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STIA making headway in value-adding of acacia resource in Sabah

KOTA MARUDU: 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 MOSTI Community Innovation Fund (CIF) (RM500,000) 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, Sabah, witnessed by the Minister of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI), YB Datuk Seri Panglima Dr. Maximus Johnity Ongkili on 2nd May 2013. FRIM is appointed as 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 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 Chuang, 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 the state of Sabah, in the year 2011, the volume of export of wood based products was recorded at 1.3million M3 and worth 2.0billion respectively. In term of financial contribution to the State of Sabah, the forest revenue has also dropped from as high as about RM 1.1 bil. (70% of State's coffer) in early 1980s to about RM 200 mil (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 sup-

port 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.

Mr. 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 program has been fulfilling, fun and rewarding. A big thank you is in order to all! This bottom-up exercise by the Acacia players, many who has also generously come forward with resources and time, facilitated by STIA and support from Government agencies to do this. It also enhances the "street credibility" of STIA that it "Walk the Talk" on issues of NATIP, conservation and sustainability, and welfare of its members. Lastly it telegraphs to all domestic and international agencies that STIA is collaboration-ready, your local reliable partner on Sabah timber issues."

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A photograph taken during the document exchange ceremony witnessed by the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Datuk Seri Panglima Dr Maximus Johnity Ongkili (centre) Dr. Rahim Sudin, Director Forest Products Division, FRIM (left), Stephen Chaw Zie Shing, Secretary-general of STIA (right).