

Managing change in shifting cultivation areas: ICIMOD's engagement in the Eastern Himalaya

Introduction

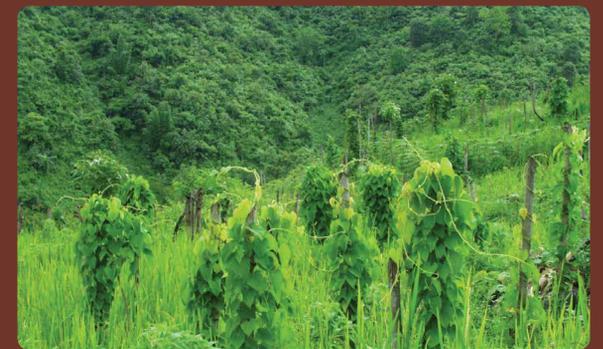
Shifting cultivation has traditionally been viewed as a rudimentary agricultural practice with little economic viability and a major cause of deforestation and environmental degradation. Consequently, governments and international agencies across continents have – without success – over decades attempted to promote cash crops and replace shifting cultivation with settled agriculture.

Across South and Southeast Asia, a large number of people still depend fully or partly on the practice for their livelihood and food security. The efforts of governments to replace shifting cultivation with settled agriculture has resulted in several “second generation” challenges, especially with regard to the depletion of agro-biodiversity, leading to food and nutritional insecurity as well as the drastic deterioration of ecosystem services. This transformation has also led to changes in property regimes, affecting access to land and productive resources for the poor, often infringing on their rights to land access and ownership. These dynamics are leading to the increasing marginalization of poor, disadvantaged, and indigenous, groups traditionally practicing shifting cultivation in South and Southeast Asia.



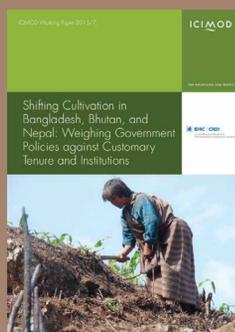
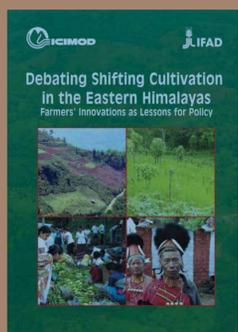
ICIMOD's work on shifting cultivation management

ICIMOD's involvement in the management of shifting cultivation began in the late 1990s with a focus on understanding the issues and concerns through research and documentation. Its approach has evolved to developing innovative, practical approaches through action research and pilots and influencing the formulation of inclusive policies. With support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and International Development Research Centre (IDRC), ICIMOD has been working with local partners, upland communities, NGOs, and local governments in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, and Nepal to document farmers' innovations, assessing existing policy frameworks on managing shifting cultivation and testing appropriate technological approaches to transform shifting cultivation to a more acceptable form that allows transformative change for upland communities.



Research and documentation

- Farmers' innovations
- Legal frameworks on shifting cultivation
- Customary laws and tenurial arrangements



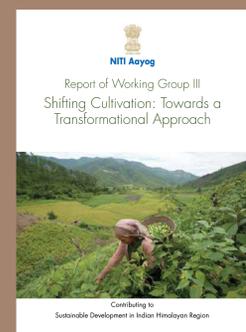
Action research and pilots

- On-farm natural resource management (NRM) practices
- Value chain development of produce from shifting cultivation
- Participatory 3-D modelling for land use and resource planning
- Participatory perspective land use planning
- Adaptation to climate change: Bridging the last mile gap in animal husbandry through the promotion of paraveterinary workers for improved veterinary healthcare



Policy engagement

- Shillong Declaration 2004
- IDRC events/policy engagement
- NITI Aayog working group on Shifting Cultivation: Towards a Transformational Approach



Key partners in collaborative work

- Government partners from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, and Nepal
- North Eastern Region Resource Management Project (NERCORMP)
- Meghalaya Rural Development Society (MRDS)
- Khagrachari Hill District Council (KHDC)
- Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, Bangladesh (MoCHTA)
- Civil society organizations such as Chokhlei Organization for Rural and Agricultural Development (CORAD), Chin, Myanmar; Zabrang Kalyan Samity, Khagrachari, Bangladesh; Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD), Nepal; Green Hill, Bangladesh; and Nepal Chepang Association (NCA), Nepal

Funding partners:

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

