



# Debating Shifting Cultivation in the Eastern Himalayas

## Farmers' Innovations as Lessons for Policy

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Session 1: Overview of policies, practices and key issues  
in sustainable sloping land and watershed management



khoriya  
Shiftin

轮歇地  
刀耕火种

ihum

tseri

pga k'nyau

swidden

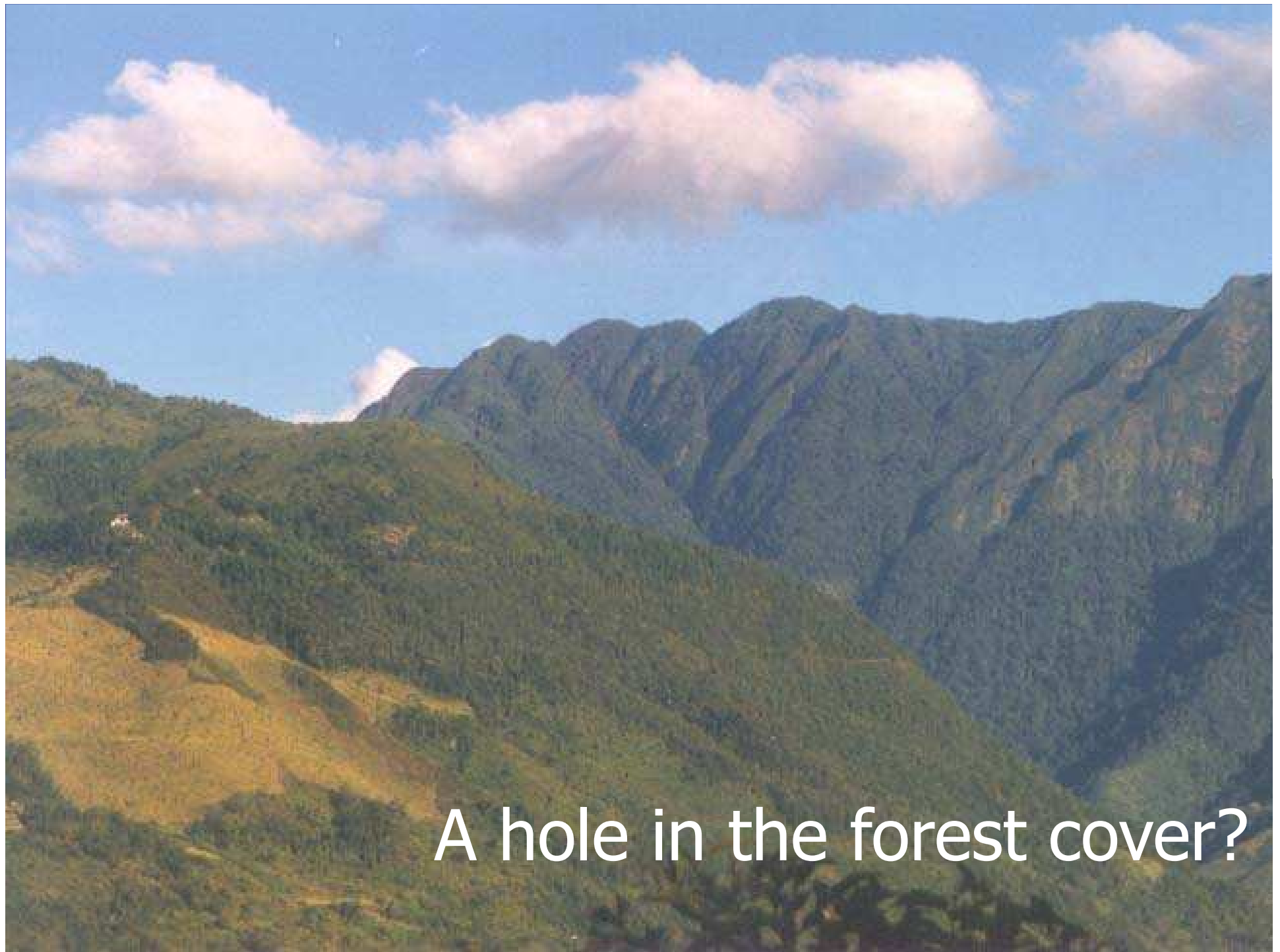
kaingin

taungya

slash-and-burn

# The shifting cultivators





A hole in the forest cover?



