

SUMMARY

1. The present study, apart from gaining an insight into various ecological aspects of shifting cultivation seeks to suggest innovations in the existing practice of 'Jhuming' locally called 'Lo' in Mizoram. The innovations or alterations tried in this study include the introduction of second year of cropping on the same jhum land, hitherto not commonly practiced in Mizoram. During second year of cropping, the jhum land is subjected to tilling and application of chemical fertilizers, farm-yard manure (FYM) and a combination of chemical fertilizer and FYM. This introduction of second year of cropping will help in lengthening the present jhum cycle in the state and thus would retard deforestation which is taking place at an alarming rate.

2. The experimental studies were conducted during 1988 and 1989 in Mizoram. The experimental data collected during these two years have been processed and analysed using appropriate statistical methods.

3. The study sites included two jhum fallows of different ages — 6-yr. old and 20-yr. old. Various aspects of the study were conducted during first year and second year of cropping on both the 'jhum' fallows.

4. Phytosociological studies of selected jhum fallow forests showed that vegetation on 20-yr. old jhum fallow is composed of 37 plant species and that on 6-yr. old jhum fallow is composed of 46 plant species. Melocanna bambusoides is a dominant species with IVI of 191.57 and 175.1 in 20-yr. old and 6-yr. old jhum fallows respectively. This study reveals a higher index of dominance with lower index of diversity of species on 20-yr. old jhum fallow whereas inverse was true on 6-yr. old jhum fallow. More tree species and less shrub/herb species are found to be present in 20-yr. old jhum fallow whereas less tree species and more shrub/herb species are present in 6-yr. old jhum fallow.

5. Studies on the physico-chemical characteristics of soil clearly depicted slightly higher pH value and higher concentration of nutrient elements in upper layer (0-10cm) than in lower layer (10-20cm) of soil.

6. As a whole, the soil fertility level in 20-yr. old jhum fallow is higher than in 6-yr. old jhum fallow.

7. The pre-jhuming vegetation plays an important role in determining soil nutrient status mainly through burning operation. Increase in soil pH and various elements like available phosphorus, exchangeable potassium, calcium and magnesium was evident after dried slashed pre-jhuming vegeta-

tion was burned. Exchangeable potassium showed the highest degree of increase due to burning. However, no increase was observed in organic carbon and total nitrogen contents of soil after burning. This has been attributed to the combustion of organic matter and volatilization of nitrogen during burning.

8. Decline in soil fertility during cropping was evident. This may be due to nutrient uptake by plants and losses brought about by erosion and percolation. Erosion loss was most severe on land where tilling was introduced.

9. The present study reveals that forest vegetation growing on jhum fallows reduces leaching and stores nutrients which are made available to crops to a significant degree through their rapid transformation brought about by burning during shifting cultivation.

10. Soil fertility level can be properly maintained by the application of chemical fertilizers, farm-yard manure and a combination of chemical fertilizers and farm-yard manure during second year of cropping.

11. Annual biomass production and net primary productivity were higher in 20-yr. old than 6-yr. old jhum fallow during first year and second year of cropping. The highest values for biomass and productivity were recorded when chemical

fertilizers were applied to the treatment plots, while the lowest values were recorded from the sub-plots where the tilling of land was introduced during second year of cropping.

12. Nutrient status of the soil is the main factor determining the biomass production and rate of productivity of crop (rice) and crop plus weeds.

13. Due to frequent weeding operation during shifting cultivation competition between crop (rice) and weeds do not play significant role as far as biomass production of crop or crop plus weeds is concerned.

14. Among various jhuming operations, weeding requires the highest energy input. Though the introduction of tilling of the land on jhum fallows required extra input of energy it did not increase the output. In fact, the energetic efficiency of the sub-plot was lowered due to introduction of ploughing.

15. The 20-yr. old jhum fallow was more efficient than 6-yr. old jhum fallow from energetic and productivity point of view during first year of cropping. However, not much difference between the two was evident during second year of cropping.

16. A greater production of crop biomass, better economic

yield considerably low weed biomass production and higher energy efficiency of 20-yr. old fallow during first year of cropping as compared to 6-yr. old jhum fallow depict the positive role of longer jhum cycle in regenerating the system and in making it more productive and efficient.

17. Among the treated sub-plots, the one which received chemical fertilizers plus farm-yard manure showed highest output in terms of money. However, these sub-plots showed lowest output : input ratio in terms of energy because of high energy value of fertilizers. Tilled sub-plots showed lowest output : input ratio in terms of money.

18. Among the treated sub-plots during second year of cropping the highest crop yield was obtained from the chemical fertilizers plus FYM treated sub-plots, followed by chemical fertilizers treated sub-plots and then by FYM treated sub-plots. Tilled sub-plot showed lowest crop yield. Control sub-plots slightly exceeded tilled sub-plots on both 20-yr. old and 6-yr. old jhum fallows.

19. As a whole, application of fertilizers, whether it be chemical, farm-yard manure or combination of both, caused an increase in crop yield and helped in maintaining the inherent soil fertility to some extent during second year of cropping. These treatments are therefore, recommended for

the improvement or to innovate the existing practice of shifting cultivation from productivity and soil fertility point of view. But the energetic efficiency of the sub-plots with these treatments is rather low as the high energy value of fertilizers drastically brought down the energetic output : input ratio.

20. Tilling of the soil as a means to innovate existing practice of jhum in Mizoram is not worth suggesting as this treatment did not increase the productivity and energetic efficiency of the system.

21. The inherent soil fertility level after a year of cropping was drastically reduced by the end of second year of cropping even when treated with chemical fertilizer and/or farm-yard manure during second year.

22. The present study provides factual and quantitative data on the ecological implications of traditional shifting cultivation and innovative approaches that were tried on an experimental basis with a view to minimise the ill effects of shifting cultivation in Mizoram. The study examines the merits and demerits of the innovative approaches that could be introduced as a means to improve the existing practice of 'Lo' in Mizoram, so that the deforestation and land degradation which are largely caused by shifting cultivation due to shortening of jhum cycle in the state could be controlled to some extent.

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