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### **Bamboo wood industry: Dark horse in NE economy**

15 November 2020



Bamboo is no longer "poor man's timber" but is considered as 21st century "Green Gold". Traditionally bamboo was only used to build houses, fences, cultivation tools etc. But with advances in engineering and technology, bamboo can now be transformed into lumber which is known as bamboo wood and is used as an alternative to timber for different products like furniture, wall panels, tiles etc. China has dynamically developed the bamboo sector. In the last 20 years China has established a huge chain of bamboo plantation to prevent fast decline of the green forest resources and come up with an alternative of wood. Bamboo is now considered as industrial raw material that has the capacity to bring economic prosperity to any nation in the globalized market.

The global market size of bamboo and associated products is estimated at USD 72.10 billion in 2019 with a CAGR of 5% from 2019 to 2025. In 2018, the global market was valued at USD 68.8 billion with China alone accounting for USD 39 billion in 2018. India is the second richest country in the world in terms of bamboo resources after China. According to reports of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, the bamboo and rattan industry of India in 2019 was worth Rs. 28,005 crore. But the export of bamboo & bamboo products in 2015-16 & 2016-17 was only Rs. 0.11 crore and Rs.0.32 crore respectively as compared to import of Rs 148.63 crore and Rs 213.65 crore during the same period. This means that India was a net importer of bamboo. According to reports of Forest Survey of India (FSI), bamboo is grown across approximately 14 million hectares of forest area which is about 12% of total forest cover. But it has failed to harness the great potentiality by increasing the production and creating industrial prospects. Bamboo wood or bamboo lumber is the next big thing in the household goods segment. It involves the mechanized and semi-mechanized processing at different levels which transforms bamboo culms into logs to be used as an alternative to timber. Premium processing creates high value products like bamboo flooring and laminated furniture, medium value

processing which is less capital intensive produces products like chopsticks and mat boards while low value processing involves limited value addition to bamboo culms like paper and pulp industry.

Bamboo is very eco-friendly to the environment which does not harm our environment like timber products and plastic products. Assam is the largest producer of bamboo in the country. "Jati bamboo" which is a local name of a bamboo species that is used for the production of bamboo wood product is abundantly found in this region. Bamboo wood products are the alternative the timber and plastic products which are harmful to our environment. To produce timber products it is required to cut down trees which as results endanger our eco-system and on the other hand plastic products are non-degradable products and thus bamboo becomes the best alternative products as a building material for day to day use consumer utilities. New business unit can enter into this industry of manufacturing bamboo wood products which has a high market potential. But in Assam there is only one enterprise engaged in the manufacture of bamboo wood products like doors, doors frame, floor tiles and furniture's like tables, chairs, bed etc. The demand for bamboo wood products is increasing in the market of Assam and with just a single manufacturing unit the market potential remains untapped. Bamboo is considered as green gold in the 21st century in the emerging market. It takes only 4-5 years to grow a mature bamboo plant where as to grow a mature tree it takes 30-40 years. Bamboo is one of the most abundant and an environment-friendly resources available in this region which is not being used to its full potential. It is considered as a part of rural life for building houses, farming tools, daily use items like bags, buckets and beds as using timber is a costly product for the rural people. North East India offers great scope for bamboo industry in the entire country based on the availability of resources and demand and is also eco-friendly to nature.

Based on a recent survey, it has been found that a majority of the people are not aware of bamboo wood products are not able to differentiate between bamboo wood products and bamboo products. Opportunities always lie around but it needs to be identified. Bamboo wood products have a high potential in this region but it needs to reach the masses properly. Consumers always have inhibitions towards new products but once it catches up in the market there is no stopping. There must be a dedicated effort both from the government as well as private investors towards popularizing bamboo wood products as a perfect alternative to timber and plastic. Assam sits on the treasure trove of bamboo resources. The raw materials are naturally available in the state and only remain to be optimally utilized. Understanding the opportunities, more bamboo wood manufacturing units should come up and capture the unfulfilled demand of the consumers. There is a positive response in the market for the bamboo wood products in the state. The government should also put in its step forward in encouraging investment in this sector. It should provide subsidy and provide opportunity for new innovation with proper financial support for setting up new manufacturing unit. It is undeniable that timber was once the root of human civilization and settlement with abundant forest reserves all across the globe. But over the years with increasing deforestation there is a world-wide movement towards reduced use of timber and prevent deforestation. Assam has also lost a significant amount of forest cover over the years and as an alternative to timber, plastic has come to the forefront lately but it has also drastic impact upon the environment which is a direct threat to our sustainability. Under such circumstances, bamboo wood serves as a perfect alternative with similar durability and comfortability. Promotional measures and dedicated investments in this sector will not bring rich dividends but also direct us towards sustainable economic development.

Source: <https://www.sentinelassam.com/editorial/bamboo-wood-industry-dark-horse-in-ne-economy-511693>