



## Editorial

It is a great pleasure for us to bring out this Special Issue of *Journal of Forest and Livelihood* on forest policy process. The theme of this Issue is chosen to capture the wide experience and repertoire of knowledge on the dynamics of forest policy making in Nepal. The articles in this Issue are particularly relevant to the present moment of political transition and uncertainty in Nepal. At present, amid a weak political ownership and commitment, Nepal's forest bureaucracy and the donors have advanced a number of forest policy agenda that endanger citizen rights. There is a need for increased scrutiny and proactive engagement of forestry stakeholders to ensure that these initiatives lead to credible, pro-people policies.

Indeed, Nepal's recent forest sector policy-making has been a part and parcel of the uncertainty that characterized the past two decades – including the period of Maoist insurgency and post-2006 'transition period'. This period is also characterized by the continued assertiveness and role of donor agencies and international NGOs that possessed the capacity to mobilize multiple local constituencies and influenced policy development in important ways. The new realities of political struggles and 'regime change' added important dimensions to the way policies are conceived, negotiated and implemented. The expanding civic space since 1990, the emergence of research-based NGOs, the growth of change-oriented personnel within forest bureaucracy and new modes and methods of civil society engagement have changed the power configuration in the country's policy making. Consequently, there are a wide spectrum of political interfaces, intense friction and struggles, contentious performances, conspiracies, negotiation and deliberation, advocacy and lobbying, social mobilization and various forms of accommodation. The articles in this Issue document the multiple experiences and lessons around these interfaces.

This Issue has three sets of articles. The first set – comprising of three articles – brings the analysis of gaps between policy discourses and everyday practice in three different forest policy domains: timber management, REDD+ and protected area management. Banjade exposes the disjuncture between discursive dominance of NTFPs in policy debate on one hand and significance of timber management in actual forest management on the other. The other two articles – by Khatri on REDD+ and Paudel *et al.* on protected areas management – reveal how seemingly participatory approaches have largely been unable to induce active and constructive engagement of diverse actors.

The second set – two papers contributed by Paudel *et al.*, and Sunam and Paudel – map out the unique combination of resistance and negotiation that characterizes Nepal's emerging forest policy contestation. Bringing cases of Gaurishankar Conservation Area and Forest Act amendment proposal, these papers demonstrate how a shift away from confrontational rejection to constructive engagement can lead either to rethink the agenda or produce legitimate and accepted policies.

The third set – two articles contributed by Ojha – brings assertive actions and innovative approaches to democratize forest policy process. The articles – one on critical action research and the other on multi-stakeholder policy learning platforms – show how engaged research and policy dialogue can inform and shape the process in favor of deliberative legitimacy as well as informed policy making.