



Government of India



Guidelines for Cooperation between the Forest and Media sector in India

Towards effective communication on Human–Wildlife Conflict Mitigation

Taking a Harmonious Coexistence Approach



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Abbreviations

BCCC	Broadcasting Content Complaints Council	MoEFCC	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development	NBA	News Broadcasters Association
DPSIR	Drivers-Pressures-State-Impact-Response	NBSA	News Broadcasting Standards Authority
FD	Forest Department	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
GIS	Geographical Information System	NTG	National Technical Group
GIZ	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i>	NWAP	National Wildlife Action Plan
HWC	Human Wildlife Conflict	OPs	Operating Procedures
HWC-MAP	Human Wildlife Conflict Management Action Plan	PR	Public Relations
HWC-NAP	National Human Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Strategy and Action Plan	RGO	Resident Grievance Officer
HWC-SAP	State-level HWC Mitigation Strategy and Action Plan	SFD	State Forest Department
MIB	Ministry of Information and Broadcasting	SHG	Self-Help Group
		SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
		WII	Wildlife Institute of India
		WLPA	Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972

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1. ABOUT THE GUIDELINES

1.1 PURPOSE, APPROACH AND SCOPE

- Realizing the significance of effective and clear communication on the issue of human-wildlife conflict (HWC) mitigation, appreciating the significant role that media plays, and recognizing the need for cooperation between forest and media sectors, these guidelines aim to facilitate a common understanding of human-wildlife conflict mitigation communication and reporting in a holistic manner.
- This holistic approach entails not only media persons covering the emergency situations arising due to HWC, but also covering the approaches and measures to address the drivers and pressures that lead to HWC, establishment and management of prevention methods, and measures to reduce the impact of HWC on humans and wildlife, in their media products.
- The guidelines provide advise on the development, assessment, customization and evaluation of instruments and processes that ensure effective cooperation between forest and media sectors.
- The guidelines serve both the forest sector personnel and media sector personnel, with dedicated sections for each stakeholder. These guidelines can be used by the Forest Department in not only planning all engagements with the media but also for implementing capacity development measures related to media and communication for response teams and other forest personnel. These guidelines can be used by all media houses, editors and reporters, other professionals such as filmmakers, bloggers, freelancers, stringers, and others whenever they are engaged in communicating on HWC mitigation in India.
- The following guidelines are to provide guidance on selected species: guidelines for mitigating human–Elephant, –Leopard, –Gaur, –Snake, –Crocodile, –Wild Pig, –Bear, –Blue Bull, –Rhesus Macaque, and –Blackbuck conflicts.
- The following guidelines on cross-cutting issues are to provide guidance on selected issues: Guidelines for Occupational Health and Safety in the Context of Human–Wildlife Conflict Mitigation; Crowd Management in Human–Wildlife Conflict Related Situations; and Addressing Health Emergencies and Potential Health Risks Arising Out of Human—Wildlife Conflict Situations: Taking a One Health Approach.
- Taking a capacity development approach, the guidelines facilitate the implementation through provision of Implementer’s Toolkit, which includes Operating Procedures (OPs), formats, checklists, and other field implementation aids..

1.2 LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTING THE GUIDELINES

India has multiple legislations, rules and guidelines for news media and related organizations. The print media too has its own model code of ethics with the objectives of not only safeguarding freedom of the press but also upholding the standards of editorial leadership of newspapers and magazines.

