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R&D in Transformation Programme for the Natural Rubber Industry*

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The NR industry has played a pivotal role in Malaysia's economy since the introduction of the commodity to the country in the late nineteenth century. The scenario changed when the government refocused its initiatives to industrialisation programmes in the 1980s as the key economic activity of the nation. However, in the late 1990s the plantation commodities mainly oil palm and rubber saved the country from global economic turmoil. This was due to strong fundamentals which allowed the plantation commodities to be the saviour of the nation's economy in the past. But how about the future? While the current performance is buoyed by high price and demand from consumers, will the situation remain the same or better in the future? Malaysia has lost her status as the major producer of rubber and oil palm to neighbouring countries, thus, what is next for Malaysia? The transformation programme for plantation commodities has been identified by the government and spelled out clearly in the economic transformation programme (ETP) which was launched in 2010. For rubber, there are four entry points (EPP) in the National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) of ETP. All the EPPs are backed-up by research carried out by the Malaysian Rubber Board (MRB). Among research outputs from the MRB are premium clones for increasing productivity and for use in replanting and new planting programme, special processed rubbers viz. "Ekoprena" specifically for green tyres, and "Pureprena" for rubber products such as automotive components are products from research and development programme carried out by MRB. To ensure the success of the transformation programme it is necessary for MRB to carry out more research primarily to support activities in EPPs. The research activities cover the upstream, midstream and downstream sectors. Support from the government is also crucial primarily to provide adequate funding and required facilities for basic and applied research. The KPIs of these research are scientific and technical papers, innovation, commercialisation and uptake of the technologies by the users or consumers.

This paper describes the role and functions of research and development activities in the transformation programme for the rubber industry.

Keywords: Transformation programme, NKEA, rubber R&D.