

Strengthening Research–Policy Link



Forest policy agenda in Nepal are largely shaped by political actors' ambitions, forest officials' understanding, international influence, civil society lobbying or interest based negotiations among influential players. Despite a rich and active research in the Nepal's forest sector, research based evidence has had little influence in shaping forest policies.

Challenges and need for intervention

Prolonged political transition and frequent changes in the government has resulted in an ad hoc approach to decision making including policy decisions. Major forestry donors who worked for a long time in Nepal emphasized on development interventions with little appreciation of research. Researchers have too often failed to communicate their findings to policy makers. Many of the existing mechanisms such as multi-stakeholder workshops, short-term working groups and task forces have also had little effect in connecting research with the policy process.

In this context, EnLiFT has aimed to develop a method to link research and policy processes to enrich both the quality of research and the impact of research on policy. A variety of strategies have been used to enhance the link between these two isolated systems of learning and decision making. This Brief describes key strategies, actions, outcomes and lessons of the policy work under the EnLiFT project.

EnLiFT strategy for research-policy link

EnLiFT has adopted four strategies in communicating its research-based knowledge and insights to inform and influence policies.

Strategy 1: Large workshops as open forum for knowledge exchange:

i) National Silviculture Workshop (19-22 Feb, 2017); ii) National Workshop on Land Management and Food Security: Addressing Under-utilised Agricultural Land Issues in Nepal (28th -29th April, 2016). Besides, we organized several workshops at district level in our research sites (e.g. forest based enterprises, CF-LG relations).



Participants during National Silviculture Workshop

Strategy 2: EnLiFT policy labs on specific policy issues involving a small team of policy actors representing the government, civil society, and the research community

We organized 12 EnLiFT Policy Labs (EPL) which we define as a researcher convened forum of policy actors confronting a specific policy challenge, designed to foster meaningful dialogue between researchers and policy actors in developing a shared understanding of the policy problem and the possible solutions informed by research evidence¹. The EPL bridges research and policy domain and forges effective dialogue between the two.



Discussion during EnLiFT policy lab held at IUCN

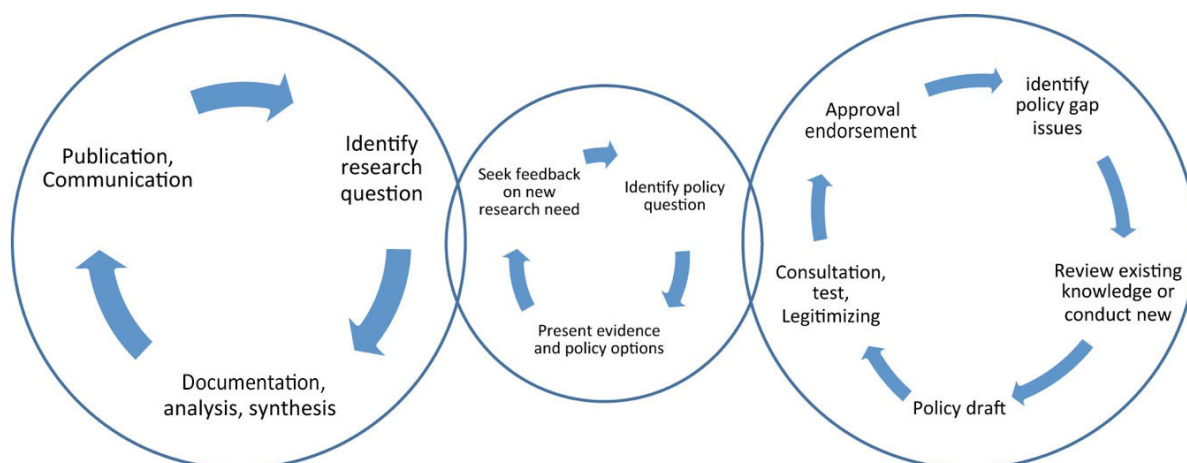


Figure: Bridging between research and policy cycle

1. Source: Ojha et al. Research-Policy paper (to be submitted)

Summary of selected EnLiFT policy lab events

Topic of Policy Lab	Participant Composition	Outcomes
Transforming State-Community Contract in Community Forestry; (15 January 2017)	Govt- 3; CSO- 2; Donors- 2	Recognition of the problem, commitment to develop a category of CFUGs with differential details for administrative requirement.
Scientific Forest Management (12 December 2014)	Govt- 2; CSO- 4; Private sector- 2	Recognized that a greater focus should be on governance aspects and in increasing the capacity of CF members
Regulatory hurdles in private forestry (8 March 2015)	Govt- 2; CSO- 1; Donors- 1; Private Sectors- 2	Exemption of 26 species of timber from regular administrative requirements, further work on promoting private forests
Land use planning and food security (19 January 2015)	Govt- 2; CSO- 1; Private sector- 2; Political parties- 2	Shared concern of the of the gloomy scenario, commitment to promote private forestry in those areas
Post-earthquake reconstruction and relaxing timber supply (19 June 2015)	Govt- 2; CSO- 2; Private Sector- 1	Immediate policy response in relaxing harvesting and transportation for timber from CF

