

B-78: Current uses of timber in Sri Lanka

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Many species of timber were used extensively in Sri Lanka in the past. However, the pattern or the type of end uses of the species have gradually been changed recently. This trend was mainly due to the scarcity of useful natural species. The current trends in the use of timber in Sri Lanka with special reference to construction and furniture timber, were studied.

Two field surveys, one among sawmills and one among timber depots, were carried out in 1992 to collect information on the current trends in the use timber. The traditional uses of different timber species in Sri Lanka were also obtained from the document published by the Forest Department. These two data sets were combined and 196 uses were found. As the number of uses were numerous and sometimes repetitive, data was collected on the use of timbers for construction (Heavy, Medium and Light) and furniture (high quality and common furniture). Availability, prices and available sizes of different species according to these end uses were determined in the field survey.

Table and a computer program giving traditional and current uses of 141 timber species in Sri Lanka have been prepared.

Jak (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*), albizzia (*Paraserianthes falcataria*), mango (*Mangifera indica*) and ginisapu (*Michelia champaca*) were available in more than 60% of the establishments visited. Rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*), coconut (*Cocos nucifera*), teak (*Tectona grandis*), mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), lunumidella (*Melia dubia*), alstonia (*Alstonia* sp.) and toona (*Cedrella toona*) were found in 50-55% of the places visited. Availability of natural forest species was low in the market. The scarcity and higher prices of naturally grown species have led to use of lesser known species. The prices of traditional species were markedly higher compared with lesser known species.

Jak a home garden species was the mostly available species used in construction and in furniture. Other home garden species such as gansooriya (*Thespesia populnea*), toona, ginisapu and mango were also commonly used for both purposes. Plantation species, rubber was the most widely used commercial species in the furniture industry. In the case of construction timber, shortage is compensated by utilization of imported timber.

Current trend is to use traditional species, home garden species, plantation species and imported timber. Lesser known species that can be used as furniture and/or construction timber, which are originated from sources other than natural forests were identified. It is suggested to term these as "alternative timber species". These include pine (mainly *Pinus caribaea*), eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus* sp.), (gansooriya *Thespesia populnea*), rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*), ginisapu (*Michelia champaca*), lunumidella (*Melia dubia*), sabukku (*Grevillea robusta*), toon (*Cedrella toona*), alstonia (*Alstonia* sp.), walapu (*Michelia nilagirica*), albizzia (*Paraserianthes falcataria*), cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), Mango (*Mangifera indica*), goraka (*Garcinia cambogia*), cashew (*Anacardium occidentale*), rambutan (*Nephelium lappaceum*) and siyabala (*Tamarindus indica*). It is recommended to select suitable species from this list in establishing future forest plantations to meet the timber demand.