

ATIBT continues its research

Plea for the use of lesser known tree species

by Patrick Martin and Elise Héral¹

Only a hundred or so of the thousands of tree species that are found in tropical forests around the world have commercial value. That poses a threat to the future of sustainable exploitation of tropical forests, also in Central Africa.

If harvesting only focusses on a few well-known tree species throughout the years, the availability of their timber will shrink eventually, sales will decrease and in the end put the concession holder at risk. Sustainable management of forests is an important solution to safeguard forests in Central Africa. In order to secure and expand sustainable forest management in the region, it is necessary to reduce pressure on well-known tree species – such as Azobé, Okoumé, Sapelli and Iroko – and include lesser known tree species (LKTS) in the harvesting plan. This requires thorough research of the properties of timber of LKTS in order to know in which industries LKTS can serve as new alternatives for well-known tree species. ATIBT intends to intensify research of LKTS and share its findings with its members.

It is a well-known fact that it is not easy in general to change deep rooted habits and preferences. No wonder that this is also the case among buyers and users of tropical timber. Therefore ATIBT finds it of utmost importance to provide stakeholders in the market with sound test results and information and involve them in the marketing of new timber options from the forests of Central Africa. Promotional campaigns of lesser known tree species have

already been carried out in the timber industry a long time ago, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. However, back then, studies on lesser known tree species were not based on forest inventories that are as precise as the current inventories, and no market research was conducted. The studies focused on the physical and mechanical properties of timber followed by some donations of timber to industrial players who lost the information after a few years. Buyers at the time were therefore not convinced.

We should nevertheless highlight an example of a successful promotional effort. The Ipé was unknown to the market around 30 years ago. The French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development CIRAD convinced

USER GUIDE FOR ECO-CERTIFIED AFRICAN TIMBER

ATIBT recently published the “User guide for eco-certified African timber, volume 1”. This book will be followed in the near future by a similar volume 2, focusing on the use of timber in Africa. On this occasion new species that are currently hardly known or misunderstood will be recommended.

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Diversity of tree species in the rainforest.