Gender Implications of Policy in Shifting Cultivation Practices in the Hindu Kush Himalayan Region

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Shifting cultivation is a dominant land use system in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region in countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. It is mainly practised by the indigenous communities who are among the most marginalized social and economic groups. Shifting cultivation forms the most important source of their livelihood and social-cultural basis. With modernization, policymakers in these countries view shifting cultivation as an unsustainable land use system that destroys the environment and is economically inefficient, as the return is low. Therefore government policies prescribe changing it to other land uses such as settled agriculture, forest, and horticulture. This paper uses the results from three case studies conducted in Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, and a review of secondary data, to examine the gender implications of these government policies in terms of gender relations, access to resources, division of labour, decision-making roles, and tenure rights, and recommends measures to be adopted to minimize the implications.