SAWING GUIDELINES
FOR SMALL-SCALE TIMBER PROCESSING

Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI)
Forest Products Research Centre- Karura

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SAWING GUIDELINES
FOR SMALL - SCALE TIMBER PROCESSING

Specially developed
for
Chain Saw, Mobile Saw Bench and Pit Saw Operators in Kenya

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Illustrations on Cover Page:
Top Left: Chain Sawing
Top Right: Bench Sawing
Bottom: Pit sawing

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Sawing Guidelines for Small-Scale Timber Processing

FOREWORD

Small-scale on-farm timber processing is gaining widespread acceptance especially in Kenya as a means of producing timber in small volumes from trees grown on the farms. It is also an important source of livelihood for small logging operators, farmers and timber dealers. However, small-scale timber processing has often been dogged by controversy. Its association with illegal forest harvesting activities, especially in areas bordering government forest plantations and their relatively low timber recovery are the main problems facing the sector.

The main small-scale timber processing methods; chain saws, bench saws and pit saws are relatively inexpensive and portable, thus, timber can be sawn on site without having to transport the logs to the saw mills. They are also very useful in areas where access is limited by terrain and lack of saw mills.

This manual has been prepared not only as a guide for potential operators but also as a skill improvement tool for the current operators. It details step by step the techniques that need to be used when harvesting and sawing timber using the various sawing equipment available in the country, for higher recovery and better quality timber. It concludes by addressing issues related to safety when working with these equipments. It is hoped that this manual will provide useful information on techniques and skills needed in timber sawing.

November, 2006

P. K. A. Konuche
Director-KEFRI
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<th>Term</th>
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<td>Beam</td>
<td>A long, thick piece of sawn timber</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>A long, thin flat piece of sawn timber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cant</td>
<td>A thick piece of timber sawn from a large diameter log for re-sawing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edge (to)</td>
<td>To remove the round ends of a piece of sawn timber to make it have regular, right angled ends</td>
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<td>Pith</td>
<td>The white substance present along the central axis of tree stems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quarter Sawing</td>
<td>Cutting a log into four pieces along its radius</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saw kerf</td>
<td>The path along which the saw passes when cutting through wood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slab</td>
<td>A thick piece of wood material cut off the side of a log to make flat surface of the log</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slabbing</td>
<td>Cutting timber into thick flat pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squaring</td>
<td>Cutting off the edges of timber to make regular sides</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taper</td>
<td>A gradual decrease in tree diameter towards the top</td>
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Sawing Guidelines for Small-Scale Timber Processing

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Timber sawing is aimed at producing sized timber from round logs. The process requires skill and the right machinery and equipment. Large-scale sawmills as well as small-scale setups have been used with different levels of success worldwide. In Kenya, while large-scale saw milling found acceptance, small-scale timber processing faced lack of technology and skills. The most common opinion therefore has been that small-scale timber processing methods are wasteful and produce timber with very rough surfaces. These methods may however continue being used on the farms due to their advantages compared to the large-scale saw milling machinery.

Some of the advantages of small-scale timber processing methods is their ability to be used on the same site where the tree falls. This reduces the costs of extracting and moving the logs to a different sawing site. It also greatly reduces the potential environmental damages associated with timber logging practices in the large-scale sector due to the use of heavy logging equipment (Pasiecznik et al., 2006). They are also relatively cheap to buy and maintain. There are three main small-scale timber-sawing methods in Kenya; chain sawing, mobile bench sawing and pit sawing. These are used in different areas in single and some times in combination.

Timber recovery is the amount of sized timber obtained from a given amount of logs and is sometimes referred to as sawn timber yield. Majority of the small-scale sawyers in Kenya have limited skills in sawing techniques used to increase timber recovery and quality. Thus, the average recovery is as low as 23% for chain saw operators and about 27% and 39% respectively for bench saw and pit saw operators at the sawing stage (Muthike, 2003a). The actual recovery from the available wood can also be controlled at every stage from tree felling to the timber handling before selling. Since about 50 to 80 percent of total saw milling costs are in terms of raw materials, it is important for the sawyer to recover as much of the raw materials as possible. This calls for a good understanding of recovery rates and the factors influencing it. It is therefore important that mobile saw bench millers, chain saw operators and pit sawyers are educated on how to improve timber recovery and quality.

This manual aims at making available useful skills to sawyers and trainers involved in small-scale on-farm timber processing sector. It offers guidelines on the important steps to take during felling and sawing of timber using the sawing methods available to the sawyers. Equipment maintenance and safety have been included due to their direct influence to timber recovery and quality. By following these guidelines, the sawyer is expected to recover more of the available tree resources into quality, merchantable timber. Training sawyers on these sawing guidelines has resulted in improved timber recovery and quality, hence increases financial gains for both the sawyers and tree owners (Muthike, 2004b). The number of trees cut for sawing at any particular time for sawing is also reduced.
CHAPTER 2

TREE HARVESTING AND PREPARATION

2.1 Felling

- Pre-determine a suitable direction for the tree to fall when cut. This is usually referred to as directional felling. Losses occur when trees fall on hard surfaces causing breaking or splitting of the log or by falling on existing establishments like buildings and overhead conductors (power and telecommunication lines).
- Cut the tree at the lowest possible stamp height; maximum 6 inches (150mm) above the ground to maximise on the amount of wood material available for sawing into timber.

