

A wood without wood to save forests

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The Earth is losing forests at the rate of around 50 football fields every minute. Yet, it is difficult to wean people away from wood-based products. This is the problem area that Indowud, a three-year-old company with operations in the outskirts of Chennai, is trying to solve with its innovative product — a natural fibre composite board made from agricultural husks.

“Indowud NFC is a wood without wood,” explains BL Bengani, founder of Indowud, and a former plywood entrepreneur. Bengani founded Uniply, which he sold in 2015. “Many say ours is an artificial wood while we say it is natural. While wood fibre boards have wood particles in it, Indowud NFC boards have only agricultural husks as the basic raw material,” says Bengani.

The company procures around 3,000 tonnes of husks annually. The plant’s production capacity is 5,000 tonnes to produce around 2 lakh sheets. This means, a saving of around 10,000 cubic metre of natural wood every year, he says.

The idea of making boards from agricultural husks came during a visit to the US. After nearly two years of research, Indowud NFC was introduced in 2019. “As the present generation cares about issues like sustainability and environment protection, it was the right time to enter with a sustainable product,” said Bengani.

The husks are crushed to powder form and then dried at 70-80 degrees to reduce the moisture content. The fibre is pulverised to get fine powder. Certain additives are added including a combination of natural, minerals and PVC resin imported from South Korea and Japan. The powder is then rolled out into sheets of plywood, he said.

While a plywood cannot be bent or twisted, Indowud can be moulded in any shape and gives architects the flexibility of designing things according to their imagination, said Iyappan, a carpenter. Agrees Kishore Panikkar, Partner, architectureRED, who used Indowud panels to achieve the seamless sinuous form of the central helical staircase in a residential project in Chennai. The material lends itself to bending easily, and in two directions, while retaining stability and strength.

Availability of agricultural husk is abundant around the company’s plant situated at Gummidipoondi on the Chennai-Kolkata Highway. “This gives an incremental revenue to the farmers, who would otherwise dump these husks as waste,” said Bengani’s son Varun Bengani, who takes care of sales.

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