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

The ICIMOD-IFAD webinar presented knowledge products that create best practices for transitioning shifting cultivation

Photo: Karen Konniff



Photo: Sanjeev Bhuchar, ICIMOD

2 July 2021, Rome - Millions of people in upland areas of South and Southeast Asia still depend on shifting cultivation for their livelihoods, nutrition and food security. The transition away from shifting cultivation remains a fundamental imperative of agricultural development for governments in those areas - being a practice often associated with deforestation and environmental degradation despite growing scientific evidence to the contrary and the consequent emergence of second-generation issues.

This issue was addressed in the webinar **Transitioning shifting cultivation to resilient farming systems in South and Southeast Asia** jointly organized by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in which knowledge products, in the form of a resource book and four

policy briefs, were launched to set best practices for farmers and development practitioners on raising awareness around this topic and sharing recommendations on how to navigate the common pitfalls related to this transition in a more sustainable and inclusive way.

“Governments have sought to replace shifting cultivation with settled agriculture, butTransitions insensitive to the strengths of shifting cultivation – dual landuse, crop diversity, customary norms of tenure.....become part of the problem threatening poor people’s access to land and tenure security, further marginalising them.”

said Dhruvad Choudhury, Chief Scaling Operations of ICIMOD. Transitions, as they stand, are resulting in second-generation issues, such as the distortion of shifting cultivation, the depletion of agrobiodiversity and forest cover, the dilution of traditional institutions and customary land tenure, and the depletion of crops adversely affecting seasonal food availability and dietary diversity with potentially negative effects on nutrition and the phenomenon of hidden hunger

Against this framework, setting best practices are relevant and useful to guide a transition where traditional knowledge and the environment are respected. The knowledge products highlight the impacts of transitions on the emergence of second-generation issues while bringing solutions and recommendations for avoiding the pitfalls.

According to Marie-Aude Even, Senior Technical Specialist in Agronomy of IFAD, the Resource Book provided guidelines and good practices for policy makers and development practitioners on the design and implementation of projects on the ground, which are also crucial to enhance the linkages among nutrition, agronomy, ecosystem services, and land tenure. *“These operational guidelines help us change our lens and the way we see things to adopt a more systemic view on shifting cultivation,”* she shares.

The Resource Book also offers a framework for a transition that is respectful of indigenous food systems. While innovations are fundamental for shifting cultivation, it is just as important to include the knowledge of local groups often marginalized. *“The knowledge of indigenous women needs to be valued in any transformation; their knowledge of the environment, their knowledge of the species, their role in keeping seeds,”* says Antonella Cordone, Senior Technical Specialist in Nutrition of IFAD. *“This is an untapped potential,”* she adds.

Another important topic discussed is customary tenure, which needs far more recognition in development projects. The knowledge products are essential to *“strengthen not only the policy and legal framework governing customary tenure but also for undertaking participatory land use and local economic development planning processes that could put the concerned communities at the centre of the decisions over their development,”* in the words of Harold Liversage, Lead Technical Specialist in Land Tenure of IFAD.

“To strengthen the environment, sustainability and climate resilience of poor rural people economic activities” - one of the main strategic objectives of IFAD, as mentioned by Liam Chicca, Regional Lead Portfolio Advisor for the Asia Pacific Division (APR) of IFAD, and achieve better outcomes on the ground, strong partnerships are vital. The partnership of ICIMOD and IFAD can *“raise the voice of mountain communities to push for climate action,”*

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well emphasized by Pema Gyamtsho, Director General of ICIMOD. *“Together, we can ensure that no one is left behind.”*

The webinar took place virtually on 30 June and counted with the presence of 140 participants. It can be watched online at [ICIMOD-IFAD Event Recording](#).

Further information can be found at:

<https://www.ifad.org/en/web/latest/-/transitioning-shifting-cultivation-to-resilient-farming-systems-in-south-and-southeast-asia>

<http://www.icimod.org/webinar/shifting-cultivation/>