With the changing nature of journalism and emerging social media, the following existing policies and guidelines can help media personnel to self-regulate, while at the same time help the forest sector personnel to facilitate the process:

- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) has relevant rules and Acts listed on their website for the media.
- The News Broadcasters Association (NBA)¹ has formulated the News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA)² under MIB listing Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards and News Broadcasting Standards Regulation³ for news organizations to follow.
- Self-regulatory mechanisms regarding monitoring content, violation, telecast/broadcast on private TV channels are available, where complaints can be lodged by the public with Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC) regarding non-news and entertainment channels.
- The Press Council of India acts as a self-regulatory body to check malpractices in journalism and to maintain ethics in the profession. The Press Council Act, 1978⁴ has a section listing journalistic norms, and another one for registering complaints through email, where any person can lodge a complaint against a newspaper for breach of ethics and journalistic propriety and taste.
- The Department of Electronics and Information Technology, Ministry of Communications & Information Technology has a ‘Framework and Guidelines for Use of Social Media for Government Organizations’.
- Under the overall framework of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (WPA), National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) developed guidelines under which it is advised that an authorized spokesperson of the Forest Department, should periodically update the media (if required) to prevent dissemination of distorted information relating to the HWC operation/incidents, as sensationalization or distorted information can lead to further damage.

1.3 INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM FOR IMPLEMENTING THE GUIDELINES

- The institutional mechanism outlined in HWC-NAP will be followed for implementing these guidelines.

1 News Broadcasters Association (NBA): <http://www.nbanewdelhi.com/>

2 News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA): <https://www.ibfindia.com/news-broadcasting-standards-authority-nbsa>

3 Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards: <http://www.nbanewdelhi.com/code-of-ethics-and-broadcasting-standards>

4 Press Council of Act 1978: <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A1978-37.pdf>

2. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- The National Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Strategy and Action Plan of India (HWC-NAP)⁵ highlights the role of media as a key stakeholder that can play a significant role in taking the desired message on HWC mitigation to the public. It further states that even though over the last decade, there has been a shift to issue-oriented media coverage, the media largely covers HWC only when an incident occurs. Constructive dialogue between wildlife managers and media professionals, agreement on guidelines, and identification of anchoring points for engaging media as partners in HWC mitigation, would be a priority.
 - The media can play an important role in HWC mitigation, as it not only reports on the conflict but also creates awareness of what is the holistic approach to HWC mitigation, what is already being done and what more needs to be done, if provided with the relevant information.
 - Media can highlight how wildlife and humans can co-exist with mutual benefits, and how conservation interventions are crucial for maintaining a healthy ecosystem and resulting ecosystem services that are the foundation of livelihoods and overall well-being of humans.
- Currently, while reporting and communicating on wildlife, media largely focuses on current crises events deemed ‘news-worthy’ by them, such as emergency situations arising due to the conflict between humans and wild animals. This, sometimes, induces the public to develop negative sentiments or opinions towards wildlife. With its wide reach, the media can help create a positive attitude towards the issue, and help stakeholders collectively arrive at sustainable and holistic solutions for HWC mitigation.
 - At present, most of the good practices in forest-media cooperation on HWC mitigation largely exist due to individual efforts. To ensure that the forest-media cooperation is institutionalized, a systematic strategy for engagement is required.
 - These guidelines intend to facilitate a systematic engagement between media and the forest sector, in terms of dialogue and joint capacity development measures at the institution level, subsequently working towards a common goal of harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife in the country.

⁵ HWC-NAP <https://moef.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/National-Human-Wildlife-Conflict-Mitigation-Strategy-and-Action-Plan-of-India-2.pdf>

