

# **Role of Environmental Journalists in Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation into Development Projects through IA Process**

## **Workshop on Capacity Building for Biodiversity**

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# Introduction

- NEFEJ is a forum of environmental journalists and professionals and it continues to create public awareness
- Environmental reporting started in particular after the establishment of NEFEJ in 1985

## NEFEJ

- Organised several training and awareness programmes during the last 2 decades
- Contributed substantially to include provisions for environment and biodiversity conservation in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal in 1990
- Formed Biodiversity Watch Group and encouraged reporting on biodiversity – several investigative reporting published
- Launches weekly *Ankhi Jhyal* TV programme which airs biodiversity information frequently

# Introduction ...

## NEFEJ ...

- Continuously awards fellowships for investigative reporting including about impacts on forests and biodiversity
- Also conducted study on the impacts on forests due to Maoist insurgency
- Interested in streamlining biodiversity conservation through EIA but needs more workshops, seminars and orientation programs to journalists
- No reporting linking biodiversity and EIA
- Very limited information shared with journalists about EIA reports
- Journalists need more inputs from EIA professionals

# Where do we stand?

- Journalists on the cross-road of development and conservation – How we understand them?
- Needs to be clear about development and conservation for whom, why and how?
- Monitored information required for reporting
- Journalists “too positive” and “too negative” in many issues or “extremism in reporting”
- Reporting to be based on facts and logics
- Need to see issues in local perspective using local knowledge
- If major issues are left in EIA report, how to impart appropriate information

# Where do we stand?

- For example, the proponent willing to implement the project in habitats of Red Panda may write absence of this species to get EIA report approved – what to do here?
- How much we could believe on information of EIA reports as it is prepared by proponent or proponent paid consultants – ethical issue
- If quality of EIA reports not checked by approving agency how to report on them?
- Capacity of journalists to evaluate data and information of EIA reports
- Journalists are also “generalists”
- More play on data, what does it mean for people and journalists?

# Knowledge Gap

- Poor knowledge on environmental impacts of development activities
- Journalists raised several environmental issues on Arun 3 Hydroelectricity project and the project was cancelled but Nepal signed on Mahakali water sharing project
- Use of soap in Sundhara (spring tap water) and impacts on drain (soap killed insects and no mobility of snake, and drain chocked)
- Population increase of some wild animals in protected areas and its impact on farmer's crop
- Killing of birds and increase in mice of cattle
- Many such examples available

# While Reporting, Think For

- Human beings are most unpredictable and selfish
- Simply approval of EIA report would be “white crime”
- Be clear on issues first
- Be clear on intention/motive of the project
- Be clear on while reporting in favour of or against the development project – it has long-term implications
- Journalists should ask answer on “why” for each data and information
- Link reporting with international obligations (conventions/treaties), national plans, laws and programmes, socio-economic base
- Be sensitive to people’s aspirations for rapid development, and also type of development model

# Think For

- Clarity of political parties towards policies such as forest policy and biodiversity
- Linkage of project activities with utilisation of forest products such as timber and firewood
- Knowledge about non-compliance of environmental requirements
- Meaning of 100 percent compliance, does it mean that project is environment-friendly
- Finding “strategic loopholes”
- Biodiversity replacement by exotic species

# Think For

- Be clear on “demand of journalists” and “of experts” and expectation from media
- National priority issues
- Inadequate provisions and threshold criteria in the Environment Protection Act and Environment Protection Rules
- Meaning of biodiversity richness to local people, nation and international commitment
- Capacity of the journalists in understanding technical issues
- Playing of the professionals on data and information and dependency of the journalists to them

# Need for

- Capacity building of journalists and clear inputs of EIA practitioners
- Free flow of monitored information
- Expanding investigative reporting
- Continuing reporting and responses on issues raised in the media, and thinking positively
- Organizing series of programs to linking biodiversity & EIA
- Regularly updating and involving journalists in resolving issues
- Avoiding the repetition of mistakes in reporting and furthermore cross-checking
- Building partnership between journalists and EIA practitioners/professionals
- Raising issues more frequently and knocking for implementation regularly

**Thank you very much**