

Advancing Active and Equitable Forest Management through EnLiFT Policy and Practice Lab (EPPL): A Brief Report of the First EPPL Experimental Event

*Report by Hemant Ojha, Amrit Poudel, Mani Banjade, Amrit Paudel, Madan Bashyal,
and Edwin Cedamon*

1. BACKGROUND AND THE IDEA OF EPPL

Demonstrating active and equitable management of community forests (AEFM) through silvicultural technology development is one of the key objectives of EnLiFT 2. To achieve this, the project team has established several silvicultural demonstration sites in the two project districts of Kavre and Sindhu in central Nepal. While formal regulatory instruments broadly allow active silvicultural operations, administrative ambiguities and regulatory restrictions persist, especially with regard to green felling and the transport of timber outside of the community. For this reason, it has been critical to find ways to ensure regulatory support at both the piloting and upscaling stages of silvicultural technology development. The regulatory environment has become even more complex with the emergence of the provincial and local governments in the country, creating some new opportunities as well as challenges for community-based and private forest management.

In EnLiFT 1, we tested a central level EnLiFT Policy Lab (EPL) method through which the project team influenced various policy processes to create enabling environment for communities to manage and utilise forest resources¹. Building on this, in the second phase of the project (known as EnLiFT 2), we designed a framework of EnLiFT Policy and Practice Lab (EPPL) to create supportive spaces for upscaling solutions being experimented at the community level. There is, however, a positive and synergistic interaction between EPL and EPPL. EPPL happens at the lowest level of state and society interface – in our case, district and/or the local government level. We also consider the Sindhu-Kavre joint processes and events for EPPL.

For EPPL, one of the actionable opportunities we tapped into is the presence of some important *discretionary regulatory spaces* within sub-national authorities (such as the one held by the Divisional Forest Officers) and local governments. There are also important and emerging entrepreneurial and civic spaces at the local level, that can contribute to community forestry innovation. Given the increasing levels of contestations around the use of regulatory power in the recent years, opportunities also exist to create trust among multiple stakeholders in advancing active silvicultural technology. What all of these means is that there is an important space for dialogue, reflections, learning, negotiation, regulatory clarification, and innovation at the lowest level of state and society interface. Such processes at the meso level could also generate important evidence, feedback, voice and insights for national level policy dialogues in the form of EPL.

EnLiFT team has realised that there is a need to develop framework and process for community leaders, DFOs and local governments to collectively review the emerging technological solutions on forest management, typically in an annual basis. This can enable them to appreciate the value of local innovations, and then to optimise discretionary powers to support and upscale the solution. This meso level fix of regulatory issues can also avoid the need to influence national policy or regulatory provisions in some cases, especially when multiple and contesting stakeholders can agree on specific strategies to upscale solutions within the spaces of existing regulatory structure. Such strategy of engaging with the district and local level stakeholders could also help identify their concerns which can be picked up by EnLiFT research team for action research and analysis.

¹ Ojha, Hemant, Udeep Regmi, Krishna K Shrestha, Naya Sharma Paudel, Swoyambhu Man Amatya, Anthony B Zwi, Ian Nuberg, Edwin Cedamon and Mani R Banjade (2019). "Improving science-policy interface: Lessons from the policy lab methodology in Nepal's community forest governance." *Forest Policy and Economics*: 101997.

