Livelihoods, land and natural resources

Each household practices shifting cultivation on average 1.5 acre of rainfed rice per year. The average fallow period is 15 years. This paddy is the main subsistence crop for farmers. It is also grown on irrigated paddy terraces. Villagers also produce tea on average 2-3 acres per household. This provides their main source of cash income, together with cattle raised on fallows. From the 500 acres of village-managed forests, they collect firewood, timber for their own housing construction needs and different NTFP. They also grow vegetables in gardens in the village to sell at market.

Customary practices

The cultivated area in shifting cultivation is partitioned into 15 blocks (‘Mra’ in local language), each of which is cultivated by all families during one year. The plots within the chosen block are allocated by lottery every year to the resident households.

The households cannot sell the shifting cultivation land, nor lease it to other households internally. They can exchange land without any fees.

Permanent plots (tea or paddy terraces) are considered private property of the family and can be sold or rented to other families within the village. However no sale nor lease can be made with outsiders.

A village committee is elected by the villagers every year, including village chief. They take decisions and establish rules and regulations concerning land management. These are discussed in the village annual general meeting (held before the lottery). Trespassers can be fined or even expelled from the village (but this never happened). The respect of the customary rules is also enforced by Ta’han National Liberation Army, as a parallel administration in the area.

The protected forest is conserved in order to protect the source of water.

If a new household settles in the village after marriage and has no land, it can request to be recognized as “insiders” by the village committee. Once accepted, it can request a land for its livelihood. This is approved by the villagers at annual meeting.

Key findings

There is no landlessness in the village: at least the shifting cultivation land is divided equitably each year by lottery.

The villagers’ lands have not been registered so the community is worried that they might lose their land in the future. They have heard of many cases of land grabbing around them (including a private company occupying 200 acres of land for tea plantation in a nearby village).

Villagers would like to get their private lands (mostly irrigated paddy fields) registered but SLRD never came to the area due to security reasons and remoteness.