



**FROM CONFLICT TO COEXISTENCE: MEDIA'S ROLE IN SHAPING  
PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON HUMAN-WILDLIFE INTERACTION**



**18TH JUNE, 2024**



**NEW DELHI**

A roundtable meeting titled ***'From Conflict to Coexistence: Media's Role in Shaping Public Perception on Human-Wildlife Interaction (HWI)'*** was hosted by the ClimateRISE Alliance, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy and Mongabay India. The meeting brought together experts from civil society and media groups to discuss the complexities and nuances of HWI, highlighting the media's crucial role in shaping public perception. **The event underscored the importance of understanding the multifaceted nature of HWI and the need for holistic approaches that include awareness, science, policy, and community engagement.**

The meeting was attended by reputed conservation practitioners, academic researchers, and civil society members from organisations such as the Bombay Natural History Society, Wildlife Trust of India, The Coexistence Consortium, and GGSIP University. Journalists from over 25 regional and national media houses also participated, including The Times of India, Hindustan Times, Business Standard, Economic Times, Amar Ujala, Rashtriya Sahara, IANS, Reader's Digest, Rajasthan Patrika, News 18, Money Control, The Lallantop, India Today, Navbharat Times and more.

# KEY INSIGHTS

## 1 *Perception is shaped by Interaction*

Direct interaction with wildlife significantly shapes people's perceptions. This was highlighted by Sunil Harsana, a Coexistence Consortium Fellow, who noted that rural populations, who often live in closer proximity to wildlife, tend to have a more positive attitude towards wildlife. These communities frequently interact with wildlife, understanding their behaviors and recognizing them as part of their ecosystem. Conversely, urban populations, who rarely encounter wildlife, often perceive animals as threats. Differential levels of interaction with wildlife of urban populations limits their view of co-existence and undermines the importance of potential coexistence with wildlife.

## 2 *Acknowledge the diverse spectrum of human wildlife interactions*

Dr. Samir Sinha from the Wildlife Trust of India provided a nuanced understanding of human-wildlife encounters, emphasizing that these encounters exist on a spectrum and hence not all interactions can and should be classified as conflicts. True conflict involves recurring incidents that lead to human or property loss, fear, intolerance, and persecution. Many urban areas may experience fear without actual losses, while rural areas face direct, often unavoidable interactions. Understanding the root causes, such as improper waste disposal attracting wildlife, is crucial in addressing these encounters effectively. By distinguishing between benign interactions and true conflicts, we can develop more targeted and effective strategies for coexistence.

## 3 *Language Matters!*

The language used in media reports plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of human-wildlife interactions. Terms like 'terror' and 'havoc' showcase negative implications of such interactions without understanding it from all perspectives. Kundan Pandey from Mongabay India emphasized the importance of sensitive storytelling and responsible reporting. Dr. Sumit Dookia noted that media reports in different languages often depict the same incident differently, with more sensational language used in reports aimed at rural audiences. This highlights the need for media professionals to use language carefully, avoiding terms that can exacerbate fear in local communities and focusing instead of coexistence with diverse stakeholders.

**4**

### ***Revisit Traditional Practices of Coexistence***

Learning from traditional practices of coexistence offers valuable insights for modern conservation efforts. Samira Agnihotri from the Coexistence Consortium pointed out that many Adivasi communities in India have successfully coexisted with large animals for generations. The practices of 'co-adaptation' practiced by such communities demonstrate a deep understanding and respect for wildlife. By integrating these traditional practices into modern conservation strategies, we can promote coexistence and reduce conflicts. Building on this, Jayashree Nandi, from Hindustan Times also highlighted some stories of traditional efforts of coexistence practiced by tribal communities in India that have proved successful in managing instances of HWI. Such practices can shift the emotional connections between humans and wildlife, which will facilitate shift of the narrative from conflict to interaction, fostering a more harmonious relationship between people and nature.

**5**

### ***Need for Balanced Reporting on HWI***

Ensuring accurate, responsible, and unbiased reporting is essential for shaping informed public opinions. Nikhil Ghanekar from the Indian Express and Akshay Deshmane, an independent journalist, highlighted the biases and challenges in current media reporting on human-wildlife interactions. Event-centric reporting and class biases often lead to distorted public perceptions. For instance, labeling indigenous communities as 'encroachers' while not scrutinizing urban expansion equally affects policy frameworks and public attitudes. To counteract this, media outlets need to engage in thorough investigation, present balanced viewpoints, and avoid sensationalism. This approach will help build a more informed and empathetic public, better equipped to support effective conservation efforts and coexistence with wildlife.

**6**

### ***Systems to immediately respond to instances of HWI need to be strengthened***

In many incidences of HWI, affected individuals and bystanders struggle to identify the right stakeholders who they can reach out to, to manage situations. Pawan Kumar Sharma from Dainik Bhaskar shared that based on their experiences there is a need for proactive efforts by local authorities to build such knowledge gaps. Sunil Saurav from Hindustan also added to this idea and reflected on the need for interventions to address concerns of the most vulnerable people who live in sheds and lack protection of concrete structures.

# Discussion Threads

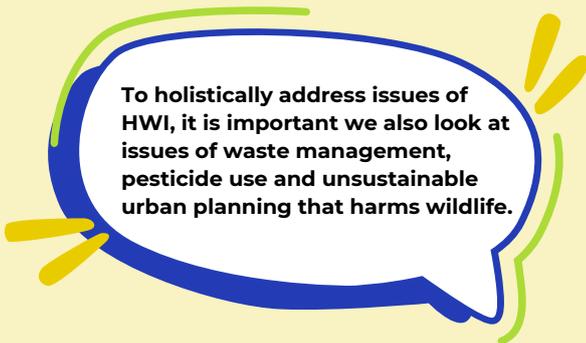
A few other pressing discussion threads that emerged during the roundtable included some of the following thoughts:



Shubhobroto Ghosh,  
World Animal Protection Group



Ipsita Pati,  
Times of India



Rajat Bhargava,  
Bombay Natural History Society



Nitin Kumar,  
Business Standard

## WAY FORWARD



**Fostering continued discourse on the issue with variety of stakeholders to build knowledge and awareness on HWI.**



**Leveraging insights and experiences of communities.**



**Advocating for policy engagement to create systemic institutional change and frameworks for redressal.**

# A few glimpses from the day..

