

## Industry view ►



## Ghana's efforts to promote sustainability in timber have won the country a much-prized partnership with the EU

**A**s an industry worth 300 million euros (£255m) a year and employing up to a million people in some capacity, timber and forestry is hugely important to Ghana.

With forests covering almost a third of the west African country's total area, timber was, at one point, the most valuable export after cocoa and gold and although it has now been overtaken by tourism and other services, it continues to play a vital part in trade overseas.

The wide range of Ghanaian timber includes some of the most durable species in the world, suitable for use in bridge construction, sea defence and as railway sleepers, as well as lighter woods for interior domestic use.

"We are hugely proud of our forestry and timber industry, and particularly of our trading partnership with the European Union," says Dr Nurudeen Iddrisu, London head of the Forestry Commission of Ghana, which regulates the use of forest and wildlife resources in the country,



Ghana's timber industry abides by EU rules on legal trading and sustainability

oversees their conservation and coordinates policy. "In terms of trade there is a great deal of competition with other African countries, but few can compete with us when it comes to sustainability."

Ghana is the only country in Africa to have entered into a trading partnership with the European Union by agreeing to abide by its rules on legal trading and sustainability. This includes assurances on responsible logging practices and the imposition of a finite upper limit on the amount of timber harvested and exported annually.

"This is an entirely voluntary partnership which we entered into in 2008. We believe it demonstrates that we are a developing country that understands and is willing and able to adhere to EU requirements and expectations on properly-sourced and sustainably-managed forests," says Alex Offei, a manager at the forestry commission London office. "We want to be completely transparent about how our timber trade operates."

All exports of wood leaving Ghana and entering the EU will now be subjected to a sophisticated barcoded tracking system that allows the consumer to follow the route taken by the timber all the way from the forest, via the saw mill and into the marketplace. Using GPS, RFID and bar code readers technologies, it allows buyers accurately to place the source and the timber's whereabouts at any given point on its journey, assuring buyers that it has been harvested legally and providing information about exactly which forest it originated from.

"We follow this process very rigidly," says Offei "so the consumer can be assured there has

been a 'chain of custody' from the raw material all the way to the finished product."

But Ghana's pride in its forestry does not begin and end with the trade in timber. The country is currently looking for investment partners in a bid to open up new eco-tourism opportunities.

The commission is planning to build lodges in its forests that will allow people to experience their natural beauty at first hand. The diverse wildlife and plant-life to be found in its numerous

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national parks, resource reserves and sanctuaries includes elephants, buffalo, antelopes, lions and more than 300 species of bird. Mole National Park alone covers some 4,840km.

Iddrisu says: "Our forests are a wonderful place for ecology and study of the environment. We want to offer opportunities to families and individuals who want to experience being at one place with nature or to scientists who want to investigate and research our forests and the species they contain.

"We believe we have a unique resource that we want to share with the world, and it is a dream we would like to make a reality with the right investment partners."

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