3. FOREST-MEDIA COOPERATION: MEASURES TO BE IMPLEMENTED BY MEDIA SECTOR

3.1 OVERALL MEASURES

- Media can play a key role in raising awareness on wildlife issues. It can influence and shape the perceptions and opinions of the public. Stories, news, and information about the wildlife living in natural and human-dominated landscapes, or even wild animals that have adapted to living near urban areas, are widely read in newspapers, and also watched with keen interest when reported by electronic media. The impact of news coverage is magnified to a greater degree in the case of highly sensitive HWC scenarios. As a reaction, the public gets polarized, both in the online world and at the community level, over ‘human versus wildlife’.
- Media houses and media persons are expected to ensure fact-based reporting to avoid bringing out stories that either misrepresent, misinform, or sensationalize the situation. When media personnel gather information for their media products, they should ensure that the information source is credible. They may need to crosscheck all the facts and take comments and inputs from spokespersons of respective forest department and other stakeholders involved in the incident while reporting on the subject. This is crucial since stories on wildlife start trending in no time due to very high interest and viewership/readership.
- To ensure the high quality of media products, media persons should engage with the forest officers, researchers, and field practitioners, not only for a regular flow of stories but also to develop media products that take a holistic approach.
- Electronic media can avoid sensationalism by using balanced text, background and headline styles while reporting on HWC, to ensure that the news does not accentuate the fear of wildlife among the local public as that may result in heightened risk perceptions eventually leading to antagonism and less tolerance towards wildlife.
- The challenges of HWC mitigation in each landscape are different, owing to the landscape structure, socio-economic scenario, development scenario, history of wildlife conflict/conservation, and overall

threat perceptions of people. The media personnel may like to see this difference and communicate accordingly, after taking necessary input from the forest department personnel and other experts.

3.2 ADDRESSING SPECIFIC CHALLENGES THAT THE FOREST OFFICERS FACE IN ENGAGING WITH MEDIA ON HWC ISSUES:

- The forest officers find that media coverage is usually reduced when the escalation of a conflict situation was successfully averted by the forest department using effective mitigation measures. But if the same had failed and the situation had worsened, it would have hit the headlines. This is largely because news is all about something ‘exciting’ happening. This is a challenge that has to be met with effective communication from media to ensure effective and holistic coverage of not only HWC related emergency situations but also the overall picture of HWC mitigation in the landscape.
- Sometimes, media reports place the entire blame of an HWC incidence on wild animals, rather than explaining the underlying drivers and pressures that may have caused the emergency situation. This leads to widespread negative perception against the species concerned. This could lead not only to retaliatory killings, but also reduced public support for the overall wildlife conservation agenda. Another challenge is that in the absence such holistic media coverage, the underlying causes of HWC do not get the desired attention and remain unsolved. Media may take the opportunity to present the HWC situation in a holistic way by focusing on the causes of HWC in the landscape, thus contributing to addressing HWC in a systematic manner.
- Media personnel can use the opportunity to highlight the HWC mitigation measures being implemented/ being planned by the Forest Department and/or other agencies to address the situation, and also disseminate the information on ‘Dos and Don’ts’ for the public to prevent accidental encounters between humans and wildlife.



Media should report on Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation, and not only on Human-Wildlife Conflict



- Media organizations may make efforts to use the opportunities to get their personnel trained on HWC mitigation to facilitate them in communicating effectively and holistically on this complex issue.
- Media persons, especially photo-videographers, reporting on HWC-related emergency situations may work as partners in addressing HWC mitigation by adhering to the field protocol set out by the forest department for such situations, as sometimes it may not be advisable for them to go closer to the HWC incidence site, for their own safety or for the safety of the wildlife animal.

3.3 ROLE OF FILMMAKERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS IN CONTRIBUTING TO LONG-TERM EFFORTS ON HWC MITIGATION:

Both filmmakers and photographers play a significant role in disseminating information on wildlife and conservation issues. The medium they use to tell stories is very powerful and can create a lasting impression. Visuals have more impact than words, and when it comes to wildlife, films and photographs help people see the beauty of nature up close, from the comfort of their homes, and thus evoking their love and passion for nature.

- Filmmakers and photographers may follow an ethical code of not sensationalizing issues related to HWC, and ensure that they take a holistic and balanced approach while presenting the central theme of their films/ products. They can also take the opportunity to highlight the importance of HWC mitigation in conservation, and why wildlife conservation is so vital to the ecosystem and overall well-being of humans.
- When a rescue operation is being conducted, forest officials are focused on completing operations seamlessly, without any harm to the animals or the humans around. Sometimes, the situation is extremely complex as animal behaviour and resulting HWC situations are not easy to predict. In such situations, while officials are working on something as complicated as this, it is imperative that filmmakers and photographers stay away at a reasonable distance from a wild animal, while documenting the HWC mitigation operations. This is not only to keep themselves safe but also to not agitate or further frighten the animal.
- Credit should be duly given to the forest department, in all such media products, to build trust and relationships for the future.

