

## Workshops Support Roll Out of the Wildlife-friendly Infrastructure Construction Directives: A Step Toward a Hopeful Future for Sustainable Development in Nepal

Nepal's expanding linear infrastructure can pose a significant threat to its diverse wildlife and biodiversity by fragmenting habitats and causing other adverse effects, such as depleting natural resources. Nepal's Cabinet of Ministers achieved a significant milestone when it endorsed the Wildlife-friendly Infrastructure Construction Directives (WFICD) on March 10, 2022, followed by the directives' official gazetting on April 18. In collaboration with various government ministries and stakeholders, WWF-Nepal—through the Asia's Linear Infrastructure safeGuarding Nature (ALIGN) Project funded by the US Agency for International Development—played a vital role in advocating for the directives and promoting wildlife-friendly practices.

The introduction of the directives is a huge milestone for Nepal, especially considering the extensive scale of infrastructure development underway across the country. Its implementation not only signifies a commitment to sustainable development but also emphasizes the crucial need to preserve Nepal's rich biodiversity. However, even with the directives in place, integrating wildlife considerations into infrastructure development is a novel concept for Nepal.

Major stakeholders involved in infrastructure development are just acquainting themselves with this concept. As part of the ALIGN Project implemented in partnership between WWF and the Center for Large Landscape Conservation, WWF-Nepal held a series of workshops to support stakeholder understanding and support of the directives. The unfolding of this paradigm shift promises an intriguing journey toward harmonizing infrastructure development with the preservation of wildlife in Nepal.

After the endorsement and publication of the WFICD on government websites, stakeholders still had minimal information and awareness about it. For wider circulation, the ALIGN Project supported the government in printing the directives as a portable booklet that Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) is distributing. ALIGN Project members also teamed up with DNPWC to organize sensitization workshops at national and provincial levels.



*Hon. Ram Sahaya Yadav, minister, Ministry of Forest and Environment, attended the national-level sharing event. Photo credit: Pooja Shrestha, WWF-Nepal*

Workshop Location	Number of participants
Kathmandu (National)	87 (10% Women)
Lumbini Province	52 (5.8% Women)
Gandaki Province	44 (9% Women)
Sudurpaschim Province	56 (11% Women)
Karnali Province	43 (13 % Women)
<b>Total</b>	<b>282</b>

The ALIGN Project and DNPWC conducted a national-level sharing event and provincial-level sharing workshops in Lumbini, Gandaki, Sudurpaschim, and Karnali provinces. These workshops included participation from government representatives, the private and finance sectors, and civil society organizations.

Participants engaged in fruitful discussions and emphasized the need for awareness programs targeting local leaders. Attendees reflected that the WFICD was a timely and vital initiative, with the potential to reduce human-wildlife conflict and provide a way forward for sustainable and wildlife-friendly linear infrastructure development. Yet, participants voiced a major concern about the potential increase in cost when constructing wildlife-friendly infrastructure.

“Although wildlife-friendly infrastructure may increase costs, we must prioritize wildlife well-being over finances. We hope for continuous support from WWF-Nepal in capacity building and sensitization related to the Wildlife-friendly Infrastructure Construction Directives,” remarked Bed Kumar Dhakal, secretary, Ministry of Industry Tourism, Forest, and Environment of Sudurpaschim Province, during the workshop at Sudurpaschim province.

Another participant, Arati Sah, senior divisional engineer, Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transportation, emphasized the importance of regular sensitization workshops that include conservation and infrastructure-related organizations at local, provincial, and federal levels.

“WFICD should be internalized by the infrastructure engineering sector and should be followed strictly by all concerned. Also, orientation programs like this, should be conducted for wider audiences,” said another participant, Shyam K. Sah, chief conservation officer of Bardiya National Park.

The workshops received positive feedback from participants, who also reported an increased understanding of the WFICD and its key elements, indicating that the objectives of conducting the workshops have been accomplished. The workshops also demonstrated the importance of bringing key stakeholders together to promote wildlife-friendly infrastructure and sustainable development. These sessions not only provided a platform for valuable feedback but also nurtured coordination, setting the stage for the effective implementation of the directives. The active engagement of diverse stakeholders in this initiative is a promising stride toward preserving Nepal's biodiversity while advancing its infrastructure development goals.