

STA CASE STUDY SERIES

Cognac, France

Responsible Timber Procurement: The “Moabi experience”

Contextual background

The city of Cognac in France decided in 2005 to implement sustainability criteria in its timber purchases. This was in response to concern about the use of rare and endangered wood species in outdoor furniture, which had been labelled only as “tropical wood”. However, analysis of the product revealed that the furniture was made from Moabi – an endangered wood species often smuggled from the Congo and Cameroon. Moabi is a tree of great importance – the oldest, found in the rainforests of the Congo Basin, may be more than 2500 years old and reach 70 m high. Today, three out of four Moabi cut in Cameroon are used for flooring, doors and windows in France.

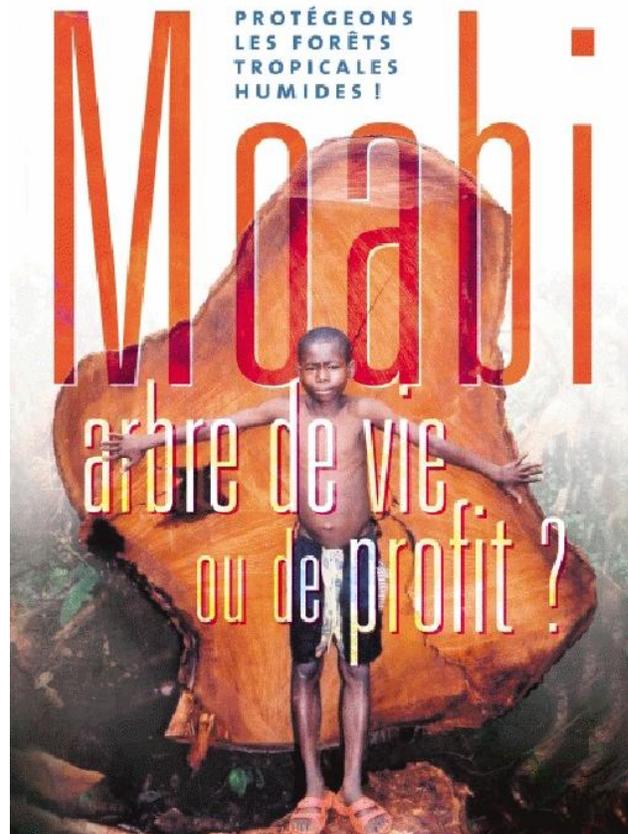
The “Moabi experience” in 2005 created a new dynamic in procurement for the City of Cognac, which then began trying to source sustainable raw materials, and replace street furniture made from exotic species.

The 2006 reform of the French public procurement law, to comply with European law, allowed the services to propose a more restrictive specification, enabling the city to be more ambitious and to include environmental requirements in all its calls for tenders. Since then, the City of Cognac has required compliance with PEFC and FSC label criteria when purchasing products that are derived from or contain wood. The criteria pertaining to these labels have been applied to wood for construction, wall panels and door units. Sustainable procurement forms part of Cognac’s Local Agenda 21 programme.

Tender implementation

Subject-matter: Environmental assessment of the market for wood construction for the city of Cognac.

After the “Moabi experience” and replacement of the street furniture in 2005 using sustainable wood, the 2006 reform of the French public procurement law enabled the city to be more ambitious and to include environmental requirements in its calls for tenders for wood for construction, wall panels and door units.



Technical criteria used and verification:

In order to prove that products are sustainably sourced, the following specifications apply for the supply of articles of wood for construction for the City of Cognac:

- The wood shall originate from sustainably managed forests. The forms of verification are demonstration of having fulfilled the latest environmental criteria under the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Keurhout, Canadian Standards Association (CSA), Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) certification schemes, or equivalent – and their approval numbers.
- Without these labels, the supplier can provide other appropriate evidence which confirms their ability to meet the current ecologically sustainable management criteria.
- Tropical wood must not appear on the list of endangered species as stated by international agreements.
- Purchased articles must neither be treated with creosote and pentachlorophenol (PCP) based products nor with chromium-, copper- or arsenic-based products. Although French law allows their use by derogation the Town of Cognac refuses to use this exemption.
- Adhesives used for plywood must be classified E1 (formaldehyde < 8mg/100g) according to the EN 312-1 norm.

Additional/complimentary measures

- The Mayor of Cognac produces a free magazine every two months, with chapters raising public awareness on issues of sustainable development and forest protection, including explanations of FSC and PEFC labels.
- Forest weeks are organised with educational activities for adults and children.

Challenges encountered

- Early market engagement involved collaboration with suppliers in order to find alternative products for the wood market which would be in accordance with sustainability criteria. Finding suitable alternative wood products required trial and error over a period of 2 years. For instance, initially suitable wood products were found but their adhesives did not respect formaldehyde emission criteria.
- French sustainable development organisation Réseau Grand Ouest was able to provide guidance on environmental criteria and specifications for the contract and on publishing the tender.
- It was necessary to maintain discussions, visits and exchanges with suppliers, to maintain standards such as plywood formaldehyde emissions, and to cultivate a real collaboration with the supplier and manufacturer.

Results achieved

- Certifications and the particular constraints required in order to comply with sustainability criteria have not had a negative economic impact for the City of Cognac. In 2011 the City saved 5% in purchasing costs compared to the same purchase carried out in the previous year.
- All wood products purchased by the City of Cognac are certified with the PEFC label, as a minimum.

- The treatment method used on the products avoids chemical treatment. Products containing heavy metals are also not employed for wood requiring further treatment.
- Despite certification not being required for door units because of the lack of certified products on the market, in practice, door units purchased by Cognac are all PEFC certified.
- From 2008, the purchase of plywood has been reduced by half.
- Criteria for paper and printed material have also been introduced since 2011. From now on the City of Cognac will also require that products meet the criteria from the PEFC certification scheme or equivalent when purchasing paper or printed material.

Lessons learned

- The same procedure will be used for upcoming purchases of the same nature. As including sustainability criteria has proven that the City of Cognac can save money, there is no reason why this procedure should not be renewed.
- The City of Cognac has been sharing this particular good practice experience with other local and regional authorities within the study group on sustainable public procurement of wood, monitored by the French regional network for the Greater West (Réseau Grand-Ouest).

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For more information on the Sustainable Timber Action (STA) project please visit
www.sustainable-timber-action.org

