

Policy dialogue on shifting cultivation in the Eastern Himalayan Region
International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and
Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD INDIA)
2004

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Introduction

ICIMOD

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development was established in 1983 in Kathmandu, Nepal, serving eight regional member countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas and the global mountain community. As a mountain learning and knowledge centre, ICIMOD seeks to develop and provide innovative solutions, in cooperation with over 300 regional and international partners, which foster action and change for overcoming mountain people's economic, social and physical vulnerability.

LEAD India

Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD India) is the Indian chapter of a global network of individuals and non-governmental organizations committed to sustainable development. Its mission is to create, strengthen and support networks of people and institutions promoting change towards sustainable development - development that is economically sound, environmentally responsible and socially equitable. LEAD carries out its mission through capacity development and strategic, outcome-oriented activities consisting of policy, research, action-on-the-ground, communications, and training.

Memorandum of understanding

Given the mandate of both organisations, a partnership memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed with an objective to bring about an increased effectiveness of policy and programme measures for the sustainable management of natural resources in the Eastern Himalayas and to increase awareness of the specificities of shifting cultivation systems among policy makers, development agencies (government and non-government), practitioners and academic institutions.

Background

Jhum (Shifting Cultivation) has been seen as environmentally not sustainable and destructive of forest and wildlife. The practice has always been subjected to policies that do not take into consideration the socio-cultural and livelihood implications for the poorest section of the society. Insufficient land availability and inadequate time for land replenishment and recovery (through forest regrowth) in the current situation suggests that options have to be found within the existing constraints for strengthening *jhum* and evolving ways to ensure forest regeneration.

There was the need to inform the national and international research agenda and policy makers of the strengths of the existing practices given appropriate policies and the encouragement of longer-term investment by finding solutions to issues rather than problems. The focal point representatives and lead persons from the Eastern Himalayan Countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal and India (North East) had already started the process of documenting farmers' innovations and policy issues in their respective areas.

The objective

With this as background ICIMOD and LEAD-India entered into the Memorandum of Understanding to facilitate and initiate an effective policy advocacy process in India. This was also to make sure that an increased awareness of the specificities of shifting cultivation systems would be created among policy makers and academic institutions.

Achievements

Based on the MOU signed between ICIMOD and LEAD India, the following initiatives have been achieved:

- *“Policy Dialogue:* The LEAD India will initiate the process for National policy dialogue in India through meetings, workshops and publication with identified key policy makers and brief them about the findings of the case stories provided by ICIMOD.”
 - Workshop in New Delhi for a policy framework supportive of shifting cultivators’ needs, priorities and strengths: LEAD-India together with the country focal team and ICIMOD organized a one to one consultative meeting with policy makers from the ministries of Environment and Forests, Agriculture and also the Planning Commission. Subject expert academicians were also present. While there have been numerous workshops and seminars on shifting cultivation in the past, this particular consultative meeting was unique as it focused on understanding shifting cultivators and the policies that abound them rather than simply debating the system itself. A comprehensive background paper titled “To Jhum or Not to Jhum” was also prepared for this meeting and has since been widely circulated with policy makers both in the National Capital and other states.
- *“Act as hub for Shifting Cultivation Information:* The LEAD India shall set up an Eastern Himalayan Decentralised Resource Centre (DRC) in partnership with The Missing Link at Guwahati to act as the Shifting Cultivation information focal point. The DRC shall be mandated to identify the names of all the institutions and individuals and create a database on who are associated with Shifting Cultivation. In the long term, the DRC will establish strategic alliances for advocacy and capacity building work pertaining to Shifting Cultivation, besides other sustainable development issues in the Eastern Himalayan region. The DRC shall also remain as the repository of knowledge on shifting cultivation, providing a window for and to the outside world.”
 - The fact that the focal point in India, Mr. Amba Jamir is a LEAD fellow; and that The Missing Link (TML) hosts LEAD-India’s Eastern Himalayan Decentralised Resource Centre not only adds more value to the partnership but will ensure sustainability in the long run. As a direct output of the MOU, LEAD India’s Eastern Himalayan Decentralised Resource Centre (EH-DRC) now continues to be the hub for activities and information centre on Shifting Cultivation in the region. Together with The Missing Link (TML), the EH-DRC continues to advocate for Agriculture policies that recognises Shifting Cultivation as a unique agricultural system with a forestry phase, rather than just an age-old primitive form of cultivation. So far, the partnership has ensured that all important documents and issues are directly made available to key individuals and organisations in the region.
- *“Documentation and Collating:* LEAD India will collate all the available information on the policies referring to Shifting Cultivation from the all the

concerned ministries of the Government of India, which will be an integral part of the decentralised resource centre (DRC).”

