

Eco-friendliness and Sustainability of Shifting Cultivation in Sri Lanka: A Review of Current Management Practices of Shifting Cultivation in the Dry Zone

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Shifting cultivation, locally known as chena cultivation, is a field of cultivation in which the natural vegetation is cut down, allowed to dry and burned. This system originally belonged to the agro-farming system and falls within the larger scope of sustainable agriculture. In recent decades, however, considerable literature has shown that chena cultivation and the people who use it neglect their environmental responsibilities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to systematically review the current chena cultivation practices in the dry zone of Sri Lanka from an environmental point of view. The study was conducted in Anuradhapura, Kurunegala, and Monaragala Districts using 20 groups focusing on 10 villagers. Descriptive statistics were used for quantitative data analysis and content analysis was used for qualitative data analysis. With Results revealed that currently farmers cut down all the trees in the premises ignoring the principles of chena cultivation. Mechanical saws have been used for this purpose. 62% of the lands has been prepared using tractors and more than 79% of the farmers has used agrochemicals with their cultivation practices. More than 80% of the sample farmers has removed all trees in their field during the last five years. And 23% of the farmers changes their lands annually as there are separate plots for farmers. Only 12% of farmers reported not cultivating land for at least a year. The human-elephant conflict has been exacerbated by the absence of farmland and the depletion of surrounding forests. More than 20% farmers directly faced elephant attack. The study revealed that the patterns of agricultural land use in traditional arid zone villages have changed significantly over the past few decades.

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