

The Shillong Declaration on Shifting Cultivation in the Eastern Himalayas

Responding to the suggestion of the Hon'ble Union Minister of the Government of India on Tribal Affairs and Development of the North East Region, Mr P. R. Kyndiah, to propose a Shillong Declaration,

Recognising that Shifting Cultivation is key to production systems, both agriculture and forestry, for providing livelihoods to many ethnic and tribal groups in the tropical and sub-tropical highlands of Asia and Africa as well as Latin America,

Recognising that Shifting Cultivation is one of the most complex and multifaceted forms of traditional agroforestry practice in the world reflecting a robust traditional ecological knowledge,

Realising that Shifting Cultivation evolved as a traditional practice and is an institutionalised resources management mechanism at a species, ecosystem and landscape level ensuring ecological security and food security and thus providing a social safety net,

Being conscious of the diverse traditional institutions and tenurial systems pertaining to Shifting Cultivation in the eastern Himalayan region comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, and Nepal,

Understanding that the institutional mechanisms ingrained in traditional Shifting Cultivation systems can ensure access to productive resources for every member of the community including landless people and the most marginalised groups,

Recognising that Shifting Cultivation is a way of life for a large number of indigenous, tribal, and other poor and marginalised upland communities,

Recognising that traditional Shifting Cultivation systems have been stressed by external and internal forces,

Having knowledge on existing policies on Shifting Cultivation in the countries of the Eastern Himalayas.

We, the participants from the eastern Himalayan countries, representing government agencies, farmers, international bodies, non-government organisations, academia, science and research institutions, local institutions, international donors and development assistance agencies, the private sector, and other professionals, concerned about Shifting Cultivation and shifting cultivators, regionally and worldwide, assembled in Shillong in Meghalaya, India from 6 to 8 October 2004 declare as hereunder:

- a) That Shifting Cultivation must be recognised as an agricultural and an adaptive forest management practice which is based on scientific and sound ecological principles.

- b) That it is imperative to provide an enabling environment in order to address the urgent livelihood and ecological concerns arising out of rapid transformations driven by development and other externalities including market forces.
- c) That it is imperative to empower shifting cultivators as practitioners of rotational agroforestry to become active participants in decision making and policy processes that impact them most.
- d) That it is essential to make existing research and extension services sensitive and relevant to the needs and challenges of Shifting Cultivation and shifting cultivators and simultaneously assimilate the traditional ecological knowledge of Shifting Cultivation into future research, development and extension processes.
- e) That it is necessary to recognise the traditional institutions and intellectual capital generated from traditional practices relating to Shifting Cultivation and ensure its protection in the legal and policy regime.
- f) That it is essential to provide interactive forums and environment for information access and sharing between multiple stakeholders at local, national, regional and global levels.
- g) That it is imperative to acknowledge that women usually play the most critical role in Shifting Cultivation both at the activity and the impact level and therefore any development intervention must be sensitive to this fact.

AND THEREFORE

The regional, national, and local policies for Shifting Cultivation need to be re-appraised and, where necessary, reformulated. For this purpose, the detailed recommendations of the 'Shifting Cultivation Regional Policy Dialogue Workshop for the Eastern Himalayas', 6-8 October 2004, Shillong can provide input.

WHERE ALL POLICIES AND ACTIONS SHOULD BE FOUNDED ON THE FOLLOWING GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To support decentralised, participatory, multi-stakeholder, interdisciplinary, eco-regional, and adaptive management approaches that respect human and cultural diversity, gender equity, livelihood security, and enhancement as well as environmental sustainability, where we value and build upon both traditional and scientific information and knowledge.

Adopted: 8 October 2004 at Shillong, Meghalaya, India