- In continuation with what was already being collected and collated by the Focal Team, the EH-DRC together with TML are carefully documenting all available materials and documents. In order to ensure sustainability this activity, however, requires not just financial support but also technical inputs in terms of proper database management and other systems.
- *“Information sharing:* An information sharing system will be established. The LEAD India and its DRC will collate and disseminate best practice information (Talking points prepared by ICIMOD), between all the concern policy makers, research institutions, development agencies etc; to sensitise them on all the positive aspects of shifting cultivation. Place and mode of printing/ preparing dissemination packages shall be mutually agreed upon, based on cost efficacy, which ICIMOD shall bear.”
 - Sensitization on the issue of shifting cultivation systems amongst policy makers and crucial civil society groups in India: Building upon the knowledge base already developed from the case stories and other issues documented by the country Focal Team, LEAD-India has actively shared and disseminated these lessons among key stakeholders (NGOs, government officials and academics) through its wide network of fellows across the country.
- *Consultative Processes:* LEAD India shall organise two or three events/ workshops in order to provide negotiating space and a neutral platform for key stakeholders to initiate and carry forward the process of consultation and dialogue. This will also enable identification of vital players imperative for achieving the objectives of this MOU.
 - LEAD India has already initiated a series of discussions both at the national and local levels. While some of these were held online, others were held in a more participatory manner with local communities and individuals, where ever LEAD fellows are working or are present.
 - In the long term, LEAD through its EH-DRC proposes to undertake a series of consultative workshops in each state with primary stakeholders in the north-eastern region of India. It is envisaged that these shall facilitate the respective state governments to formulate agriculture policies that recognises and facilitate shifting cultivators to actively participate in productive research and other economic activities.
- *“Shifting Cultivation Policy Workshop:* The LEAD India will be an active partner for the proposed Shifting Cultivation policy workshop, to be conducted under the joint aegis of ICIMOD and LEAD India, and will guide and help ICIMOD in the organisation of the said workshop through initiating policy dialogue with concerned policy makers at the national level, by

advocating the positive aspects of Shifting Cultivation with other partners for effective policy change at the National level.”

- Besides having partnered with ICIMOD and others to successfully hold the 1st Regional Consultative Workshop on Shifting Cultivation in the Eastern Himalayan Region, LEAD India continues to advocate for effective and positive policy change. The EH-DRC is now fully operational in terms of providing support and other services to state governments and other organisations with regard to issues relating to shifting cultivation and the policies thereof.
- “*Networking*: The LEAD India with its diverse national and international network, and its ability to provide neutral space for dialogue will be able to initiate the process of mobilising individuals, media, and institutions to look into the benefits of shifting Cultivation which can lead for an effective policy dialogue with policy makers.”
 - Sharing and dissemination of good shifting cultivation practices within and outside of the LEADnet (spread across 83 countries): This has been done in a less formal way within the LEAD network and it will in the long run supplement or add to the activities of the *Jhumia* network. The overall objective of sharing with LEADers across India or the world was to create a level of awareness amongst a unique network of leaders who are or would be in decision-making positions in their respective countries or regions. It is hoped that such sharing of knowledge and concerns will continue to add to the growing constituency of communities that understand and appreciate shifting cultivation as a system rather than just another primitive practice. As a long-term output, the LEADnet could further galvanize the advocacy for Shifting Cultivation in numerous international fora and debates.

Impacts

While the collaborative partnership between LEAD India and ICIMOD has successfully produced the set objectives, it would also be worthy mentioning other unforeseeable impacts attained.

1. As an immediate impact of the numerous networking and other consultative processes - including the consultative meeting in New Delhi - much awareness has been raised amongst policy makers within the different departments and organizations of Government of India. For example, the Planning Commission of India has now not only developed a dossier on Shifting Cultivation within its Environment Division but has requested LEAD-India to make a special presentation to the Commission on Shifting Cultivation. They have referred the “*Shillong Declaration*” and other papers to the Agriculture Ministry to study policy implications. A member of the Planning Commission visited Nagaland (site of 2 of the case studies) recently to get a first hand view of the NEPED innovations in shifting cultivation and has suggested a Planning Commission funded programme for up scaling efforts.

2. Both the Agriculture and Environment divisions within the Planning Commission of India as well as the Directorate General of Forests have now taken special notice of the imperatives for Shifting Cultivation.
3. Some state governments - particularly the Government of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh - have been in touch with LEAD with regard to Agriculture policy and sustainable management options.
4. The media and NGOs in the region are now seeking information on shifting cultivation from TML and the EH-DRC. Earlier, although shifting cultivation was a popular form of cultivation in the hills, there was no central place to get information on it.
5. The *Jhumia* e-group network is ever expanding with inputs not only from practitioners, but researchers and academicians across Asia (Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia etc.)

Ways Forward

To ensure that the outputs achieved in the three years of activities with regard to the Shifting Cultivation initiative, and to further stabilize the collaboration between institutions like ICIMOD and LEAD, the following are suggestive points for consideration by all stakeholders:

1. That, the Shifting Cultivation initiative must not remain only as a project activity. It must develop into a programmatic area as it is crucial not only to the livelihood of millions of upland farmers but to the whole issue of conservation, indigenous knowledge systems and biodiversity in general.
2. That, LEAD India together with ICIMOD formulate joint proposals towards participatory research, capacity building, documentation and advocacy for upland farming communities and shifting cultivation in the Eastern Himalayas in particular.
3. That, the EH-DRC be recognized as a full-fledged Secretariat for Shifting Cultivation in the Eastern Himalayas as well as for the *Jhumia* network. This would however, require further program development including fund raising.
4. Those, as an immediate follow-up to the October workshop, LEAD India and ICIMOD together with other partners initiate a series of workshops with selected state governments in the northeastern region to ensure that the "Policy Recommendations", including the "Shillong Declaration" are not just empty or dead documents but remain live documents.
5. With raising concerns for poverty, loss of biodiversity, global warming and even erosion of knowledge systems, it is imperative that research organizations like ICIMOD; and networks and professional organizations like LEAD work together to research, document, build capacities and provide leadership skills to such crucial upland communities. Implicit in this would also be the issue of identifying the unique knowledge systems and having it re-validated through participatory and modern scientific studies.

Notes to readers

The final report was prepared by LEAD INDIA.