

Background note for Launching event of Knowledge products on

Transitioning shifting cultivation to resilient farming systems in South and Southeast Asia

Shifting cultivation is commonly perceived as a primitive agricultural practice, economically unviable and a cause of tropical deforestation and environmental degradation. Despite growing scientific evidence to the contrary and a revision of this position by several countries and international agencies, policies based on this misconception still strive to replace the practice with settled agriculture even today. Such policy positions in conjunction with market forces, have led to the rapid expansion of settled agriculture across landscapes in South and Southeast Asia over the last decades with shifting cultivators gradually adopting alternative forms of agriculture. However, despite the expansion of settled agriculture across shifting cultivation landscapes, the practice persists across much of South and Southeast Asia as well as parts of Africa and Latin America. The management of shifting cultivation, therefore, remains enigmatic for governments across the world even today.

Although exact figures of the area under shifting cultivation and the population involved are hard to come by, it is estimated that around 280 million hectares is under shifting cultivation globally, with around 110 million hectares in Asia alone. An estimated 200 million people in Asia are reported to be dependent on forest-based agriculture, including shifting cultivation. Clearly, efforts by governments to replace shifting cultivation with settled agriculture has not yielded the desired outcomes. Instead, research and field studies suggest the emergence of second-generation issues following transitions to settled agriculture affecting food availability particularly for poorer households, insecurity of tenure and an alarming increase in ecosystem degradation. This has ramifications for poverty alleviation and attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Management approaches and the policy framework governing transformation of shifting cultivation areas, therefore, need an urgent reappraisal. Strategies facilitating transition of shifting cultivation too, need to be re-examined, redefined and remolded as necessary. This is an critical imperative to ensure that transformation of shifting cultivation does not result in drastic depletion of dietary diversity and malnourishment, increased insecurity of tenure or accelerate depletion of forest cover compromising the sustenance of ecosystem services. Left unaddressed, present approaches will lead to further distortion of shifting cultivation, perpetuating marginalization of shifting cultivators and further impoverishment, compromising their resilience as well as that of their food systems and the immediate environment supporting their livelihoods.

Against this background, IFAD developed a grant to ICIMOD to convene an international symposium on *Transitioning shifting cultivation to resilient farming systems in South and Southeast Asia* (held in Guwahati, India in June 2019) and prepare a series of knowledge products, including a Resource Book and Guideline for transitioning shifting cultivation to resilient farming systems. The Resource Book and Guideline prepared by ICIMOD provides an overview on the impacts of settled agricultural systems on food availability, ecosystem services and security of tenure, outlines approaches that can help avoid the negative fallout of transition. More importantly, it provides a framework for facilitating transition to resilient composite food systems offering pathways for a gradual, organic evolution of this change while nurturing a sensitive, inclusive approach that is accommodative of the aspirations of shifting cultivators. Four accompanying policy briefs provide insights into the impact of transition on the second- generation issues of depletion of seasonal food availability and dietary diversity, ecosystem services and the issue of security of tenure, and the ramifications of inaccurate and incorrect landuse classifications in the context

of shifting cultivation. The policy briefs provide recommendations in each case and these will be useful both for programme development and policy reforms. This set of publications are expected to help development agencies and governments in revising and reshaping programmes facilitating transitions so that transformations can be more sensitive, inclusive, effective and acceptable to the shifting cultivators.

Tentative Programme: (A very rough sketch – requires refinement. Suggestions welcome)

Date: 30th June, 2021; 11:00 – 12:00am (Rome time); 14.45-15.45pm Nepal time (60 mins)

Moderator: Roshan Cooke, IFAD

11.00 am: Moderator welcomes everyone and invites Mr Nigel Brett, Director APR, IFAD and Dr Pema Gyamtsho, DG ICIMOD for their opening remarks on

11.05am: *Why is managing change in shifting cultivation important to IFAD?* Nigel Brett, Director, Asia Pacific Division, IFAD

11.15 am: *Why is managing change in shifting cultivation important to ICIMOD?* Pema Gyamtsho (DG, ICIMOD)

11.25 am *Challenges in transitioning shifting cultivation to settled agriculture: Addressing second-generation issues of transition*– Dhrupad Choudhury, ICIMOD

11.35 am: Launching of the knowledge products:

- i. *Transitioning shifting cultivation to resilient farming systems in South and Southeast Asia. A Resource Book***
Marie-Aude Evens, IFAD will introduce the book and highlight its relevance and importance (5 mins)
Nigel Brett and Dr Pema to jointly launch the Resource Book virtually
- ii. *Supporting Myanmar's land governance reforms.*** Policy Brief
Harold Liversage, IFAD will introduce the policy brief and speak on why Tenure is central to poverty alleviation and resilience building and release the policy brief (max 5 mins)
- iii. *Ensuring seasonal food availability ad dietary diversity during and after transition of shifting cultivation systems to settled agriculture.*** A Policy Brief
Antonella Cordone, IFAD will introduce the policy brief and speak on the importance of ensuring seasonal food availability and dietary diversity for nutritional security and release the policy brief (5 mins)
- iv. *Shifting cultivation landscapes in transition: Where are the forests?***
Marie-Aude Evens, IFAD will introduce the policy brief and speak on the impacts of transitions on ecosystem services and release the PB (5 mins)

Closing Remarks and way forward:

11.55 am: Nigel Brett, Director, APR IFAD and Izabella Koziell, DDG ICIMOD