3.4 OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH, ETHICAL ISSUES AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

- There is a growing trend of people venturing too close to a wild animal for photographs, even in a conflict situation, which can be a grave danger to the person taking the selfie as the wild animal can charge on being provoked, to defend itself. Media personnel should avoid engaging in acts like this for their own safety and well-being.
- Media personnel should get themselves informed on the occupational health and safety aspects, concept of zoonotic disease prevention and the overall concept of One Health⁶. This will help them getting better prepared for any possibility of zoonotic diseases, when working closely with wild/ captive animals, and take all necessary precautions such as wearing masks, sanitization etc.
- The sensitive information on animal locations, movement and occurrence can be used by poachers to trap and poach wild animals, especially high-value species. Therefore, it is advised to not disclose the detailed location information to the general public. This can be done by switching off geo-tagging options on phones when clicking photos, or to not pin the exact location while sharing on social media.

3.5 SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS TO BE USED BY MEDIA FOR EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH WILDLIFE MANAGERS

- Media professionals may communicate regularly with the forest officers via meetings, and by using various messaging, social media and microblogging applications. Messaging groups may be used by the media personnel and forest officers to share any news on an impending/ongoing HWC-related emergency situation with each other, and also to alert the local community.
- Media houses may write occasional editorials on HWC mitigation and also be helped in the process, with background material, so that the editorial items are accurate in their analysis.
- Media personnel may make efforts to participate in trainings and other capacity development measures to develop a common understanding of the holistic approach to HWC mitigation.

⁶ One Health is a collaborative, multi-sectoral and trans-disciplinary approach—working at the local, regional, national and global levels—with the goal of achieving optimal health outcomes, recognising the interconnection between people, animals, plants and their shared environment.

4. FOREST-MEDIA COOPERATION: MEASURES TO BE IMPLEMENTED BY FOREST SECTOR

4.1 OVERALL MEASURES

The best instrument to create awareness on nature and wildlife conservation issues- including HWC mitigation, among media professionals, is to engage with the media on a regular basis. Having a large reach, the media can help sensitize the general public to the complicated issues of conservation, in very simple language.

- However, as media professionals are not wildlife specialists, it will be useful for the forest officers to constantly engage with them, to ensure that the media reporting is accurate, and both forest and media have the same perspective on the issue at hand.

4.2 MEASURES TO ENSURE DISSEMINATION OF CORRECT INFORMATION AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

- Disseminating the right information to the media is of utmost importance, to avoid biased reports and inaccurate facts and analysis. Care may be taken by the forest department in providing accurate figures and statistics to the media, on a regular basis and not just during a crisis, to ensure fact-based reporting.
- The forest officials may identify media persons (local as well as national level) from all the media platforms, who report on conservation and environmental issues for such regular interactions. The forest officials may make themselves available for comments, responses and sharing key visuals and other information with the media personnel for a particular news/story, to facilitate the media personnel in developing a clear perspective on a particular incidence and subsequently developing media products based on facts in a sensitive manner.
- It may be useful for the forest officers to facilitate suitable media personnel in identifying relevant stories on HWC mitigation in their area/landscape. This may serve as an important trust-building exercise that may serve both forest officials and the media personnel during an emergency situation.

- Photographs and video footage are an important element in story-telling and attract much more views than write-ups. Therefore, the forest officers may provide interesting and relevant visuals from time to time, within the scope of the existing legal regime and advisories, depending on the species involved, to help media use these as key elements to supplement their media stories and increase viewership/readership.

4.3 FIELD VISITS TO FACILITATE AUTHENTIC REPORTS

It is very important that media personnel visit the actual HWC incidence sites and the sites where HWC mitigation measures are being implemented, while developing their media stories. This will give them a better insight into the drivers, pressures, state, impacts and current responses with regard to the HWC situation in the area.

