

Local Mining Industry In Sabah Empowers Young Talent

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TAWAU, April 5 (Bernama) -- While the mining industry is often associated with foreign expertise and closed technologies, the sector is now beginning to change as more locals – especially young people – step forward to master the skills and technology in this field.

At a gold mine in Bukit Tundong, Balung, young people are seen as the backbone of operations, with the majority of the workforce made up of locals who now fill various roles, including technical positions.

Southsea Gold Sdn Bhd, a Sabah-based gold mining company established in 2008, currently employs 300 workers, with about 75 per cent of them being local youths under the age of 35.

Assistant geologist Shahirah Atirah Lee, 27, said that her interest in the field was driven by her active nature as well as the opportunity to work in the field.

The Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) graduate said that a career as a geologist gives her the chance to observe the entire mining process while also exploring various locations.

Shahirah Atirah said the involvement of young people in the industry not only opens up new career opportunities but also provides exposure to a field that was previously less explored by locals.

“I consider myself fortunate because opportunities to be involved in this industry are not very common. Here, I am able to see the entire process from the early stages right through to gold production.

“A career in geology is also interesting because it has various branches, including mining, oil and gas, as well as construction,” she told Bernama.

Managing director of Southsea Gold Sdn Bhd, Datuk Lo Fui Ming, said that efforts to train the local workforce, including through industrial training, are very important to ensure the sustainability of the industry.

He said the approach of sharing technology and expertise also acts as a catalyst for greater involvement of local people in the industry.

“I want more people to join the industry. Right now, I’m training young talents. If we don’t start developing our own people from the beginning, it will be difficult to find local workers who truly understand this industry.”

“Back when I started this business years ago, it was very hard to find skilled local workers in gold mining, as it was mostly dominated by foreign workers.

“I will 100 per cent share the knowledge and technology with them. If you are Malaysian, I will share it with you, because I want more people to come in and learn,” he said.

At the same time, the company’s local technological capability continues to stand out, having achieved a gold recovery rate of up to 95 per cent – among the highest in the industry – and is capable of producing up to 20 kilogrammes of gold per month.

He also encouraged university students in related fields, such as geology and mining, who are interested in gaining experience to apply for industrial training at the company.

Lo said that Sabah has strong potential in the mining sector, with more than 20 gold mining sites identified that can be developed in stages.

Meanwhile, the company’s geology supervisor, Norfazilah Ramlan, 36, who has over 13 years of experience, said that the mining industry in Sabah is now regaining momentum.

She said that the growth has increased demand for skilled workers in geology while also opening up more opportunities for young people, including women.

According to her, Sabah has great potential in the mining sector due to its wide distribution of minerals, but it requires more investment to be developed sustainably.

At the same time, her colleague, senior metallurgical engineer Nor Syahirah Rusdi, 30, said that the mining industry in Sabah provides wide employment opportunities for locals without the need to migrate elsewhere.

With six years of experience, she said the sector not only offers opportunities in professional fields such as engineering and geology, but also provides jobs for technical workers, including operators.

“The mining industry offers good job opportunities for local residents, especially in Tawau, while allowing them to work closer to their families,” she said.

According to her, the industry’s growth also strengthens the local economy as more job opportunities are created across various skill levels.