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KOTA KINABALU: Opposition leader Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal questioned the state government's decision to collaborate with Sawit Kinabalu in a 100-acre rice project in Kota Marudu.

Looking at the potential of agriculture activities in the state to eradicate poverty, Shafie said the government need to take comprehensive approach to address the issue, and look at various steps to take advantage of the fertile soil conditions in the state.

"I have suggested before to revive Lembaga Padi and I also saw in the TYT's speech that there is a 100-acre rice project in Kota Marudu, in collaboration with Sawit Kinabalu.

"Why must Sawit Kinabalu? The state government must look into this. I am suggesting don't involve Sawit Kinabalu because this GLC is for oil palm cultivation.

"Go downstream for palm oil products. We need to focus on downstream to provide job opportunities in an effort to eradicate poverty.

"We know that Sawit Kinabalu is a GLC that has the ability to place our palm oil in a better position, better than Sarawak, better than the peninsula," he said in his debate speech at the State Assembly sitting on Monday.

Shafie also suggested to the state government not only to examine which areas are suitable for agriculture, but to map out, make long-term and short-term plans in agriculture.

Meanwhile, he urged the state government to set up Papar Dam at Mondoringin, Papar to reduce its high dependency on independent power producers (IPPs).

"Infrastructure in Sabah is worrying. We are not only talking about water, road or electricity but about SESB's RM2 billion

debt to Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB). It is not even SESB's debt but it is TNB's. Why can't they write off?

"We all know this is happening because of our high dependency on IPP, while the state government is suggesting genset even though the price of diesel is very expensive.

"That is why I urge the government to set up Papar Dam.

"Just look at Sarawak's Bakun Dam. There were protests before but today, the revenue has reached RM7.2 billion a year. No water problem, no electricity problem and in fact they are selling it to Sabah and Kalimantan. We must forward looking because we want infrastructure," he said.

When he was the Chief Minister, Shafie said there were investors from China interested to build Papar Dam and railway in Sabah.