# Transition of Shifting Cultivation and its Impact on People's Livelihoods in the Miombo Woodlands of Northern Zambia and South-Western Tanzania

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# Abstract

Shifting cultivation has long been a major livelihood for people in the miombo woodlands of southern, central and eastern Africa. However, increasing deforestation and forest degradation throughout the region are resulting in growing pressure on traditional shifting agricultural systems. Indeed, agricultural intensification and expansion itself is considered the primary cause of miombo deterioration, which is driven by both endogenous and exogenous variables operating at various scales. On the basis of data collected in the 1990s and 2010 from two villages in Northern Province, Zambia and two in the Rukwa Region, Tanzania, the paper will document the transition of shifting cultivation towards more intensive land use practices. It is argued that the main drivers influencing miombo degradation, and thereby the transition process of traditional shifting cultivation practices, have been a growing population, government policies, and an increasing commercialization/market integration. Questionnaires, focus group meetings, and in-depth interviews reveal that despite the breakdown of the traditional shifting cultivation practices, a general improvement of livelihoods has taken place. This has happened through adaptation and diversification in both agricultural practices and livelihood activities. However, it is also seen that because of the often rapidly changing external factors (market conditions and policies), life in the shifting cultivation communities involves a continual shift of emphasis among a variety of livelihood strategies.

## Keywords

Shifting cultivation Transition Livelihoods Diversification Tanzania Zambia Miombo woodland