2. THE EXPERIMENTAL EPPL PROCESS

The first EPPL cycle was tested in January 2020. After completing three steps, the EPPL plenary meeting was held at Budol (Kavre). Participating in the EPL cycle and the plenary event were key stakeholders of the two project districts (DFOs, Community Forest User Group leaders, Local government representatives, FECOFUN, local forest entrepreneurs), a senior official from the Ministry of Forest and Environment, and members of the EnLiFT Research team. This cycle comprised of the following four steps: designing an operational EPPL framework and team orientation on technology or innovation being piloted (silvicultural trials in this case), multi-actors review of silvicultural trials, team discussions and further analysis, and a plenary event to share reviews and discuss action strategies for improvement (schematically presented in the diagram below, Figure 1). This experimental cycle has shown that EPPL can be an important platform to remove blockages to the development and promotion of forest management solutions. This was evident in the positive feedback of the participants and the commitment of DFOs as reflected in the view of Sindhupalchok DFO at the end of the plenary event: “Please pass me all the action points identified for the DFO and I will soon act on these”. Research team has processed the outcomes of this EPPL cycle in five categories: 1) action points for DFOs and local stakeholders; 2) issues that need more research and evidence by the research team; 3) issues that need to be presented at the EnLiFT Advisory Group meeting; 4) and issues that require national level EPL action. It was agreed that such cycle repeated at least annually.

