

# Forests can Change the World

Since ancient times, forests have been the basis for civilization and supported human life. However, with population growth, forests have been cut down and are gradually decreasing.

The decrease in tropical rainforests had already begun in the 1970s when many developing countries began exploiting forests to pursue economic growth. In the world, 80 percent of deforestation is concentrated in three areas: Brazil, Tropical Africa and Indonesia. Indonesia is experiencing deforestation and carbon dioxide stored in peat swamp forests is being released due to land reclamation for oil palm plantations.

Now, global warming has become an international issue. Attention is also focused on the adverse impact of deforestation on the environment. Cutting down forests into fields results in releasing carbon dioxide that was previously absorbed by the

forest. In the 1990s, about 20 percent of carbon dioxide emission was due to deforestation. Thus, the importance of forest conservation for reducing the emission of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide began to be realized.

Forest conservation prevents global warming while contributing to maintaining biodiversity and enabling local communities to benefit from the forests. Nevertheless, the effects are somewhat indirect and require much time to be visible. If developing countries can receive economic support for not cutting down trees, this will create direct and short-term benefits for forest conservation.

The Director of the REDD Research and Devel-

opment Center of the Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute, Mitsuo Matsumoto, points out, "It is important to understand the reasons behind deforestation in each country to appropriately plan for forest conservation. In most cases, the reason for deforestation is agricultural development but other reasons exist like civil war. Also cash crops differs in each country such as oil palm, cassava and rubber trees."

Trees are cut down in order to harvest food or earn cash income in the first place. Striking a balance between meeting local needs or sustaining a decent living and forest conservation is a challenge. Every country, including Japan, is formulating guidelines which work for all of them. Initiatives for the future have just begun.

