Role of Women Jhum Farmers in Alternative Land Use Options: Challenges for Adoption and Adaptation

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As in many other Himalayan countries, indigenous women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh, have always been the main driving force for sustaining natural resource management and biodiversity. Since time immemorial, shifting cultivation has been an integral part of their livelihoods, culture, and tradition. Women make a significant contribution and participate intensively in the whole process; the role of women is particularly prominent in dealing with the intensive work. Currently, alternative land use options are being introduced, mainly due to the very limited access to land, the government preference for promoting sedentary cultivation, population growth, lower productivity, labour migration, and climate change impacts, among others. With the adoption of alternative options, women’s workload is increasing day by day. Using the heavier tools (like spades) required for alternative land use options also affects their health. Notwithstanding this, women still have fewer opportunities for participating in skill enhancement training opportunities. At the policy and planning level, women farmers are seen and treated as agricultural labourers and not farmers. Resources are also distributed as per recognition and women are always excluded. In addition, some gender issues (including superstition) hinder the adoption of other options, such as lack of land ownership, insufficient resources to invest, and impacts of climate change. This presents a challenge to sustainable development and the establishment of women’s rights.