

ASSESSING THE CURRENT SITUATION OF GHANA'S FOREST PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The forest products sector in Ghana is a major contributor to the country's employment and economic growth. Nonetheless, the industry is increasingly being constrained by acute raw material shortages due to excessive harvest of timber, illegal logging and other anthropogenic activities. The extent to which the industry is impacted by raw material decline is uncertain. To determine appropriate future steps to help curb the overexploitation of timber, we have investigated the current situation by determining the log felling volumes of the leading exporters of wood products, the scope of the industry and the impacts of raw material decline. We have also determined the benefits that companies offer to neighboring communities. Data was gathered from a survey of the managing directors of the companies. Key indicators of natural resources scarcity were used to determine some of the variables that were studied. The results show that, more than just providing jobs and income locally, the industry also undertakes rural development projects. However, the total volume of logs that the industry consumes far surpasses the annual allowable cut. The impact of raw material decline is reflected in the rise in the adoption of lesser-used species, increasing raw material costs, and declining raw material quality. It is suggested that the government support the Timber Validation Department to help curb illegal logging. Continued research to develop a policy and change management framework for the adoption of alternative fast growing fiber materials to supplement natural timber is also proposed.

Keywords: Ghana's forest products industry, current situation, illegal logging, impacts of raw material decline, adoption of lesser-used species and alternative fiber materials

INTRODUCTION

The wood industry is a very important sector in Ghana's economy, ranking fourth and trailing only gold, tourism and cocoa in export earnings (Ghana Forestry Commission (GFC), 2009). In addition, the industry provides direct employment to several thousand people, and partial employment and livelihood for an estimated two million people (Bank of Ghana, 2004). Agriculture (including fisheries and forestry) offers 47.9% of total

employment to the country's total workforce of 11.1 million and contributes significantly to the country's GDP (Bureau of African Affairs, 2011; FAOSTAT, 2011; World Bank, 2011).

The Ghana Forestry Commission reported a total export value and volume of US\$243 million and 528,570 m³ respectively for wood products in 2007 (GFC, 2011). In 2008, all exports amounted to a value of US\$246 million with a corresponding volume of 545,915 m³ (GFC, 2011). Exports in

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