- The forest personnel may plan regular field visits of the media personnel at HWC hotspots, possibly on special days such as World Environment Day, International Forest Day, Wildlife Week, Global Tiger Day, Elephant Day, World Biodiversity Day etc., to give out specific information related to the day/ week and highlight HWC mitigation measures that are being implemented in the area.
- Special interactions and field visits may be planned by the forest personnel for the media personnel to facilitate them in understanding a specific local complex HWC issue and developing a clear perspective on the issue.

4.4 NODAL PERSON FROM FOREST DEPARTMENT

- When there is an ongoing operation to capture an animal in a conflict situation, media persons may reach the site and attempt to engage with the staff of the forest department. To facilitate such engagement in an efficient and smooth manner, the forest department may identify a nodal person to interact with the media, who is prepared with the answers to the expected questions. This may ensure that rumours or incorrect information is not reported by the media personnel.

- Some news reports may carry all the factual information, but would nevertheless use a sensational headline, i.e., calling the animal ‘maneater’, ‘rogue’, or using terminology such as ‘animal attack’ etc. Therefore, the forest personnel may actively discourage the media personnel from using such terms and phrases, and also be careful to not use such terms themselves, which project the wild animal as a culprit and may further accentuate the negative and retaliatory sentiments among the human beings.
- A Public Relations (PR) wing may help the state forest department focus on regular communications with both the media and local community, on HWC mitigation. The PR Wing may also implement awareness and sensitization measures for the media personnel on developing and implementing holistic HWC mitigation measures.

4.5 ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES, THE MEDIA ENCOUNTERS DURING HWC COMMUNICATION AND REPORTING

Getting information at the right time is extremely crucial for media personnel. It is their job to break stories. Stories are also now told via multiple platforms be it on mobile apps, web portals, television and in print. In such times, if the media personnel do get timely updates from the forest personnel, they may end up giving speculative information in their stories.

- The forest personnel may use appropriate platforms and applications to share timely updates with the media personnel to facilitate fact-based communication.
- A Press Release may be issued as early as possible, not only to make it easy for media coverage, but also to avoid any wrong information getting into media stories.
- Efforts may be made to release any major information through a public press conference, which gives an opportunity for hosting all media persons equally. Also, if a press conference is not possible, it may be useful to send a common press release across to the media or make the same public.
- The forest personnel may explain everything in detail, while keeping it simple with the explanations and avoiding technical details, to the media personnel, so that there are no errors in reporting.

4.6 DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL MEDIA

The local media personnel, including independent reporters and columnists are the first to reach the scene of an HWC incidence, as well as to cover an HWC mitigation measures, and it is their story, pictures and videos that are later used by the state and national media agencies.

- The forest personnel may take special care to provide detailed information in simple language and with all facts to such regional and local media personnel.

4.7 POSSIBLE FACILITATION MEASURES BY THE FOREST PERSONNEL TO MAKE THE MEDIA PRODUCTS BALANCED

- It might be a good idea to develop a media strategy to ensure effective forest-media cooperation in each state, if possible.
- Regularly interacting with media personnel may help in developing common understanding on the holistic approach to HWC mitigation. Regular interaction may also prevent rumours or misinformation from becoming news. This also ensures that the viewpoint of the forest department would always be carried, clearing the fog around certain issues.
- Forest officials may occasionally suggest story ideas to media personnel as the latter are not familiar with what is happening in the HWC mitigation front. Media personnel may also be facilitated to cover specific developments or decisions relevant to HWC mitigation.
- It may be useful to organize joint trainings for forest officials and media personnel, to develop a common understanding of HWC issues in the area, agree on the communication channels, and knowledge and experience sharing on HWC issues using participatory training methods.
- Media interns may be engaged by the forest department to document vital information and databases.
- If they do not wish to be quoted, forest officials should specifically say so to media persons, while being interviewed.

