



Editorial

It is a great pleasure for us to present the fifth issue of the 'Journal of Forest and Livelihood'. The journal seeks to document and disseminate emerging insights, lessons and innovations taking place in various dimensions of forestry and rural livelihoods in Nepal. In this issue, we have included eight articles, which analyse policy and governance aspects of forest management and livelihoods of local communities who depend on forests. Forest user groups and their engagement with natural resources in the community forests have become a common ground to talk about questions, issues and experiences but with respective perspectives of authors mainly in the topical area called Community Forestry (CF).

Despite widespread rhetoric of success of community forestry policy in Nepal, serious concerns are now being raised as regards who is benefiting from the policy. In the on-going discourse, such concerns are commonly referred to as 'second-generation issues', which relate to the processes of governance, equity and social justice, biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest management. The articles in this issue add to the growing literature that is critical about much acclaimed CF model practised in Nepal and elsewhere. While empirical findings in the last few years show that second generation problems threaten the durability of collective action surrounding community forestry, policyshapers and makers have yet to acknowledge the need to rethink the model. The articles in this issue seek to address some of these challenges, presenting state-of-the-art situation as well as policy and methodological innovations.

The need to search for ways and means to facilitate good governance and democratic norms among all the stakeholders of CF has continued to draw the attention of researchers and implementers in the field. In this regard, an action research based paper by Netra P. Timsina and colleagues contends that an action learning approach can be a viable option for addressing the issues related to governance and equity at Community Forestry User Group (CFUG) level. Their finding that the prevailing *status quo* in knowledge and power relations among CFUG members in the villages can be changed through action learning is novel and, therefore, worth experimenting at a wider scale.

In the context of escalating violence and conflicts in Nepal, it appears that existing laws, policies and practices are not adequate to cope with the challenges of governance and equity in natural resource management. Bishnu Upreti's paper discusses the issues of natural resource governance, scarcity of resources, and ensuing conflicts with special reference to Nepal. The paper lists a number of conditions for desirable outcomes from Natural Resource Management (NRM) including the need for a strong political commitment, fair and responsive administration, and embracing collective learning.

While there is a widespread recognition of CF's role in halting environmental degradation in the country and meeting the subsistence needs of forest users for the forestry products, its contribution in livelihood and equity is not fully satisfactory. Papers by B. K. Pokharel and Mike Nurse, Bhim Adhikari, and Arun K.C. analyse this issue in their respective papers. The paper by B. K. Pokharel and Mike Nurse also supports the point that the poor, women and other marginalised groups of people are not getting an equitable share of the benefits. This clearly suggests that CF practice at the field level needs further refinement in order to make itself a pro-poor model of rural development. In addition, they recommend a pro-poor framework for implementing community forestry.

Bhim Adhikari draws attention to the distributional aspect, with a focus on cost-sharing analysis of forest management as common property in Nepal. He concludes that the poorer people bear a larger proportion of transaction costs which could be a barrier for them to participate in decision-making and benefit sharing. Similarly, Arun K.C. analyses the contribution of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) in household economy and reveals that wealthier people are able to reap larger share of the benefits from the community forests in comparison to the poorer households. This is supported by an argument that mostly the rich and land-owning farmers use NTFPs as inputs to agricultural and

livestock farming. In addition, he argues that the poorer households get higher percentage contribution from NTFPs (collection and sale) in household income, since their income from other alternative sources tend to be low.

The relationship of biodiversity conservation and CF has continued to draw the attention of researchers and CF managers in the country. The paper by K. P. Acharya is an addition to the ongoing discourse on the subject. The author raises a question as to whether CF management supports biodiversity conservation. He proposes that the management objectives promoted by an external agency or spontaneously adopted by a CFUG, and the ensuing silvicultural operations would be critical in making a particular CF pro-or against biodiversity conservation. A separate comment by a reviewer contests the view of the article and argues that 'active forest management' not necessarily reduces biodiversity, presenting evidences from a number of cases in Nepal.

K. R. Kanel and B. R. Kandel examine the process of change in CF related policy and practices in the country. Besides, the authors (as insiders in the government's forestry sector) list a number of current challenges to the smooth functioning of CF in Nepal including links between CF and livelihood, good governance and sustainable forest management.

Finally, a message that emerges out of A. S. Poudyal's paper that sustainable use of some species and the forestry products that are in high demand can be ensured through a multi-pronged strategy. Some of the strategies suggested by Poudyal include domestication of such resources, adoption of sustainable harvesting methods, and a better understanding of the resources in question through research. While these may not be new prescriptions, the author's analysis of a case study of *Lokta* (*Daphne spp.*) in Dolakha makes it evident that NRM practice is still slow in adopting the lessons from the field.

We believe that everyone concerned would agree with us that the papers in this issue of the journal make it evident that poverty, livelihoods, equity, democratic practices, and governance will continue to draw our attention in time to come. To address such complex challenges, stakeholders need to challenge their own assumptions that guided the interventions to date, and explore more innovative approaches and strategies that combine diverse perspectives and favour a strong in-built component of learning from experience.

At this juncture, we would like to note that Journal of Forest and Livelihood has completed four years and time has come to review its position in the rapidly changing context. The editorial board is planning a review of the journal's overall strategies, coverage and formats, which will best serve our readers and contribute to the more critical aspects of environmental policy and rural livelihoods. We would be very grateful if you provide your critical comments and suggestions in this regard.

We would like to thank all the reviewers of this issue for their valuable contribution and hope to receive their continuous support in the future too.

Mani Ram Banjade
Managing Editor
Journal of Forest and Livelihood
Email: eri@wlink.com.np
forestaction@wlink.com.np

Ram B. Chhetri, PhD
Head of the Department
Central Department of Sociology/
Anthropology, T. U.
Email: rchhetri@info.com.np