

## A FEW CLARIFICATIONS ARE IN ORDER!

# TIMBER NAMES

### INTRODUCTION AND ISSUES



As timber is derived from a tree, it is often accepted that it carry the Latin botanical name given to the tree by scientists. This can be summarised by its genus and its species. For the record, this name is given on the basis of criteria relating to the tree's leaves, flowers or fruits, but not the timber that it produces. Several difficulties arise at this level: the botanical name isn't easy to remember, and in the field, the woodcutter or person carrying out the forest inventory will have a hard time identifying the species with certainty.

At the practical level, **users are looking for the most homogeneous physical, mechanical or aesthetic properties possible.** The characteristics of a type of timber depend on the cellular arrangements of the timber and their structure. Usually, the botanical species (the tree) ensures that a user will know its expected properties. However, sometimes within the same species the timber will have characteristics that vary due to environmental factors (nature of the soil, sunlight, water, silviculture, etc.) of the place where the tree grows and **the botanical name criterion will no longer be sufficient.** Other criteria, such as density or colour, can be added to reduce this variability. Examples: plantation teak (*Tectona grandis*) won't have the same durability as a natural forest teak if forestry is intensive.

**In addition, it is often the case that several species - of the same genus or of different genera - produce timber with relatively uniform characteristics.** For this reason, and since ancient times, timbers have been marketed under **Variety** names, which can include several genera and species. Such naming is perfectly justified because it is specific to the timber itself. There are many examples of several genera and species being grouped together. One of the most obvious is Kedondong, which is the timber variety produced by some species of the *Canarium* genus, by all species of the *Garuga*, *Protium* and *Santiria* genera and by *Dacryodes costata*.

**Cases where a variety relates to a single species, or all the species of a botanical genus, are very rare.** Examples, Sapelli = *Entandrophragma cylindricum*, or Bungur = *Lagerstroemia* sp. pl. (all species of the genus).

Note that to identify several species falling under a genus, the abbreviation «sp. pl.» (which means *species pluralis*) was created. (Although equivalent to spp, sp. pl. is preferred to avoid further confusion with sp., ssp. or sspp. which don't mean *species pluralis*). Please note that this abbreviation doesn't mean that a variety covers all of the species of the genus. The same also applies to temperate varieties. For example, the European oak can be designated as *Quercus* sp. pl. (*Quercus robur*, *Quercus pedunculata*, etc.) but it would not be acceptable to mix holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) with it or cork oak (*Quercus suber*). Another example are the

following varieties: Red Balau, Yellow Balau, Dark Red Meranti, Light Red Meranti, White Meranti, Yellow Meranti, which are all different and come from various species of the same *Shorea* genus.

The name of a variety is generally relayed in each country and region by common names given by the people, known as «**vernacular**» names or also «ordinary» or «trade» names. As there are many vernacular names out there, the risk of confusion is too great for the trade. It is not uncommon that - depending on the origin of the timber - a single vernacular name can apply to different varieties. For example, the Ipé, which means «bark» in Brazilian, is a vernacular name given to timbers whose trees have a characteristic bark. In fact, many timbers have the vernacular name Ipé without having the characteristics of the Ipé variety that European users expect.

## BACKGROUND AND SOLUTION

To this end, 60 years ago ATIBT established a **nomenclature** of tropical timbers defining each variety by a unique internationally recognised **pilot name** with all of the botanical species that it includes. The merits of this nomenclature were fully understood by France's Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry, which recognises ATIBT as the «guardian of the temple» in terms of tropical timber nomenclature. Regular updates are necessary to introduce or remove certain varieties according to market volumes, but also because botanical names can evolve. For example, the *Tabebuia* genus, some of whose species corresponded to the Ipé, has become *Handrohantus* to some extent.

This pilot name is the result of a choice made for practical reasons, using the usual name under which the timber is most commonly traded, adopted either by the main exporting country or by the main importing country.

The determination of a variety's pilot name is crucial, as its commercialisation depends very largely on the adoption of this name by the public. In addition, protection of the name ensures that the properties of the variety it covers remain constant.

Another solution to simplify the names without risk of confusion would be to use the 4-letter code defined in European standard EN 13556. As with ATIBT's nomenclature, this classification of varieties defines the genera and species that are relevant in terms of the properties that are needed. For example, Azobé (*Lophira* sp.pl., *L. alata*, *L. procera*) is identified by LOAL.

Gaps and omissions make this standard difficult to use at the moment, but its revision is underway and ATIBT is highly committed to this effort.

## THE TIMBER NAMES MENTIONED IN THE EUTR

The «trade name» and «common name» mentioned by the EUTR are both synonymous with the «vernacular name». Therefore, neither of them ensures the accuracy of the information.

Regarding «where appropriate», the need to add the scientific name of the variety in the information to be gathered is specified in the EUTR's implementing regulation. It appears in article 3 «Information on the supply of timber by the logger», paragraph 2: «*The full scientific name of the forest variety referred to in article 6, paragraph 1 (a) of (EC) regula-*

*tion no. 995/2010 shall be communicated in cases where the use of a variety's common name is ambiguous*».

In this respect, if the vernacular name isn't the pilot name, ambiguity may occur, and «where appropriate» therefore becomes the rule. This rule is impossible to implement, because without a botanical analysis upstream of the logging operation or a downstream anatomical analysis (which cannot always be carried out until the species is determined), it is risky for a producer to specify a precise species.

## CONCLUSION

The full scientific name is only necessary in the event of ambiguity and should therefore not be provided systematically.

In terms of timber designations, the name of a timber is always its variety name. **This variety name is defined by a multitude of vernacular names which can be ambiguous, and by a single pilot name that ATIBT has retained in order to eliminate confusion in trade.** This timber variety is generally from several types of trees, each individually defined by a botanical name (genus and

species) in Latin. The relationship between varieties and botanical names is a link (more complex than it seems) that is dealt with in ATIBT's nomenclature.

ATIBT's latest nomenclature version dates from 1982. Along with several experts in the field, the association's technical director updates this nomenclature. Once completed, it will be available on ATIBT's website ([www.atibt.org](http://www.atibt.org)) and on the legal-timber.info website ([www.legal-timber.info](http://www.legal-timber.info)).

### Key takeaways:

In order to meet EUTR requirements in terms of information on tropical timber varieties, ATIBT's timber variety pilot name is both necessary and sufficient. Moreover, the 5 April 2005 circular issued by France's Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Industry validated the usefulness of these pilot names: «... in the case of timber from tropical forests, the document must specify the variety's scientific name in Latin or, failing that, the pilot name set by ATIBT...». However, if you would like more information, the correspondence between the pilot names - vernacular names - botanical names can be found in ATIBT's nomenclature.



Fair&Precious recommends the purchase of FSC® and PEFC-PAFC certified tropical timber.