

# C I N T R A F O R

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## **European Imports of West African Tropical Hardwood Forest Products**

**Ivan Eastin. 1989**

### **Executive Summary**

The vast majority of tropical hardwood timber reserves are located in the developing regions of Southeast Asia, West Africa and South America. Many of the countries in these regions, faced with a shortage of foreign exchange and a lack of capital for developing manufacturing facilities, regard their tropical forest reserves as a natural resource for exploitation to generate export revenues.

In order to utilize these forest resources efficiently, long-term forest product export policies should be developed based on an understanding of the international timber market. Those responsible for developing national forest product export policies should:

- analyze the market to identify the importing countries involved and the types and quantities of forest products being imported;
- identify competing countries or regions exporting forest products to the same market; and,
- optimize the composition of forest product exports to maximize their economic return.

This paper focuses on the European market for tropical hardwood forest products imported from West Africa. West Africa is considered separately from Africa based on its dominance in the production and export of forest products. In 1986 West Africa accounted for over 99% of African hardwood log exports, over 95 percent of hardwood sawnwood exports, over 90 percent of veneer exports and over 75 percent of plywood exports. The four categories of forest products considered in this paper are: hardwood logs, hardwood sawnwood, veneer and plywood.

Europe and West Africa share a unique relationship that includes the trade of tropical hardwood forest products. First of all, several European countries have maintained strong economic ties with many West African countries following their independence from colonial rule. Secondly, many West African timber species were first exploited and marketed by European timber companies. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Europe is the primary market for West African forest products, importing over 70 percent of West African exports from 1977 to 1986.

Although this paper focuses on European imports of West African tropical hardwood forest products, to provide a complete description of this market it is important to understand the relationship that exists between the major supply regions with respect to the European import market. The primary supply regions of tropical hardwoods to Europe are Southeast Asia, West Africa and South America.

The paper begins by describing total European imports of hardwood forest products and presenting the share of this import market represented by tropical hardwoods. It next analyzes the share of the European import market held by each of the primary supply regions. It then examines the mix of forest products being exported from West Africa, as well as the nominal unit prices obtained for each type of forest product. Finally, the major importing and exporting countries for each category of forest product are presented.

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