

Unlocking Sarawak's Bio-economy Potential through Biodiscoveries in Nature



SBC Researchers analysing bioassay results. PHOTOS: SBC



SBC Researcher extracting natural compounds.

BY EDWIN KALOM

THE second half of 2018 is set to witness an exciting sequel to biodiscovery breakthroughs, as Sarawak Biodiversity Centre (SBC) proudly releases two prototypes: wet wipes infused with the gentle scents from the wild orchids and flowers of Borneo, and foot sprays inspired with scents captured from indigenous plants of Sarawak.

Over the past year, the Centre has shifted its R&D to high gear, as it explores commercially viable wellness products that are nature-based for domestic and international markets.

"As part of the oldest tropical rainforest in the planet, Sarawak shares a rich, untapped biodiversity that offers immense opportunity. At SBC, our R&D is intent on tapping on the bio-economy trajectory, in particular, the wave of consumer demands for products that promotes health and wellbeing," says Dr Charlie Yeo, SBC's Chief Executive Officer.

"Ongoing research collaborations between SBC scientists and international partners have uncovered and 'decoded' significant leads, from plants that could help diabetics to Sarawak's resident algae that could feed, fuel and heal the world. We are constantly looking for industry partners to propel

our findings for commercialisation as well," Yeo adds.

The significance of botanical value and benefits to wellbeing are deeply entrenched among Indigenous communities. The global wellness industry worth US\$3.7 trillion is now three times larger than the pharmaceutical industry, making a strong case for the protection of indigenous traditional knowledge and benefit sharing on the use of their knowledge. At the same time, it is also important to be vigilant of biopiracy and its negative impact on novel efforts.

In Sarawak, capacity building through SBC's Traditional Knowledge (TK) documentation programmes brings about empowerment with greater community awareness on the processes involved. It is not a straightforward process as the SBC Traditional Knowledge team needs to assimilate the wishes of the respective Indigenous community at every stage of the process.

Periodic meetings and continuous dialogue are initiated until a collaborative understanding is achieved in unison. Partnering communities are equipped with propagation know-how, wild craft approaches and understanding principles of sustainable harvesting.

The bio-economy trajectory presents a novel economic oppor-



SCENTS captured from Bellina (Normah Orchid, Sarawak State's Orchid).

tunity for indigenous communities' Traditional Knowledge and Sarawak's rich biodiversity. While the research and biotech process are tedious, the returns in the long run for both the planet, investors and indigenous communities are significant.

In its effort to create more awareness of its work in Sarawak, the Centre organises Biodiversity Day and participates in international events held across the State annually.

This July, SBC is participating in the Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF2018) from 13 to 15 July. With a refreshing twist,

SBC's 'Scents of Borneo' booth at the RWMF2018 will showcase an array of invigorating sensory experience unique to Borneo. Visitors can have a hand in its Rainforest Basin, Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Aromatherapy and more. With a minimum purchase of RM10, enjoy a free 'foot therapy booster' session, and free Traditional Steam Spa session (with every purchase of RM30 and above). Perfect after all the walking at RWMF. At the same time, stand a chance to win amazing 'Gifts from Borneo' while contributing to SBC's community projects with every purchase.