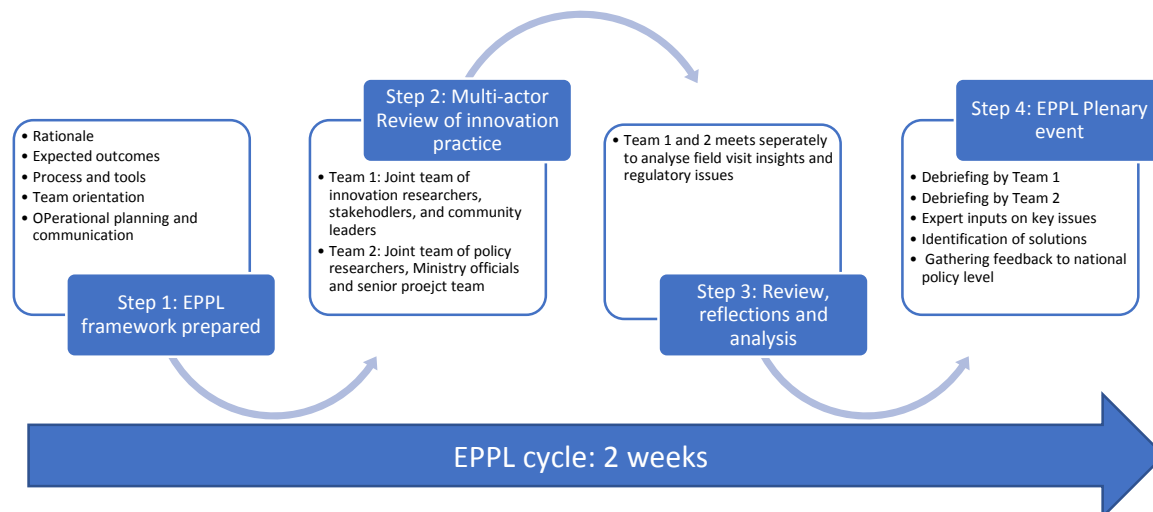


Figure 1. EPPL Cycle: Steps and processes

3. OUTCOMES OF EPPL

Several key outcomes emerged from the first EPPL process

- **Wider and deeper ownership of the silvicultural demonstrations:** a joint team of forest staff, FECOFUN leaders, entrepreneur and CFUG leaders visited and assessed the silvicultural demo plots in Chaubas area. This onsite observations and collective reflections provided an important opportunity to understand the process, merits and challenges of silvicultural development in community forests. Furthermore, such as joint task team that discussed intensively the issues and merits of silvicultural development to present in the plenary part of the EPPL.
- **Clearer understanding of roles, limitations and expectations of different stakeholders:** Linked to silvicultural experimentation and challenges experienced, an intense discussion emerged in the plenary meeting at Budol. This led to who can do what to resolve emerging issues and take the silvicultural development work forward in each of the sites. It was realized that all of the stakeholders such as CFUGs, government forestry agencies, local governments, MOFE planning division, researchers and experts could play better role in advancing silvo-institutional development in community forestry. Specific roles were identified and commitment expressed by all stakeholder groups.
- **The value of dialogue and open reflections appreciated:** At the end of the process, all participating groups agreed that such dialogues among multiple stakeholders on a very specific theme of their common concern and organized as a joint event between Sindhu and Kavre is very helpful to create momentum, enhance synergy and deepen learning.
- **Local government role and way forward:** As forests are included under the concurrent powers of federal, provincial and local governments, clarity of the role of the local governments is critical. As many local governments have shown an interest and have demonstrated their concern in effective functioning of community forestry program, EPPL can be an effective forum to craft and test CF-LG cooperation modalities.
- **Stakeholder feedback to research team:** There are some positive developments in policy fronts in accommodating various forest management models. However, challenges of implementation on the ground persist largely due to the limited capacity and willingness of technical staff and other actors, administrative burdens and complex procedural expectations, governance issues within CFUGs, blanket approach promoted for timber focused forest management and limited deliberation while preparing operational plans. These issues should be taken into consideration by EnLiFT project while working on technical aspects of forest management and promoting for trade and enterprises.
- **Better link with EnLiFT advisory group:** There was also a suggestion that EPPL outcomes should be shared with the EnLiFT advisory committee. The MOFE representative attending the event pledged to facilitate such linkage. DFOs also committed to act on the action points identified.

Overall, as all the stakeholders participated in the first EPPL found it a useful approach for bringing stakeholders together for analysing policies and practices, observing the practices and reflecting on the same, the EPPL shows great promise for effective implementation of the research activities on the ground and upscaling them. The EnLiFT research team also realised the value of designing and facilitating EPPL for other themes such as governance, gender and enterprise.

4. APPENDIX – DETAILED EPPL PROCEEDING

(By Amrit Poudel)

Opening Session of Program

The first session of program started with the brief introduction of program by Master of Ceremony Mr Kamal Bhandari. He sensitized about the changing dynamics of forest management with decreasing dependency of local user on forest and shifting of forest needs from firewood, fodder to timber and ecotourism. He briefly introduced about EnLiFT2 project, its objectives and significance in current scenario.

The program went on with the introduction of participants and seating of the participants.

Second Session

The meeting proceeded with the presentations on different themes silviculture policy and practices as follows:

1. Presentation 1: Forest management policy and practice laboratory, *first historical workshop?*

- This presentation was jointly done by Dr. Mani Ram Banjade and Dr. Hemant Ojha. In the first segment of presentation Dr. Banjade highlighted the transitional scenario of forest management in federal structure, lack of clarity in role of different tiers of government and CFUG in management of community forests and uncertainty on taxation system. Similarly, he presented on changing demands from forest of local users, decreasing direct dependency on forest and shift in conservation to utilization model of management. He pointed out the need of the active forest management, good governance and silviculture-based management as need of hour and stated that the improvement in Community Forestry sector has not happened as expected. He presented EnLiFT2 as a practice to fill the gap between policy and practice and over-mature forest as opportunities of management amid the challenges of outmigration and passiveness on CFUG prevailing in the site. He explained the role of EPPL to find the joint learning group working together to work in coordination for forest management.
- In the second segment, Dr. Hemant Ojha stated building on the legacy of community forestry development with timely adjustment and change is necessary and intensive intra-discussion within CF stakeholders (Ministry of Forest and Environment, provincial authorities, DFO, Forest Enterprises, FECOFUN, researchers and other relevant is must for the betterment. He recommended to identify the policy vs. practice loopholes in core issues of community forest management and develop a road map of forest management based on three dimensions of change: improvement, process and time.

