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# Move to protect traditional knowledge, genetic resources

## Jason Santos

KOTA KINABALU: Existing traditional knowledge and genetic resources from the State will have their intellectual properties protected, thanks to an understanding sealed on Monday, to document all data into the national digital database, MyTKDL.

MyTKDL or Malaysia Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, under the purview of the Malaysia Intellectual Property Corporation (MyIPO) set up in 2009, functions not only to serve as a digital database but also to provide the mechanism of protection to issues related to violations like biopiracy, bio-prospecting and misappropriation.

Similar cases have been reported before such as India's claim over the roots of the Basmati rice against the United States, which claimed it was created in Texas, in spite of the plant being well documented in India for hundreds of years.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU),

between MyTKDL and Sabah Biodiversity Centre marks the beginning of the compilation process in the hope of converting into an agreement to give grounds for legal certainties in the future.

Sabah Biodiversity Centre Director, Dr Abdul Fatah Amir proposed that it would help increase confidence between the State Government and MyIPO in the work of intellectual property, if it is approved by the State Biodiversity Council later.

"This MoU is important as Sabah is rich with biological resources and native traditional knowledge related to biological resources. This effort would also aid the Biodiversity Centre in developing a system of protection of its resources and knowledge," he said.

He said the MoU would help harness the system as encouraged by the State's Biodiversity Enactment 2000.

Dr Abdul said four core initiatives had been underlined like legal assurance for

access and utilisation of such resources, raising awareness on the importance of traditional knowledge, tapping its potentials including for commercial reasons and patent check.

"However, most of these data are currently fragmented, some are readily available within the centre, some in other departments like the Museum, while there are still those untapped", he explained.

To make the compiling work efficient a special task force will be formed, which will be led by the Biodiversity Centre and members consist of departments, agencies, non-governmental organisations and MyIPO, he said.

Meanwhile, MyIPO Chairman, Datuk Hj Abd Manan Ismail said although MyTKDL is launched under the Ministry of Domestic Trade, Consumerism and Co-operatives, it is still in its infancy stage.

It came about after realising its importance and potential of protecting national traditional

resources and was one of the initiatives under the National Intellectual Property Policy 2007.

MyIPO Director-General, Datuk Azizan Mohd Sidin explained to date a total of 1,443 data on plant samples have been uploaded into the database under two categories Traditional Knowledge and Genetic Resources.

These data came from the Native Development Department (Jakoa), Malaysian Institute of Medical Research, Forest Research Institute Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and from Sarawak.

He said all these data would help MyIPO patent checkers as reference for patent.

"In the process of expanding the scope of MyTKDL, new data on traditional Malay medicine and traditional complementary medicine will be inserted soon.

"More MoUs would likely materialise from these two areas soon," he said.