Or growing forests on cropland?

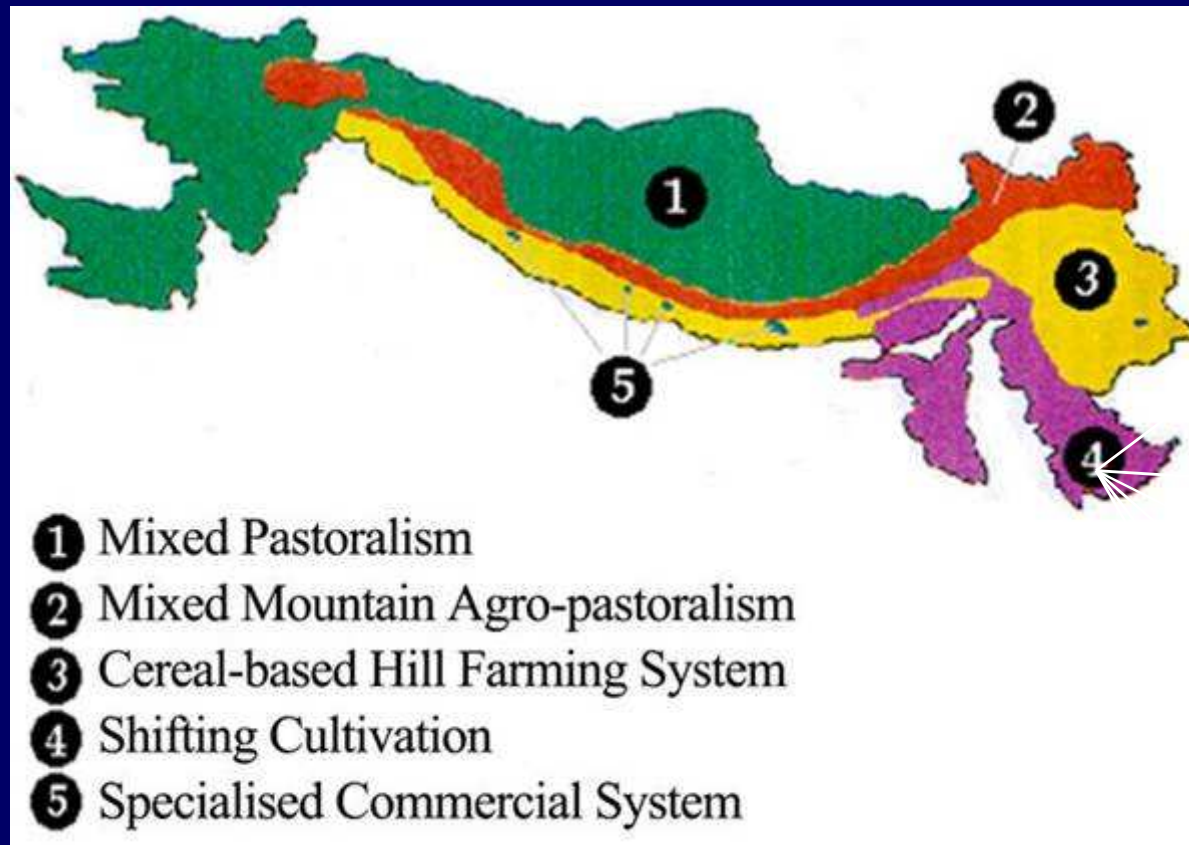


Fallows of various ages

# Shifting Forestry



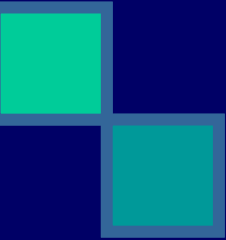

# Rotational Agroforestry in the Eastern Himalayas



- North East India
- Bangladesh
- Bhutan
- China
- Myanmar
- Nepal

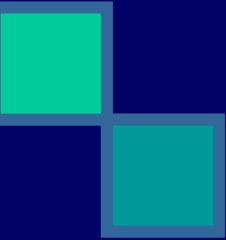



# Overview

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1. Perspectives
  2. Policy problem
  3. Our message and findings
  4. Policy research and dialogue process
  5. The Shillong Declaration
  6. Policy environment
  7. Policy impact
  8. What made it work?
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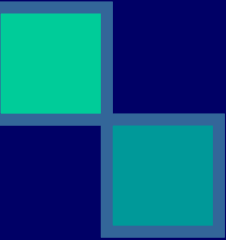



