

Shift in focus of effective foresters

By Larry Ralon

KOTA KINABALU: There is a growing trend nowadays to consider the needs of other stakeholders, for example, nearby communities or neighbourhoods or rural residents living within or adjacent to tracts of forest.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Vice Chancellor, Prof. Datuk Dr Mohd Noh Dalimin, said these considerations are developed with the prevailing forest harvest laws and regulations together with the public's involvement.

"The traditional forest management plans which are chiefly aimed at providing logs as raw material for timber, veneer, plywood, paper, or other industries, have shifted into considering quality and quantity of products, and employment and sustainability become central," he said.

Post-harvest plans become imperatively aligned with reforestation (tree planting by species), weed control, fertilisation, or the spacing of young trees (thinning of trees that are crowding one another), he added.

The duties of foresters include preventing and combating insect infestation, disease, forest and grassland fires.

"Foresters are specialists in measuring and modelling the growth of forests (forest mensuration)...increasingly, foresters may be involved in wildlife conservation planning and watershed protection," said Mohd Noh.

His speech was delivered by his Deputy Vice Chancellor, Prof. Sanuddin Tahir, at the Regional Conference on Forestry Education here. Mohd Noh said the path to be a competent forester, is the curriculum in the forestry education during the formal education, particularly at tertiary level.

"Generally, by its nature, forestry education should be able to create the behavioural changes in terms of knowledge, attitudes, values and

skills required for sustainable management of the resource," he said.

This might include advocacy (or public education role of forestry education aimed to create public awareness, interest and appreciation of sustainable forest management policies, programmes and strategies through a systematically planned and aggressively implemented advocacy programmes), knowledge/technology generation (through research, relevant institutions could help generate and build on the information and knowledge base) and also capacity building (i.e. forestry education produces competent human capital needed for sustainable forest management).

He said generally, several human and technical competencies had been identified for an effective forester.

"The human competencies include seeing, thinking and doing systematically, communicating, managing and supervising people, managing conflicts and interacting or collaborating with others, effectively.

"Aside from that, new technical competencies should also be developed, including sourcing and processing information through information technology (IT), geo-spatial visualisation, interpretation and application, and integrated and balanced management of forest ecosystems."

They should be able to practise professional ethics, and be conversant with national, regional, and global issues relevant to forestry, to become forestry professionals.

Mohd Noh also said that the selection of four themes in this conference, namely, Forestry Education and Forestry Curricula Development, Needs and Expectation of Government Employers/Wood Based-Industries, Government Policies on Tertiary Education with emphasis on Forestry Education and Forestry Management will enable the participants to communicate and discuss various relevant topics in depth, particularly exchange experience among delegates from the Asean region.



Prof. Dr Mohd Noh

