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## Changes in Local Land Tenure System in Response to Swidden Transformation in Southern Chin State, Myanmar

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### Abstract

Swidden cultivation has been one of the most common land use systems in the upland regions of the tropics. Many researchers agreed that swidden cultivation is still an important practice for the livelihood of upland communities, providing local resilience in the face of turbulent social and ecological changes. Moreover, swidden farmers have been practicing unique customary land management systems that preserve cultural identity, equitable and secure land tenure, and social mechanisms that enhance community resilience. However, due to the increased access to market, the new cash crops were introduced and swidden farmers have transformed their traditional shifting cultivation practices towards permanent agriculture. To understand the impact of swidden transformation on local land tenure system, this study took 12 case study villages located in and around Natma Taung National Park, southern Chin state of Myanmar. The study applied Ostrom's eight governance principles to analyse customary land tenure system of swidden farmers. A total of 150 households were randomly selected to analyse household livelihood strategies and their compliance with local customary practices. Hierarchical cluster analysis was applied to categorise households based on their income from different livelihood sources. Cultural consensus analysis was later applied to determine household's compliance with local customary land management practices. The results demonstrate that households that engaged more in permanent agricultural practices are less compliant with local customary practices. Moreover, local land tenure systems have changed from collective to individual ownership in response to the introduction of new cash crop namely elephant foot yam. This particular trend has negative impact on the livelihood of marginalised and landless households who previously have access to land under the communal land tenure system. The study suggests that legalising communal land tenure system may reduce negative impacts on the marginalised households and may increase social equity and community resilience against turbulent social and ecological changes.

**Keywords:** Customary land tenure, rural livelihoods, swidden transformation