



Pulp and Paper Industry in Nigeria: Current Status, Challenges and Options for Resuscitation

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Abstract

The plans of policy makers in Nigeria to promote local production of adequate quantity of paper and paper products for both domestic utilization and export through establishment of three integrated pulp and paper mills in the country in the 60's – 70's have not yielded adequate result as only one of the mills is functioning at present. In the 1980s two of the mills performed optimally with capacity utilization averaging 65% respectively, leading to the country's self sufficiency in paper requirements. Since the early 1990's however, the operatives within the Nigeria paper industry virtually depends on importation of nearly all their paper and ancillary requirements as a result of collapse of the primary pulp and paper manufacturing concerns. This costs the nation in excess of N500 billion in foreign exchange equivalent annually, and eventual closure of the enterprises that cannot operate competitively within the sector and general disillusionment. High dependence on imported inputs, most especially, long fibre pulp, processing equipment, spare parts and secondary raw materials such as pulping chemicals, etc had militated against optimal performance of the sector.

Efforts to revitalize the industry through privatization of primary paper manufacturing concerns were not met with adequate success as the mills have been extensively cannibalized, resulting in their negative net worth. However in 2006, the three pulp and paper mills were eventually privatized. Till today however, only the Nigeria Paper mill is operational. The mill is presently converting waste paper into recycled fluting paper as a result of high cost of imported long fibre pulp. This, nevertheless, has attendant quality implications. Consequently, there is need for long lasting solution to the long fibre pulp problem. At the interim, localized pulp mills can be set up at the source of locally identified indigenous long fibre raw materials. A more permanent solution however will be intensification of R&D into the silviculture of pine and the establishment of more stock of pine and further research into the properties of different age classes of Nigerian grown *Pinus species* with a view to determine their rotational age since it has been observed that at suitable environment, Nigerian grown pine reaches pulpable size in 12 years. Private sector investments are also urgently required in the areas of small scale pulp, paper and chemicals production in order to meet local demand for paper and paper products. The need for a presidential task force for the sector and establishment of a pulp and paper fund has become necessary to productively realign investment operations in this sector.

Key words: Kenaf, long fibre pulp, short fibre pulp, capacity utilization, *Pinus species*, privatization, pulp and paper industry, commercialization.