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STIA making headway in value-adding of acacia resources

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 was made possible through the Mosti Community Innovation Fund (CIF) where RM500,000 were granted recently.

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

FRIM was appointed the technical consultant to STIA in the collaboration.

The cooperation forms part of the effort by STIA in assisting their members in making use of local plantation-grown acacia mangium for the production of higher value-added product 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 utilisation in Sabah is low.

Although Acacia plantation started as early as the 1980s, 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 MOSTI is supportive enough to provide the necessary grant for such a meaningful endeavor".

"For Sabah, in the year 2011, the volume of export of wood based products was recorded at 1.3 million M3 and worth RM2 billion respectively.

"In term of financial contribution to the State, the forest revenue has also dropped from as high as about RM 1.1 billion (70% of the State's coffer) in early 1980s to about RM200 million (4.64% of total State revenue) in 2011", Dr. Rahim Sudin, Director of Forest Products, FRIM, added.

"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 RM 53 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".

"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", explains Dr. Tan Yu Eng, Head of FRIM Project Consultant.

"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".

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 the State of 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 U.S.A. This does not include other opportunities such as use of similar resource for garden furniture, domestic flooring boards etc."

He further added by stating that "the Research and Development programme has been fulfilling, fun and rewarding."

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The document exchange ceremony witnessed by Maximus (centre) Dr. Rahim Sudin and Stephen Chaw Zie Shing, Secretary-General of STIA (right) .