2) Presentation 2: Opportunities of Active Forest Management in Nepal

Mr. Shambhu Dangal presented on Opportunities of Active Forest Management in Nepal stressing on sustainable management of forests with optimum utilization at present without compromising future. He stated Terai and Midhills forest as financially manageable forest with high potential and management of only mature forest can yield 119 million cubic meter of timber. He explained the scenario of Nepalese market of forest products with demand of forest products in household level

is decreasing in urban and semi urban areas , demand of timber and softwood (especially for furniture) increasing but the big timber-based industries have been found not to prefer Nepalese timber as they come up with several issues such as no seasoning or timber, lack of treatment and lots of administrative and procedural hurdles. He stressed on the need of conducive policy and timely connection of forest with local livelihoods in terms of economic returns. He pointed out the lack of cost-effective forest management models, blanket approach of silvicultural treatments, complex marketing provision, ambiguity in taxation, lack of inclusive and good governance and different understanding of different stakeholders as the major challenges for forest management in Nepal. He suggested to develop Sustainable Forest Management criteria and indicators for different type of forests in Nepal and rejuvenation of Silviculture Working Group from Ministry of Forest for timely discourses on forest management in the country

2. Presentation 3: Presentation by Mr. Thakur Bhandari, FECOFUN

- Mr. Thakur Bhandari started his speech with objection to initial statement of community forestry and users being disconnected and requested not to exaggerate the situation and to present rationally. However, he accepted that dependency of users on forest has decreased on some parts. He pointed out the revision and analysis of existing operational plans as immediate and effective way to find out the hurdles for active management of community forests. He warned to control clear felling practice and showed his dissent to Scientific Forest management system as a practice to cut young trees in an area by keeping old treed in other area untouched for 8 years. He felt the Scientific Forest Management is not only a timber focused system (which ignores whole range of other products that local people need in daily basis) leaving out biodiversity and NTFPs and is being run by limited dangerous stakeholders. He said that the bushfire case in Australia is being misused in Nepal to showcase the risk of fire and strengthening scientific forest management. However, he supported research by EnLiFT believing as different practice and asked for sufficient co-ordination with stakeholders by research team. At the same time, he also stated that encouraging the clear-felling practice by showcasing EnLiFT research would be fatal one.

He presented the hurdles in forest-based products marketing and commercialization as major challenge for community forest management. He also expressed his dissatisfaction to the role of three tiers of government by taking them as the boastful and non-conducting.

- **Comment:** Mr. Ram Prasad Gautam, ward chair from Chautara Sanghachowkgadhi CF, defended the version of Mr. Thakur Bhandari by saying local government as the government structure with day-to-day interaction with people at grassroot level and suggested central FECOFUN to reduce its distance to local people with timely and regular counseling.

3. Presentation 4: Introduction of EnLiFT2 (Dr. Naya Sharma Paudel)

- Dr. Naya Sharma Paudel, In-country coordinator, EnLiFT introduced EnLiFT2 project as action research project with special focus on forest management on contrary to EnLiFT1 with more works on forest management, agroforestry and Under-utilised land. He described the structure of EnLiFT2 as research collaborated by Australia government and Nepal government with University of Adelaide, University of New South Wales and University of Craigieburn as universities involved from Australia, and Forest Research and Training Centre (FRTC), Department of Forest (DoF), ForestAction Nepal, Nepal Agroforestry foundation and RECOFTC as partners within Nepal. He presented Active and Equitable Forest Management (AEFM), social inclusion and good governance, and forest based pro-poor enterprises as the major thematic objectives of project. He summed up his presentation by informing the details of the projects, its objectives and activities can also be assessed on www.enliftnepal.org, official website of EnLiFT.

4. Presentation 5: Active and Equitable Forest Management (Mr. Madan Bashyal)

- Mr. Madan Bashyal presented on Active and Equitable forest management (AEFM) system being followed in EnLiFT. In the scenario of half of the population dependent on forest in mid hill region below poverty line, he presented AEFM as a sound forest management model in terms of silvicultural, social and economic aspects. He shared experiences from EnLiFT I stating that the start of community forest management in Chaubas area with increased income of Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) had significantly increased the adoption of AEFM practice. This way the adoption of AEFM practice can also be helpful in achieving 'Forest for Prosperity' goal of the Government of Nepal. He presented AEFM as better and holistic system that sees forest management through the lens of community and ecology as well as facilitates for small scale forest management for upliftment of livelihood. He described the steps followed by EnLiFT from research to policy input with activities of demonstration, knowledge output and capacity building. He also informed on the technical aspect of silvicultural trials, treatments followed, research data collected and further course of action to be carried out.