5. FOREST-MEDIA COOPERATION: MEASURES TO BE IMPLEMENTED BY BOTH ACTORS

5.1 ETHICAL AND RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- Information on locations of wild animals is deemed highly sensitive. Such information on animal location, movement and occurrence can be used by poachers especially in cases of high-value animals to engage in trapping and taking away these animals (dead or alive) into the wildlife trade. Therefore, it is advised to use discretion while disclosing the information to the media.
- Display of wild animals is illegal under WPA 1972, and as such photography with a hunted (captured) animal can be interpreted as a display, under the law.
- Animal welfare, cultural and religious concerns should be respected while documenting HWC issues.

5.2 SENSATIONALISM AGGRAVATES HWC: HOW TO ENSURE THAT SENSATIONALISM IS AVOIDED

With social media and instant messaging applications turning into news media, the spread and frequency of news, including fake news, is exponentially increasing. With fake news having the potential to spread fast with a touch of a finger, it is extremely important for media personnel to ensure that their source of information is credible and verified, to facilitate them in counteracting fake news as soon as possible and arrest any unwanted damage. Here are the following ways, in which media personnel and forest officials can address the issues of sensationalism and fake News:

- Steps to be taken by the forest officials:
 - If a fake story goes viral due to some reason, steps may be taken to report to the Press Council of India, the Press Information Bureau, or cyber authorities that it was a fake story, and then present what are the right facts so that the spread can be blocked.
 - All fake or doctored news should be handled by the designated media spokesperson. A press release with the correct(ed) information, and narrative with corresponding photos and videos may be issued, substantiating the correction.
- The forest officials may contact the media personnel who may have used incorrect information in their media story and, after convincing the latter, request her/him to publish a corrected version of story or publish a rejoinder.
- If no action is taken by the concerned journalist, then the wildlife manager can write to his/her superior or the editor of the media house. If that also yields no result, and the news continues to be carried causing damage, the Forest Department can file an online complaint with either the Press Council of India, or the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC) if the fake news plays on television.
- Meanwhile, the forest department may also share the correct information and narrative with corresponding pictures with other media personnel, and encourage them to publish a counter-narrative that discredits the fake news
- Under the new Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (the “IT Rules 2021”), a grievance can be raised in case any patently false or misleading information is published by a user on a social media platform.
- The post or article can be reported to the website or the application (as the case may be) by filing a grievance with their Resident Grievance Officer (RGO). The contact details of the RGO and the mechanism for filing a grievance are to be made publicly available by the social media intermediary. Under the IT Rules, 2021, the RGO has to dispose of the grievance in a time-bound manner, i.e., within 15 days from its receipt.
- Further, the social media accounts of the forest department may also be used to discredit the fake news or doctored content, and while at the same time sharing the correct information and narrative of the incident.
- The media personnel may use fake news detection tools and software analytic tools to detect the Fake story.

- Media persons may check with responsible spokespersons of relevant authorities what the real news is and try and ascertain where the fake story came from.
- The media personnel may check every fact in the story by talking to responsible forest officials and ensure that they have their version of the story.

5.3 SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS TO BE USED FOR EFFECTIVE MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

- Regular interaction with Media: Regular interaction will provide opportunities to employ the several above-mentioned recommendations.
- Press conference: Holding a press conference to announce important information pertaining to occurrences, plans, achievements, research findings, and implementation of programs and so on may help in getting better coverage. Press conferences also serve as additional opportunities to interact with media persons.
- Press Release: It is not always possible to hold press conferences, especially during times of crisis or urgency and so a press release may be issued. It is best to keep it short and in simple and clear language.