To achieve a safe and accurate felling, three cuts are necessary (Figure 1). The first two cuts 1 and 2 take out the sink, which controls the direction of fall. The third cut 3 is the back cut positioned to leave a hinge.

![Figure 1. Part of tree showing position of sink and back cut](image)

- Make the sink cut to about 1/4 of the stem diameter. This limitation is made to leave the tree with enough strength to hold standing until the back cut is made leaving the hinge.
- Make the back cut horizontally or at most 25mm above the base of the sink cut. This should extend to leave an uncut area (hinge), about 1/10 of the tree diameter, but not less than 25mm between the two cuts. The hinge controls the rate of falling of the tree to avoid sudden falling, which would lead to wood splitting and possible twist from the direction of fall and stem kicking back.

Direction of fall can also be greatly influenced by strong wind and weight of the tree crown (branches). Leaning trees are also difficult to change their direction of fall. The following can however assist if...
done before felling the tree.
- Cut and remove heavy branches from the tree. This makes the tree crown lighter and easy to control its direction of fall.
- Tie one end of a rope to a strong branch near the top of the tree and the other end tightly to a tree in the direction of fall. Some times a number of people may pull the rope, but this has to be done with care to avoid the tree falling on them.

Caution: Ensure that all people and animals are as far as at least twice the length of the tree and in the opposite of the expected felling direction.

2. 2 De-branching (Removing Branches)
Poorly de-branched logs can easily roll in any direc tion, especially if it props on one branch.
- Cut branches at the base from the bottom to the smallest log diameter that can be sawn by the available sawing equipment. Most sawing machines can saw a diameter as small as 150mm.

![Figure 2. Removal of branches](image)

2. 3 Crosscutting
To divide the tree into shorter logs for sawing, the following steps are necessary;
- Correctly measure the log length taking into consideration market requirements.
- Measure shorter logs if the tree has higher taper or there is a bend to control.
- Add to the required log length sufficient allowance to take care of any slight splitting of sawn timber and for squaring of the finished timber pieces.
- Make the necessary marks to guide the machine operator in crosscutting.
- Crosscut accurately guided by the marks.

Timber recovery increase with increasing log length up to 4 metres. Logs with lengths beyond 4 metres produce many short pieces of timber during sawing, especially in species like cypress and grevillea, which have pronounced taper. It is also important to remove bends to get fairly straight logs for ease of sawing (Figures 3, 4 and 5).
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Figure 3. Measuring and crosscutting of logs

Figure 4. Marking Logs for crosscutting

Figure 5. Logs already crosscut

2.4 Moving Logs
- Move logs from the cross cutting site to an area, where the sawing equipments can be set.
- Carry logs off the ground instead of rolling or skidding. Off the ground carrying avoids getting logs dirty, muddy or sandy. Dirt, mud and/or sand lowers the sawing speed and recovery rate due to:
  - Damage and wear of saw teeth
  - Poor exposure of logs (making defects invisible)
  - Difficulty in handling, which leads to log wobbling during sawing

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3.1 Taper Sawing
Taper sawing is the sawing of logs to reduce taper effects (Figure 6).
- Saw the log along the bark, to produce short side slabs and boards until a flat surface is obtained along the full log length.

![Figure 6. Taper sawing](image)

3.2 Split Taper Sawing
This is the sawing of the log along the pith (Figure 7). It is mostly used if quarter sawing method is to be employed, especially when very large diameter logs are sawn (See Quarter sawing).
- Saw the log into two halves and re-saw each half separately

![Figure 7. Split taper sawing](image)

3.3 Through and through (Slabbing)
- Cut the first side slab from the log to produce a flat surface (Figure 8).
- Saw timber planks along the same plane.
- Edge and trim the boards to the required sizes and to remove wane.

This method is fast, has high yield and is commonly used in converting timber for furniture and joinery especially hardwoods due to good wood colour and grain matching. This pattern is the best when sawing logs with almost zero taper.

![Figure 8. Through and through sawing pattern](image)
3.4 Quarter sawing
To do quarter sawing, do the following:
- Cut the log into two halves along the pith.
- Divide each half again along the pith to get four quarters.
- Saw each quarter separately into the required timber sizes.

This pattern is commonly used when sawing extra large diameter logs or when converting timber for grain and figure appearance especially where aesthetics is the prime objective. Quarter sawing results in lower yield than through and through method, due to the many cuts that have to be done, which increases the wood lost as saw dust. In small-scale timber sawing, quarter sawing is only appropriate when handling very large logs. Figure 9 shows the quarter sawing pattern.

