Empirical evidence for shifting cultivation's role in indigenous food sovereignty in Manipur, Northeast India

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Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS) is pivotal in enhancing food security and nutritional well-being and preserving governance systems and cultural practices within indigenous communities. Despite its significance, the literature on food sovereignty practices within Indian tribal communities and strategies for bolstering them remains limited. The present study draws upon primary data collected from 97 households in Manipur, Northeast India to address this gap. This study employs a mixed-methods research approach and systematically investigates the intricate dynamics of shifting cultivation (SC), agrobiodiversity and their collective contributions to IFS. Empirical findings underscore that SC provides culturally relevant food resources, thereby amplifying dietary diversity and contributing significantly to IFS. The indigenous SC system in the present study site encompasses 32 crop species and 4 local livestock breeds, featuring numerous landraces that ensure nutritional security and preserve food culture. Integrating wild edible plants from forests and fallow lands supplements the traditional food basket, reinforcing indigenous food culture and promoting biodiversity conservation. This study emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between SC-based agrobiodiversity and dietary diversity and highlights their critical role in fortifying IFS resilience, particularly in the context of climate change.

Keywords: Agrobiodiversity, ethnic foods, indigenous food sovereignty, jhum cultivation, Northeast India.

shift towards food sovereignty[2]. The concept of food sovereignty has been suggested as a framework for evaluating the sustainability of food systems[3]. Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS) introduces intricate relationships between local communities, their land, sacred food knowledge and inter-community sharing[4,5]. The accountability to uphold respectful relationships with the environment, living beings and neighbouring communities in land use and food management is central to IFS[6,7].

Indigenous populations increasingly reclaim traditional food practices in their struggles for decolonization and self-determination, accentuating the critical role of food sovereignty[8,9]. Local foods rooted in cultural wisdom are integral to IFS and are perpetuated across generations[9,10]. Despite the coexistence of colonialism and globalization, indigenous communities have upheld intergenerational knowledge and cultural practices in food systems, augmenting their food sovereignty[9]. This context underscores the pronounced significance of indigenous self-governance, enhancing environmental resilience and holistic well-being[11]. Traditional and small-scale indigenous crop cultivation has demonstrated its capacity to meet growing agricultural demands while sustaining biodiversity, ecosystem services and livelihoods[12,13]. Both food security and food sovereignty are influenced by scale and geography[14], emphasizing enhanced production and access. Scientific literature empirically validates the positive influence of food sovereignty on food security and nutrition[15,16]. Despite this, scant litera-