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## NITI Aayog Report on Shifting Cultivation

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A recent NITI Aayog publication on shifting cultivation has recommended that the Ministry of Agriculture should take up a “mission on shifting cultivation” to ensure inter-ministerial convergence.

The report titled "**Shifting Cultivation: Towards a Transformational Approach**" is prepared by one of the five thematic working groups set up by NITI Aayog in 2017 which aims to encourage well-being of the people in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR).

### Why the Need to Manage Shifting Cultivation?

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- Managing transformations in shifting cultivation areas is fundamental to agricultural development in the uplands of northeast (NE) India and an important element of the **Act East Policy**.
- There is a **lack of updated and authentic data** on the area under shifting cultivation as well as the total number of households practicing shifting cultivation.
  - While different programmes designed to address the management of shifting cultivation have claimed drastic reductions, the Forest Survey of India's (FSI, 2015) reports over the years continue to attribute large scale deforestation and loss of forest cover in NE India to shifting cultivation.
  - There is an urgent need to **update data on the area under shifting cultivation** as well as the total population still involved with the practice.
- There is need to blend traditional knowledge on resource use and management with modern scientific approaches.

The approaches for transformation and supportive research and development (R&D) should not summarily dismiss traditional land use, but try to **blend the traditional with the modern** and, wherever possible, improve the productivity of existing practices through **locally acceptable technological interventions**.

- **Access to credit** for shifting cultivators is denied because they are unable to offer shifting cultivation land as collateral for loans in the absence of land titles.  
Credit guidelines should be amended to **allow group guarantee (from village/clan authorities) for loans** instead of land title deeds in these areas.
- State agencies like agricultural marketing, forest development corporations of concerned states should take steps to formalize, promote and organize **marketing of products** from shifting cultivation.
  - The value addition to such products, ensuring opportunities for large scale involvement of the rural youth and women will address income generation and youth employment while providing a comparative advantage for such products, contributing to several SDGs.
  - Encouraging States and relevant Central Ministries to **recognise home gardens** as a distinct land use category with dedicated schemes and programmes for promotion of home gardens and the promotion of niche crops and other products found in shifting cultivation systems. This will provide income generation and entrepreneurship development opportunities for upland farmers.
- Shifting cultivation lands fall under the purview of agriculture during the cultivation phase, but come under Forests during the fallow phase – the **same piece of land under two subjects at different time periods**.
  - This ambiguity needs to be addressed and shifting cultivation lands with long fallow cycle should be categorized as a distinct land use, thus removing their categorization as ‘abandoned land’, ‘wastelands’ and ‘Unclassed State Forests’.
  - All government departments should consider **jhum land as a distinct land use**, with an exceptionally long fallow phase.
  - Shifting cultivation fallows must be legally perceived and categorized as **‘regenerating fallows’**, which may, if given sufficient time, regenerate into secondary forests.

## Shifting Cultivation

- Shifting cultivation, locally called '**Jhum**', is a widely practiced system of crop cultivation among the indigenous communities of Northeast India. The practice, also known as **slash-and-burn** agriculture, is when farmers clear land by slashing vegetation and burning forests and woodlands to create clear land for agricultural purposes.
- This provides **very easy and very fast** method of the **preparation of the land** for the agriculture.
- The bush and the weeds can be removed easily. The burning of waste materials **provide needed nutrients** for the cultivation.
- It gives a family its food, fodder, fuel, livelihood and is **closely linked** to their identity.
- Because of cutting of forests and trees, this practice **leads to soil erosion** and may also effect the course of rivers.