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# Value-adding of acacia resource in Sabah

**KOTA KINABALU:** The Sabah Timber Industries Association (STIA) is making headway in making commercial use of plantation-grown Acacia Mangium in Sabah a reality.

This is made possible through the RM500,000 grant from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation's Community Innovation Fund (CIF).

A ceremony on the document exchange for the collaboration between STIA and the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) was held in Kota Marudu, witnessed by Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Panglima Dr Maximus Johnity Ongkili on May 2.

FRIM is appointed as the technical consultant to STIA in the collaboration.

The cooperation forms part of the effort by STIA in assisting its members in making use of local plantation-grown acacia mangium for the production of higher value-added products for the export market.

Once succeeded, it shall help in boosting the current export of wood-based products to a greater height.

"The current level of acacia utilization in the state of Sabah is low.

"Although Acacia plantation in this state started as early as 1980's, the resource is mainly exported as chips and exported to Japan, or sold in the form of logs to China and Vietnam," said Datuk James Hwong You Chuaang, president of STIA.

"Through the collaboration, FRIM is working together with our members in developing truck flooring boards for the

export market.

"We are indeed fortunate that the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation is supportive enough to provide the necessary grant for such a meaningful endeavor," he said.

Dr Rahim Sudin, director of Forest Products, FRIM, said for the state of Sabah, in the year 2011, the volume of export of wood-based products was recorded at 1.3 million M3 and worth 2.0 billion respectively.

In term of financial contribution to the state of Sabah, the forest revenue has also dropped from as high as about RM1.1 billion (70% of total State's coffer) in early 1980s to about RM200 million (4.64% of total State revenue) in 2011."

"The National Timber Industry Policy (NATIP), however, targets for 60% value-added wood-based products export against 40% for export as timber commodity by 2020, and a corresponding national export value of RM53 billion by then.

"Being a national forest products research institute, FRIM is honoured to be able to participate in this collaboration and support the NATIP aspiration to be achieved," he said.

Dr Tan Yu Eng, head of FRIM Project Consultant, explained that the scope of the cooperation covers principally development of effective means to improve the drying quality of acacia mangium through the introduction of some

pre-treatment techniques, exploring the possibility of applying Saw-Dry-Rip (SDR) in its sawn-timber conversion and the development of finger-jointed truck-flooring boards in compliance with regional market requirements.

"By improving the quality and recovery of the sawn-timber follows by product development, which are the current technical challenges encountered by the members of STIA, it will enhance the profitability of the acacia industry in Sabah, subsequently increase the revenue generated by the State," said Tan.

It is believed that the project will benefit a wide spectrum of STIA members involving in sawmilling, kiln-drying, timber suppliers, traders, flooring and furniture manufacturers. With better return, it will help boost the competitiveness of the plantation and wood-based industries, besides other social-economic benefits including job opportunities in Sabah.

Fong Ming San, STIA's project coordinator, is enthusiastic about the project.

"It is hoped that the endeavor will lead to a breakthrough in the local plantation timber industry. The market for acacia truck flooring boards alone is forecasted to be huge, in the range of RM1 billion for the first few years, especially for countries like Japan, Korea and US. This does not include other opportunities such as use of similar resource for garden furniture, domestic flooring boards etc," he said.