## 2. Policy problem

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- Despite lengthy and expensive efforts to do away with shifting cultivation, it is still a common practice
  - Traditional practices are discouraged, while alternatives provided are not working
  - Policies turn out to be counterproductive
- 




### 3. Our message and findings

- 
- Those who prefer to practice shifting cultivation should be allowed
  - They should receive the R&D and policy support they need.
  - Don't replace shifting cultivation, but improve it for the benefit of all
  - Build on farmers' own innovations and good traditional practices
- 



**In the following, consider its  
(potential) benefit for...**

- Maintenance of forest cover
  - Conservation of biodiversity
  - Soil and water conservation
  - Commercial and organic farming
  - Cultural integrity and social security
- 

# Fallow management



Use of firelines



Landscape planning: Jhum blocks



Trees during cropping phase



Controlled burning

# Wildlife management

Mithun (*Bos frontalis*)



Patchy landscape



Elephant corridor



Sacred grove

# Agrobiodiversity farming

Food variety



Intercropping



Agroforestry



Jhum crops in the orchard

# Soil and water conservation



Contour bunding



Zero tillage with dibbling stick



N-fixing alders and stone walling



Covering slash with mud before burning

# Commercial niche products



Fuelwood



Cash crop farming



Transport



Bay leaf



Chiraita



Local market

# Cultural integrity and social security



Village authority



Labour sharing



Fire management



Common property



## 4. Policy research and dialogue process

- Case studies on farmers' innovations (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar and Nepal)
  - Working group
  - Regional exchange visits and e-discussion
  - National level policy workshops and initiatives
  - Regional Policy Dialogue Workshop
  - The Shillong Declaration
  - Academic advocacy
- 

## 5. The Shillong Declaration



# Policy Recommendations

1. Remove **explicit policies** against shifting cultivation, and strengthen the implementation of existing beneficial policies



# Policy Recommendations

2. Increase security of **land tenure**
3. Invest in **research** to document, scientifically validate and improve traditional SC practices
4. Encourage **market** development based on local niche products



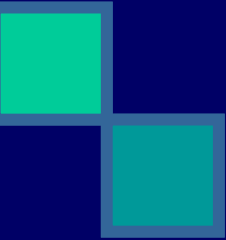

# Policy Recommendations



5. Strengthen and capacitate **customary institutions** for local level NRM, tenure and governance
6. Reorient existing **credit** policies for CPR situations
7. Encourage **coordination** among different government agencies

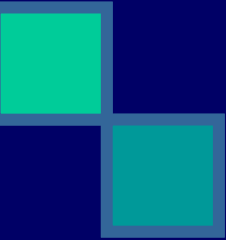



## 6. Policy environment

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- A **myriad of (conflicting) policies** from many different departments (e.g. forest, agriculture, land use, rural development, indigenous affairs)
  - Social and political **conflict**
  - Strong **lobbies** from stakeholders such as the 'timber mafia', settlers, and commercial enterprises
  - General **lack of understanding** and interest for ground realities
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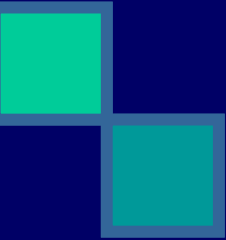



## 7. Policy impact

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- Renewed interest and momentum among governments, researchers, donors and civil society
  - Reassessment of the practice (“no longer disallowed”)
  - National Forest Commission in India
  - Participatory mapping in Nagaland, India
  - Curriculum development in Bhutan
- 



## 8. What made it work?

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- Most stakeholders agree that it is an urgent policy issue
  - Good balance between scientific rigour, and policy makers' need for timely information
  - Good partners: work with farmers, and reach up to the 'movers and shakers'
  - Credibility and connections
  - Communication and networking
  - Benefit from regional approach
- 



<http://in.groups.yahoo.com/group/jhumias>

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