

## Relaxed but stimulating trip to Kalimantan, Indonesia

Over the last ten years, I have worked only in the Middle East and Africa, and I did not have any opportunity to visit Asian countries. Despite hoping to visit various countries extensively all over the world, I have been involved in specific countries such as Syria and Palestine for 5-6 years, and Sudan for 7 years (ongoing), under long-term project schemes.

In 2017, however, I had a chance to go to Indonesia on a short trip of nine days, from September 15 to 23. We conducted a field survey in Kalimantan (Borneo island) focusing on the usage of *Tengkawang* oil tree (*Dipterocarpaceae*) and sales and marketing methods of its value-added product, which was a project of JIFPRO (Japan International Forestry Promotion and Cooperation Center).



Visiting a *Tengkawang* village    Exploration of *Tengkawang* trees

Indonesia was a new country for me to experience. The preparatory period for the trip was just less than a month, but I felt somewhat fresh and began to study the Indonesian language with excitement. I took great pleasure in touching the landscapes and flora/fauna of a wet environment; very different from the dry lands that have become so familiar to me. I opened books related to tropical rainforests for the first time since my university days.



Huge trees of *Tengkawang*

Seeds of *Tengkawang*

The survey team included three other members who were experienced in the field of forest resources and Indonesia, so conversation in the car during the trip was pleasant despite our tough and tight schedule. I noticed something new every day. It was a meaningful expedition and I constantly learned new things.

The purpose of this survey was to explore the possibility of utilization and commercialization of *Tengkawang* oil as a forest resource to substitute oil palm and as a source of cash income for local people. Through interviews and observations on the Dayak people, those who live in a forest environment, we were able to get basic information such as various types of livelihood activities including pepper and rubber manufacture, shifting cultivation and livestock breeding; the relationship between villages and *Tengkawang* forests; the significance of *Tengkawang* for residents; construction of an oil extraction plant by Dutch experts and other projects; and the relationship between oil palm plantation and topography. In particular, the preceding efforts of a Dutch-supporting NPO were very informative. The visions and challenges involved in utilization and commercialization of *Tengkawang* oil became clearly apparent.



A forest of oil palm

Seeds of oil palm

Further progress is expected in the future regarding the utilization and commercialization of *Tengkawang* oil, and discussions are developing in more concrete and specific directions, from general theory to every detail. For me, this Indonesian visit was a valuable opportunity to acquire new findings and perspectives of the tropical rainforest, although I only participated as a temporary member of the team. I would like to keep my eyes on trends in tropical rainforests that are so different from the arid lands in which I have spent so many years.

(By Koga, November 2017)