5. Discussion

- Bhagwan Prasad Gupta, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Sindhupalchowk asked that a silvicultural system can be active but how can it be equitable. This query has responded by Dr Hemant Ojha describing entire forest management, not a particular silvicultural system, as an equitable process. He added that process and issue of equitable management will be assessed throughout the project period and will be assessed and recommended by end of project period.
- Devi Chandra Pokhrel, DFO Sindhupalchowk, asked on future of retained mother tree/ seed tree after 5 years. Shambhu Dangal responded on it mentioning that 50% mother tree to be removed and 50% to be retained for entire rotation. He added the frequency of retaining mother trees and urge to remove them after 5 years may vary as per site quality, recovery potential and risk management strategy adopted.
- Dr. Edwin Cedamon clarified that EnLiFT is not promoting any silvicultural system, but is co-learning collectively. He said that after synthesis of the knowledge, some prescription can be made as per regeneration potential, suitable timing for seed tree removal. He added that market demand should be considered crucial ensuring the right amount of harvest to be done, neither too high nor too low. He reinstated that there is no point for EnLiFT to promote any system if institutional capacity is no strengthened and he suggested to understand AEFM as a part of research trial.
- Mr. Shambhu Dangal informed the meeting that EnLiFT is working on institutionalization of Training of Trainers (TOT) on forest management and safe chainsaw training with collaboration with FRTC.

6. Presentation 6: Field Experience Sharing by Research Review Team (Hari Pandey)

Mr. Hari Pandey started his presentation with overview on involvement of FRTC, structure of Project Advisory committee and EnLiFT2 procedural steps. He presented field visit with research team as a good experience and explained active community participation as major positive for forest management. He mentioned present policies on forest management more enabling than in past and took it as opportunity for forest management. At the same time, he stated the lack of common understanding among different stakeholders and diverse intra-stakeholder problems as major hurdles for active forest management. He stressed on sustainable management of forest ensuring the multiple

values of forest and supported the site and objective based forest management. He took ample growing stock in forests as resource with huge potential and said that wise utilization is must. He added that synergy and replication of research findings will lead to active forest management and institutionalization of learning from research is must. He wrapped up his presentation with request for all stakeholders to act for better forest management.

7. Presentation 7: Presentation by Forest Management Study Task force (Mr. Ram Kumar Bhandari)

- Presentation by Forest management study task force on the base of visit of forest management practice in Chaubas and prior experiences related to forest management was last presentation of second session and it was delivered by Mr. Ram Kumar Bhandari, Assistant Forest Officer (AFO), Janal sub-division Kavrepalanchowk. He presented strength in policy and shift in conservation mindset to different models of management as the major positives for forest management. At the same time, he said that challenges on capacity of actors and risk factor for new trials exist. He added that the uncertainty of regeneration, hard work of conducting environment among all stakeholders and administrative rules binding the government were some of challenges during the starting of EnLiFT II. Similarly, he described level of good governance and complex procedural steps as important areas to be worked on. He pointed the timber focused Operational Plan adopted with blanket approach as major hindrance for active forest management. He added that the technicians are dominant in Operational plan with Community forest user group (in some cases even CFUG chair) unknown about provisions in OP and despite of unnecessary bulk volume of pages, the OPs are lacking the necessary content on clear plan of activities. Similarly, he presented that the federal structure had not brought forest structures closer to community as much it should have been and also said the roles of different tiers of government and taxation are still in process of being made clear. In case of marketing and trade, he said that the long and tedious administrative process is hindering the timely and swift market channel. Similarly, the legal provisions are unfriendly for CFUG to use and value add the product from own forest production.