![Quarter sawing](image)

**Figure 9.** Quarter sawing; Quarters sawn with different patterns

3.5 Cant sawing
Cant sawing is when the log is sawn by either removing only the side slabs in small diameter logs, to make square beams, commonly referred to as cants or by cutting large diameter logs into large size beams. In both cases, the aim is to get regular shaped beams, which can be easily transported, for re-sawing into required timber sizes.
- Measure accurately the sizes of beams to be sawn
- Exercise care when sawing cants to produce square beams, to reduce the risk of squaring when re-sawing. Figure 10 shows cant/beam sawing pattern.

![Cant Sawing](image)

**Figure 10.** Cant Sawing
CHAPTER 4

USE OF SAWING EQUIPMENT

There are three main sawing equipments used in small-scale timber processing; Chain saws, Mobile saw benches and Pit saws.

4.1 Chain Saws
Chain sawing uses an engine powered chain saw, operated by one person. Most chain saws have saw kerfs of between 7.5 to 10mm.

When using a chain saw for timber sawing:
- Choose a thin chain to reduce the saw kerf.
- Sharpen the chain correctly using the right file for the chain in use.
- Use the correct fuel/oil mixture. Chain saw manufacturers recommend 200ml of 2T oil to 5 litres of fuel. More oil tends to clog the engine compression chamber and spark plug, while less oil means inadequate lubrication of the engine, resulting to over heating and shorting of engine life (see your chain saw operator’s manual).
- Measure timber sizes correctly with adequate allowances included.
- Draw sawing lines and follow them correctly, holding the saw firmly to ensure straight and regular cuts (Plate 1).

Plate 1. Chain saw method

4.2 Bench Saw
This method uses circular saws of various thicknesses mounted on and powered by a tractor (Figure 11). The tractor provides the power used to drive the saw during timber sawing.
- Choose thin saw blades. Thin blades however require frequent tensioning.
- Sharpen and set the saw teeth correctly to minimise saw kerf and for ease of sawing.
- Determine and cut the opening slab as small as practically possible to reduce waste.
- Determine and set the sawing table gauge correctly with adequate timber thickness allowances included for subsequent sawing of the required timber sizes.
4.3 Pit Sawing

Pit sawing method uses a long flat blade with handles on both ends and is operated by two people (Plate 2).

When using pit sawing method:
- Sharpen the saw to ease sawing and set saw teeth correctly to minimise saw kerf.
- Cut small side slabs to open the log.
- Measure, draw and cut accurately along the sawing lines.
CHAPTER 5

SAFETY MEASURES IN TIMBER SAWING

This section gives only basic principles and is not a substitute for workers proper training or using detailed guidelines on safe machinery handling practices. Having emergency procedures is strongly recommended and these should be communicated to the others in the team.

5.1 Personal protective equipment (PPE) and Safe Working Regulations

- Wear protective equipment when working with a machine. The strongly recommended types are a helmet with visor (face protection) and ear defenders, steel toed boots, and gloves, trousers and jacket with clogging material (Ministry of Labour & Human Resource Development, 2006). However, realistically, the standard protective clothing is very warm and unbearable in tropical climates, expensive and possibly difficult to obtain. Therefore a relatively equivalent level of protection from different types of clothing should be considered. For example, industrial boots or any leather shoes will offer better foot protection than open shoes, sandals or bare feet. Any lather gloves can be good for the hands. Cotton wool in the ears and welding glasses will offer better ear and eye protection than nothing at all (Pasiecznik et al, 2006).
- Tie up long hair, do not wear loose clothing or anything that could possible restrict movement or become entangled in the machine.
- Make available a first aid kit on site, but if not, have at least a large clean piece of material as a wound dressing if the worst does happen.
- Do not take alcohol, stimulants or other intoxicating drugs while at work.
- Do not smoke when working with petrol-powered machines like the chain saw.
- Avoid working when too tired, as fatigue increases chances of accidents.

5.2 Basic safety Measures

5.2.1 Chain Saws

- Use a well maintained, tensioned and sharp chain.
- Ensure no one is near your working zone.
- When working alone, be sure someone knows where you are.
- Stand firmly on the ground with your legs well apart, one foot forward and do not over-reach to avoid loosing stability.
- Place the left thumb around the front handle of the chain saw to keep a tight grip.
- Support the weight of the chain saw by keeping it close to the body or on the log.
- Operate the saw with two hands for optimum control.
- Always apply the chain brake when not cutting.
- Be extra careful when using chain saw on slopes where you could slip and fall.
- Do not use a chain with the depth gauges removed or reshaped (Fehr C., 2006).
- Stand to the side of the cutting path of the chainsaw.
- Do not cut above shoulder height.

5.2.2 Saw Benches

- Sharpen and set the saw teeth correctly before starting to work.
- Change saws when they become hot to avoid buckling.
- Use a push stick to move the logs when close to the saw to save the hands from the running saw blade.

5.2.3 Pit Saws

- Sharpen and set the saw properly for ease of cutting without draining energy.
- Ensure working decks/pits are firm and secure
- Secure logs properly onto the deck to avoid possibility of rolling out
- The operator working under the deck should be well protected against dust and other falling objects. A helmet is a good consideration.
FURTHER READING


Fehr C., 2006. Dealing with the Realities of Chainsaw Milling in Uganda and Eastern DRC. Policy brief. HDRA, Coventry, UK.