Strategy 3: Using research through Working Groups and Task Forces

Senior people in the EnLiFT team have been contributing to the policy making process mainly through occasionally formed working groups and task forces. Due to their good research credibility and long standing relation with the relevant sectors (SMA and NSP in forest) and BHP in agriculture), they served several missions during the EnLiFT period. In their commissioned work, they have translated EnLiFT generated research findings into reports that they produced for the government (examples: Swoyambhu Man Amatya: reviewed agriculture and forestry based industries; Bishnu Hari Pandit: worked for revision of forest based policies; Naya Sharma Paudel: worked on community forest enterprises; Shambhu Dangal: involved on silvicultural technologies for different forest types; Murari Joshi: Agroforestry Policy).

Strategy 4: Informal but ongoing engagement

EnLiFT researchers made several formal and informal meetings with relevant officials as a part of policy discussion and have communicated their research generated knowledge. While such engagements are crucial in maintaining mutual trust, identifying and measuring actual output of such engagement is quite challenging.



Director General of DoF and other participants during visit to Chaubas

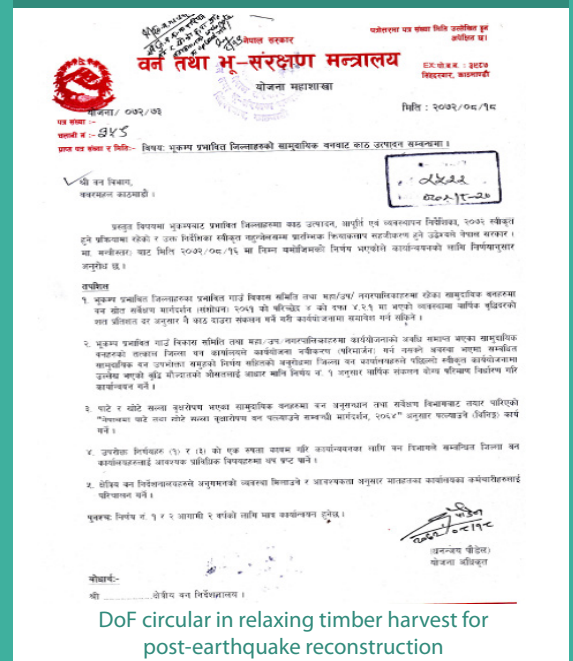
The unique features of EPL include:

1. 10-12 carefully selected key individuals (policy makers + researchers + experts + key stakeholders);
2. Cozy environment for free exchange of constructive and critical ideas/views;
3. Robust evidence from specific cases usually generated under the EnLiFT project;
4. Very specific, narrow policy question that are confronted by people and project team;
5. Two-way communication: not only research sharing their findings but also policy makers sharing their knowledge needs; and
6. Minimum institutional boundary where people can talk out of their institutional identity and standard norms.

EnLiFT policy engagement has significantly contributed to the following policy Outcomes

It has Stimulated silviculture-based sustainable forest management to achieve multiple objectives of forest management. Our engagement has strongly brought the concept of silvo-institutional approach to sustainable forest management.

- The Government, especially the Ministry of Agriculture Development, brought schemes that encouraged land utilization through incentive structure, subsidies and stronger compliance of its rules.
- The Government made a decision to relax administrative requirement in harvesting and transporting timber during the post-earthquake reconstruction period.



DoF circular in relaxing timber harvest for post-earthquake reconstruction

Lessons

Review of EnLiFT’s multiple strategies in linking research with policy decision reveals the following important lessons that may help future project design and wider research community in Nepal:

1. EPL can be an effective strategy in strengthening research-policy link to enrich and inform many policy agenda in the forest and livelihoods sector, if it is properly organized and facilitated.
2. Linking research and policy processes requires context specific, dynamic, flexible and interactive process which means that the researchers should adopt diverse strategies as appropriate.
3. Policy link should be an essential element of any research project to achieve wider and lasting achievements, and also to bring research results to scale.
4. Effective dialogue between research and policy actors help revise/refine research agenda and questions, and this benefits both research community and policy actors

Voices of people

It is the fact that a Public policy formulation approach based on strong evidence based research has always high level of acceptance, ownership and success rate compared to ad-hoc and incremental approach. In my personal view, our field visit was an excellent field laboratory policy dialogue. I am very much hopeful that it will definitely value add in drafting the forth coming Management guideline for established plantation community Forests.

Resham Dangji, DG, Department of Forest

Compared to large forums, EnLiFT policy lab is more focused and allows effective discussion

Krishna P. Acharya, DG, Department of Forest

We often see a tensed environment and everybody seems to be struggling to establish their positions in large forums. But, EnLiFT policy lab is different in that sense where there is a cool environment and everybody seem to be appreciating each other.

Ganesh Karki, Chairperson, FECOFUN



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