He recommended that concise and comprehensive OP should be prepared through participatory process concentrated on demand supply chain and OP should be site specific based on forest character and management objectives. He also suggested EnLiFT to develop model OPs on different management theme and said Divisional forest office is happy to co-operate on that. Similarly, he inferred that long administrative process needs to be reduced and enabling policy with economic procedure on harvesting to final product should be developed. He further added that capacity development of forest sector professional should be enhanced. He concluded with the notion that it can be a good idea for able CFUGs to go for better management by hiring forest technical personnel.

Third Session

Third session was an open discussion with stakeholders facilitated by Dr. Hemant Ojha. He summed up the preceding presentation and discussions as similar understanding of stakeholders on challenges, opportunities and need of initiative and in this session, he suggested the meeting to discuss on how can stakeholders work together better. He pointed modalities of organizational development, policy refinement, market access and AEFM should be discussed to achieve the target by ensuring the sustainability. He also added that roles of local government in CF management are still unclear and what mechanism is better should also be discussed. The floor was opened for discussion and following opinions were raised during discussion:

1. Bhagwan Prasad Gupta, DFO Kavrepalanchowk

- He stated that research team needs to research on existing policies and find research gap and suggest on what policies can be taken forward, what should be left behind and what changes should be made on policy. He suggested that Research on Pine, pulp processing for paper, seasoning and so forth should be done. He also added that all of the involved stakeholders in forest management (from communities to concerned ministries involving common CF members to forest technical experts) should be able to understand their specific roles on AEFM and showed his hope that EnLiFT I & II will provide detailed roles of each of the stakeholders and channel them and equip them to understand better about the overall process of AEFM and their specific roles.

2. Shambhu Dangal

- Mr. Shambhu Dangal mentioned that obstructions in policy, changes necessary in market approach and institutional development should be sorted out and asked if the research team can develop provisional criteria acquire permission for piloting in research sites (as it was possible in Australian Project).

Similarly, he said that market survey for timber to have lesser use and market survey for multiple and newer product as a necessity of hour. He presented trial for face veneer from pine softwood as one example for possible and different trail.

3. Kamal Bhandari

Mr. Kamal Bhandari expressed his concern over decreasing interest of CFUGs in harvesting as the marketing and sale of timber not being satisfactory. He said that value of timber has dipped down and this trajectory should be timely addressed.

4. Ram Prasad Gautam, Ward Chair

- He recommended to establish local level forest policy for easy and smooth functioning of aforementioned hassles related to timber harvest (until final product). He echoed on the need of research-based policy and development of concise and specific OP for forest management. He presented example of improving governance in Shreechhap CFUG and timber marketing hurdlesfaced by Shree Sansari CF in his ward. He repeated the need of collective action among stakeholders in sum up.

5. **Lok Bahadur Kunwar, Ward Chair, Bhumlu**

- Mr Kunwar said that as community forest management is linked with all level of government: Central, Provincial and Local level, there is not enough clarity on its functioning and its accountability. Similarly, he expressed dissatisfaction to the structure of forestry sector by saying that almost every technical expert on forestry are allocated at local government level. He told that having forest technician at all local level is important and expected EnLiFT to help to resolve this issue. Similarly, he restated the need of all stakeholders to be on the same page and hope EnLiFT will help to facilitate to bring all stakeholders together and help to know all issues and mediate to flow right information related to functioning of each stakeholder with their roles and responsibilities.

6. **Madhav Mani Humagain, FenFIT**

Mr Madhav Mani Humagain expressed his concern as the country is going through a transition phase both at political and institutional level. He expressed his unhappiness on the functioning of three tiers of government federal republic of Nepal. Here, one of the major issues is the conflicting roles of the government at all three levels. He opposed the hyper-conservative mindset in forest management in Nepal and presented this as major hassle in competing to the imported timber. He presented it with an example of import of 22 ft long timber from abroad but dependency on mechanical labour with ban on mechanized equipment like dozers in Nepal. He showcased the need of intensive discussion on law and policy matters with all stakeholders and suggested EnLiFT to create conducive environment for all the stakeholders. He reported the misuse of self-wisdom by forest officials has also been problematic in some cases during permit grant. He pointed failure to establish seasoning plant and portable saw mill and said that felling and maintenance of quality of timber are always problematic given the time and technology available (on top of policy hassle). He expected facilitation and help from EnLiFT team on these issues.

