

ALIGN Event Educates Media on the Importance of Wildlife-Friendly Infrastructure

Nepal is a country rich in biodiversity, home to endangered species such as the one-horned rhinoceros, royal Bengal tiger, red panda, and Asian elephant, among others. The country has celebrated many remarkable conservation wins, including achieving its [TX2 target](#) by nearly tripling its tiger population from 121 individuals in 2009 to 355 individuals in 2022.

Despite conservation emerging as a priority for the government of Nepal, infrastructure development takes precedence, and each year, investments in linear infrastructure (LI) continue to rise. The construction of roads, irrigation canals, and transmission lines, while seemingly progressive economic steps, may negatively impact wildlife, their habitats, and ecosystems if these infrastructures are not designed with due consideration to the protection of nature. Representing only the tip of the iceberg, issues such as wildlife-vehicle collisions make headlines, while more nuanced information around LI such as the underlying causes of these issues and achievable solutions are rarely covered in the news.

Recognizing the need for journalists to better understand the impacts of LI on biodiversity, WWF-

Nepal—through the US Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Asia's Linear Infrastructure safeGuarding Nature (ALIGN) Project—established a partnership with the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ). As a part of this collaboration, a sensitization event was organized with the objective of helping media professionals throughout the country become more knowledgeable about the issues related to LI, its impact on wildlife, and the importance of wildlife-friendly infrastructure.



Program participants at Parsa National Park with the park's warden, Mr. Ramchandra Khatiwad (bottom center, wearing a vest). (©Sneha Tamrakar /WWF Nepal)

This two-day program in July 2024 took place in Chitwan—Nepal’s biodiversity hot spot—and included an orientation workshop and field visit. Thirty journalists from four provinces attended the program and were briefed on the ALIGN Project’s work, LI and its impacts on biodiversity, natural resource safeguarding, and wildlife-friendly infrastructure. Speakers included natural resource safeguards expert Dr. Roshan Serchan; the Chief Warden of Chitwan National Park (CNP), Mr. Dil Bahadur Purja Pun; and environmental journalist Mr. Abhaya Raj Joshi, who writes for *Mongabay* from Nepal.

Following the half-day workshop that offered theoretical knowledge and basic information on the impact of LI in Nepal, the team of journalists embarked on a field visit to observe and learn more about wildlife-friendly infrastructure. First, the team went to Mugling-Narayanghat highway to observe the four underpasses at Ramnagar, Chitwan, which



An underpass being constructed at N-B road (©Swarnima Shrestha /WWF Nepal)

are regarded as the first wildlife-friendly infrastructure in Nepal.

The second site was a section of the Narayanghat-Butwal road (N-B road) under construction. This segment of Nepal’s primary East-West Highway is being upgraded under the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Roads Improvement Project supported by the Asian Development Bank. The N-B road section contains a stretch that passes through the Terai Arc Landscape’s forested habitat, which is home to keystone species such as tigers and elephants, including a section of road adjacent to CNP’s buffer zone. In light of this, the N-B road project has integrated internationally recognized natural resource safeguarding measures, including highway wildlife crossings, into its ongoing construction.

During their visit, attendees gained insights into the underpasses’ significance from the project site engineer. Additionally, the team visited Parsa National Park and conversed with the park’s Warden, Mr. Ramchandra Khatiwada, to understand biodiversity and LI-related issues.



“Through this event, I learned about crucial wildlife corridors in Nepal, such as the Barandabar Corridor, and understood the importance of preserving these areas from the impacts of linear infrastructure.”

RITA RAUT
JOURNALIST
AKTHIKNEWS, KATHMANDU



The participating journalists expressed that the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical field visits was effective in providing them with a



comprehensive understanding of LI issues. Reflecting on the event, journalist Rita Raut from a Kathmandu-based news media outlet remarked that she gained knowledge on the importance of preserving wildlife corridors and other sensitive areas from the impacts of LI. Another participant, Ramesh Kumar Paudel from Chitwan, noted that the term "linear infrastructure" was new to him, and now he understands how it impacts the forests and biodiversity.

Following the workshop and field visits, participating journalists have started to write independently about the importance of wildlife-friendly infrastructure and natural resource

safeguarding in LI development in Nepal. Multimedia journalist Ms. Barsha Shah from *Deshsanchar News* [highlighted the need for wildlife-friendly infrastructure](#) like underpasses and assessed the current state of these structures. Additionally, the long-running TV program *Aakhijhyal*, which airs on 14 channels across Nepal, devoted [an episode](#) to exploring the issues discussed at the event and featured coverage of the event itself. Nepal's first English language, government-owned daily newspaper, *The Rising Nepal*, also featured [an article](#) by participant journalist Ms. Indira Aryal. Likewise, *Mongabay* published [an article](#) written by Mr. Joshi that featured learnings from the program. This media coverage indicates the event's success and demonstrates a growing understanding of and commitment from the journalists to write about wildlife-friendly infrastructure. This increased media coverage will, in turn, raise awareness among the public, policymakers, and professionals involved in infrastructure financing and construction. As Nepal continues to balance its developmental aspirations with environmental conservation, proactively engaging the media will play a crucial role in highlighting and addressing LI challenges. WWF-Nepal and the ALIGN Project will continue to initiate and facilitate these engagements.

■ *To learn more about the ALIGN Project, visit alignproject.org.*

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