN SWAZILAND\*

by

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V.81-20088

Swaziland has large plantations of local pine which is the raw material used by both the furniture and joinery industries. This local pine grows very fast and the quality of the material is not very good because the annual growth rings are very far apart. Another problem encountered with this raw material is the tendency to crack or bend. When making furniture, the timber has to be selected and only the better qualities used.

Hardware, adhesives, surface finishes, fittings, upholstery materials, etc. are usually imported from different countries since there is no local production.

The country has two medium sized furniture factories which employ between 100 and 200 workers. A third company is owned by the Government, it is called the Small Enterprise Development Company (SEDCO). It serves as a training centre and SEDCO has many different projects. The furniture manufacturing project comprises 12 local enterprises. These are by and large small, for example, the enterprise that I had has 30 workers which are not permanent but employed according to the need of the business on hand.

These small enterprises usually have minimum investments in machinery (usually a combination machine) and this type of machines are not suited for industrial production. In that case, since the standard of the product cannot be high, the timber is taken to the workshop owned by SEDCO for machining. These small workshops usually produce school furniture and household furniture. The major client is usually the Government.

Only two factories produce for export. These are the Swazi Pine Factory SPF, and Wood Masters. The major export market is the United Kingdom, for which the Swazi Pine Factory produces large quantities of breakfast nooks which are shipped knocked-down, coffee tables, dining chairs, bookshelves. Both factories are foreign owned.

The smaller enterprises need assistance and better machineries to be able to improve production to the standards which would enable them to export.

There are no acknowledged designers for furniture in the country. The marketing department of the various companies are trying to contact foreign countries to propose selling to them the furniture they produce.

As to skills of the labour force, there is no organized training scheme, each plant training its own labour force. It could be said that only the teachers in technical schools are trained and have the basic technological knowledge for work producing furniture.