7. **Dr. Kiran Poudyal,**

He said that being governed by similar system, the cases of Sindhupalchowk and Kavrepalanchowk are more similar. He presented the use of alternatives like aluminium, PVC and iron have decreased the demand and value of timber and predicted it to dip down further if same scenario goes on. He refused that the import of timber as major challenge to demand by stating that the import of timber has also decreased from 9 million cubic feet (cft.) to 7 million cft in last years. He also said that forest product other than timber and firewood is wasted and there is no security of market. He suggested the government to encourage wood instead of cement, iron and make guideline for government construction to enforce use of timber. Similarly, he said diversification of wood products and value addition has been must to combat the import of final wooden products. He suggested subsidy to wood-based industries as well as recommended enabling provisions to CFUGs and private forests to produce their sawn timber and sell them independently in the market

8. Sujata Tamang

She said that amid of talk that dependency on forest is decreasing, the dependency might have been changed differently to different level widening the gap between the better-off and poor communities and suggested to address this issue.

4.1.1.Way forward

Research team will work on different themes, interrelations of themes and present result in other consultations. Theme specific discussions will be continued, issues will be grouped, sent to respective stakeholders for action and the recommendation will be made to Project Advisory committee. EnLiFT2 will organize another policy lab on different theme and present the finding of this policy lab with input from all.

Closing Session

Closing remarks were made by Bhagwan Pasad Gupta, Dr. Ian Nuberg and Hari Prasad Pandey.

- **Bhagwan Prasad Gupta (DFO Kavrepalanchowk)**
 - He found EnLiFT Practice and Policy Lab as a good discussion synthesized from field practice, policy and principle.
- **Dr. Ian Nuberg**
 - Dr. Ian Nuberg congratulated everyone for a lively and energetic discussion and hoped for significant outcome from this EPPL. He stated policy was not a major component in the early stage of EnLiFT I, but in the II phase it become an important part and now has been one of the central componenets in EnLiFT II.
- **Hari Pandey**
 - He thanked EnLiFT2 for important discussion in EPPL and concluded the program.

Annex I: List of participants

S.N.	Name	Affiliation
1	Ian Nuberg	EnLiFT II
2	Hemant Ojha	EnLiFT II
3	Edwin Cedamon	EnLiFT II
4	Naya Sharma Paudel	EnLiFT II
5	Shambhu Dangal	EnLiFT II
6	Mani Ram Banjade	EnLiFT II
7	Sujata Tamang	EnLiFT II
8	Madan Bashyal	EnLiFT II
9	Amrit Kumar Poudel	EnLiFT II
10	Kamal Bhandari	EnLiFT II
11	Kiran Poudyal	EnLiFT II
12	Neeraj katwal	EnLiFT II
13	Hari Pandey	FRTC
14	Devi Chandra Pokhrel	DFO, Sindhupalchowk
15	Bhagwan Prasad Gupta	DFO, Kavrepalanchowk
16	Rajan Shrestha	AFO, Kavrepalchowk
17	Ram Kumar Bhandari	AFO, Kavrepalanchowk
18	Kamala Shretha	Ranger , Sindhupalchowk
19	Thakur Bhandari	FECOFUN
20	Chandraman Tamang	Ward Chair, Banepa
21	Ram Prasad Gautam	Ward Chair, Chautara
22	Lok Bahadur Kunwar	Ward Chair, Bhumlu
23	Madhav Mani Humagain	FENFIT

Annex 2 - Photo plates



