

B-77: Survey on the wood based industries in Sri Lanka

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A study was conducted on the structure and technology of wood based industries in Sri Lanka for the Forestry Master Plan revision project in 1993. Major wood using industries in Sri Lanka included sawmilling, construction, furniture production, plywood, crafts and other wooden items. Fibreboards were not produced using wood, and use of wood for pulping was also less.

The sawmilling industry has traditionally been the biggest consumer of industrial wood in Sri Lanka. The sawmills in Sri Lanka were small, output range being 2-7000 m³/year. The quality of sawnwood is not high, especially due to inaccurate cutting and surface quality. Most of the sawmills that process rubberwood had chemical treatment and drying facilities.

There were 13 operating plywood mills in Sri Lanka, all but one peeled their own veneer using rubberwood. Total plywood production of the mills in 1993 was 4900 m³. The output range of the plywood and veneer mills was 125-1300 m³/year, the average being around 400 m³/year. Except for one particle board factory using straw as a raw material, which also faced technical problems, no other wood based panel industries existed in Sri Lanka.

The furniture industry, like sawmilling is widespread throughout the country, however there is a clear concentration in Moratuwa which has a long tradition of carpentry. Most of the producers were small, employing less than 5 people and using less than 1 m³/year of sawnwood on average. The largest 10 producers, which used rubberwood had an average sawnwood consumption of 1500 m³/year. The manufacture of various wooden items such as wooden components, crafts, toys and parquetry was not important in terms of wood use, with the exception of one large parquet factory. However for Sri Lanka it is the most important wood-based export industry.

The biggest challenge faced by the wood-based industries in Sri Lanka is the shortage of logs, due to the logging ban in natural forests, and restrictions on timber transport even from the other sources.

Note: Some parts of the work reported in this abstract has been presented at Wood Based Industries Development Study of the Forestry Master plan revision project (1994).