

From the country of sea tribes: Mangrove and environmental education

AAI has a long relationship with Oman and we have introduced the country on various occasions in this newsletter. This time, I visited Oman as part of a human resource development project aiming to establish an environmental information center for mangrove ecosystem conservation. In recent years, the words such as “middle east”, “the Gulf” and “oil producing countries” may conjure up images of a place like Dubai with modern cities with high rise buildings. However, Muscat, the capital of Oman is without high rises and has a very calm atmosphere with buildings that are mainly white or other gentle colors.

Compared with other oil producing states in the Gulf, oil production of Oman is small and the percentage of immigrant workers is also low. This is a result of “Omanization” that tries to utilize the Omani labor force without relying on foreign labor. Omanization is particularly thoroughly implemented in government offices. At the office of our counterpart agency the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, most of the staff are Omani apart from some tea boys who are Indians. When I worked in neighboring UAE, it was very difficult to find any local counterparts. It was in a way shocking to see an Omani woman at the register at the supermarket in Oman! All taxi drivers are Omani. There was a move towards restricting barbers to Omanis. But apparently there was a lot of opposition as people were not very comfortable having their hair cut by an Omani who is not commonly believed to be good barbers. There are some funny stories like this.

In my current work, the main objective of the activities is to implement and strengthen environmental education activities in order to promote sustainable mangrove ecosystem conservation. Mangroves provide habitats for a variety of fishes and animals and create a rich ecosystem. Therefore, by protecting mangroves, we can protect biodiversity and maintain ecosystems.



Left: Mangrove forests in Qurm Nature Reserve
Right: Observing mangrove forest from the board walk

Using mangroves as an entry, the Qurm (Mangrove) Environment Information Center is expected to provide a space for nurturing the children to be environmental conscious future generations with a global outlook.

Many think about “desert tribes” when hearing the words “middle-eastern oil producing states”. However, Oman could be described as a country of “sea tribes” due to its long history of sea trade. During its heyday, Oman ruled a large area from the western part of Pakistan to Zanzibar in Africa to the south. It was a vase oceanic empire that embraced a variety of cultures and religions. Ancient Oman belonged to the Arab world, yet had an element of integration with Asian culture from places such as Pakistan. It was open towards the outside world, having exchanges with Africa reaching as far as Zanzibar.

There is a special meaning for establishing the Qurm (Mangrove) Environment Information Center in Oman with such a historic background with exchanges with other countries. The Center is expected to forge links with the outside world by collecting and dispatching various types of information related to mangroves and environmental conservation. Such a role is very appropriate for a country like Oman.

(By Koto, March 2012)



Ministr of Environment and Climate Affairs



Left: Mangrove planting experiences by children
Right: Nature game to understand mangrove's ecosystem