

Bringing Together Infrastructure Stakeholders from Nepal and India: An Insightful Knowledge-Sharing Experience

A knowledge-sharing visit brought together government, private sector, and financial institution representatives from Nepal and India in August 2023 under the Asia's Linear Infrastructure safeGuarding Nature (ALIGN) Project. Funded by the United States Agency for International Development and implemented by WWF and the Center for Large Landscape Conservation, ALIGN works to enhance biodiversity conservation and sustainable linear infrastructure development through natural resource safeguard measures in Asia with specific focus in India, Mongolia, and Nepal. The weeklong event held in Delhi and Dehradun in India, brought together key stakeholders to identify challenges and limitations in implementing linear infrastructure safeguards; share insights and experiences; problem-solve; and enhance participants' understanding of safeguard-related policies and best practices.



Fifteen participants from Nepal took part in the visit. They included:

- Senior officials from federal government agencies, such as the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport; Ministry of Energy, Water Resources, and Irrigation; and Ministry of Forest and Environment
- Private sector representatives from Society of Consulting Architectural & Engineering Firms, Confederation of Nepalese Industries, and Federation of Contactor's Associations of Nepal
- Financial institutions such as the Nepal Infrastructure Bank and Nepal Bankers' Association
- ALIGN Project team members from WWF-Nepal

The trip adopted two main approaches for learning sharing: guided tours and lectures.

The guided tours—the event's most important learning element—allowed participants to visit the Rajaji Tiger Reserve landscape from the Dehradun and Haridwar/Rishikesh sides to see successful examples of wildlife-friendly infrastructure. The attendees observed safeguard measures in linear infrastructure including highways, railway lines, power canals, and transmission lines. The field visit highlighted

exemplary practices and demonstrated how India places a high priority on incorporating wildlife safety measures, even in the large-scale construction of linear infrastructure.



Elevated Road along Haridwar-Dehradun Highway within RTR



Railway track near Haridwar within RTR with precautionary signboard

The lectures featured experts and specialists from government agencies in India—including the National Tiger Conservation Authority, Rajaji Tiger Reserve, National Highway Authority of India, Ministry of Road Transport and Highway, and Wildlife Institute of India—, as well as WWF-India. They presented a combination of theoretical and practical guidance on vital issues related to biodiversity and safeguard measures in linear infrastructure construction. This provided participants with a comprehensive understanding of vital topics, including the significance of biodiversity and the relationship between linear infrastructure and biodiversity in India. The sessions delved into practical field-level approaches for natural resource safeguards across various infrastructure projects. They also explored the intricacies of planning, designing, and evaluating the impact of safeguard measures in linear infrastructure development.

To capture the visit's impact, ALIGN staff conducted a preliminary questionnaire and post-trip evaluation and meeting. Prior to the visit, participants particularly wanted to learn about the details of incorporating safeguards for natural resource conservation in linear infrastructure construction. The post-event evaluation revealed that most of the participants strongly agreed that their expectations were met and that the knowledge and information received were relevant to their jobs.

Additionally, ALIGN held a post-visit reflection meeting with the participants to share the learnings and how they could be applied in Nepal. Attendees stated that with their enhanced knowledge and understanding, they will become advocates for wildlife-friendly infrastructure. They also expressed that their thinking changed after the visit. They used to believe that conservation was just the responsibility of organizations such as WWF. But after the trip, they realized all sectors need to work together for conservation and that conservation and development can go hand in hand.

This visit fostered a deeper understanding of shared challenges and paved the way for future collaboration and meaningful discussions between stakeholders from the two countries. After the successful visit, which included federal-level participants, a similar program is being planned for provincial-level government officials from Nepal.