- Active engagement via social networking sites
- In case of a crisis situation, or when responding to false information, different social media channels may be used to disseminate correct news.
- Workshops: Well planned and periodic media workshops using a participatory approach
- Effective media coordination during a crisis situation.
- The forest official may promote well-written and balanced HWC mitigation stories on social networking sites.
- A video and photo library may be built, to facilitate access of multimedia to media professionals so that stories could be better presented.
- Besides social media channels, the forest department may have an active and regularly updated official website.
- Publication houses may write occasional editorials on HWC and also be helped in the process, with background material, so that the editorial content is accurate in its analysis.
- Training for frontline staff, managers, and senior decision-makers may be organized on issues relevant to engaging with media on HWC

6. MEDIA ENGAGEMENT DURING HWC RELATED EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

- During an HWC-related emergency situation, the media is bound to be around, to capture the news as it happens. To get to the action, media persons may try and get as close to the epicenter as possible. This could very well hinder the HWC mitigation operations. To ensure that the conflict situation is handled carefully, keeping both humans and animals' safety in mind, following indicative actions may be beneficial:

6.1 ENGAGING WITH MEDIA PROFESSIONALS IN AN HWC RELATED CRISIS SITUATION

- In a crisis situation, it is advisable for the forest officials to not avoid the media. Do not say something like 'No Comments' as it may be misinterpreted or give the impression that there is something to hide. Giving straight and clear answers to media questions is a good option while aggressive responses can be avoided.
- Dedicated forest officials trained in media engagement may engage with media persons enabling other members of the team to deal with the crisis situation. A good practice is also to quickly share a clearly written, crisp media release, as soon as possible.
- In the absence of a designated spokesperson, media briefings may be addressed either by the senior-most member of the department, or by anyone with regular interactions with the media. If the briefing is happening after the situation has been contained, it may be useful to explain the entire operation in detail, highlighting the efforts that were taken to keep animals and humans safe.
- It's best to try and provide opportunities for photographers to get visuals, or in some cases, permit forest staff to shoot images and videos and later share it with media persons.
- If any media personnel runs a story that is not true to what happened during an HWC incident, or is found to be misleading, then the wildlife manager should take immediate steps, in line with the guidance provided in section 5.2 in these guidelines.

6.2 PLANNING FOR PUBLIC OUTREACH IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The forest officials may anticipate the questions that the media might ask. The media will also ask the same questions that the public wants answered, as that is what they want to relay to the readers. Primarily, they will want to know if any danger to human life persists, what is being done to secure their safety, when and what *ex gratia* is going to be paid to those affected, and how the conflict is going to be finally resolved. While they will want to pin responsibility or give credit, depending on the outcome, they will also want to look at government measures and policy. They will want statistics and figures to beef up their news story.

- It may be effective to use multiple media outlets – print, TV, Radio/ FM, online, social media to broadcast messages, asking the public not to panic, not to leave the safety of their homes and come out, or attempt to harm a wild animal-in-conflict during an HWC situation.
- Forest department staff at HWC hotspots and at other locations where regular media engagement is envisaged, may be coached to direct all questions and queries from the media to the designated spokesperson, when available.
- It is always a wonderful idea to develop a decision chart on who will do what in a crisis, which includes how the media will be briefed. All the personnel in the forest department may be on the same page and not give out contradicting narratives of the incidence.
- If there is a concrete visible action on the ground that demonstrates that the crisis is being actively and efficiently handled, it may be communicated to the media, as this could help people know what is being done and help in the public perception of the forest department.

6.3 GENERAL COORDINATION BETWEEN FOREST DEPARTMENT AND MEDIA DURING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

- During an HWC related emergency situation, the Forest Department may involve and seek help from local press clubs, press associations and similar such bodies to ensure that the media persons do

not take undue risks to themselves. Such local media volunteers can convince media persons to operate in such a way that the lives of other humans are not put to risk, and also by cautioning onlookers to stay away from the conflict zone.

- A designated forest official may give regular updates to the media about the ongoing operation, preferably on an hourly basis, so that accurate information reaches the general public. In locations where internet coverage is adequate, a useful practice may be to post live updates about such information and updates on social networking sites. This way, media persons can use the information to supplement their stories and need not wait for official comments.

- The Forest Department, through training sessions, may instil a sense of trust amongst media persons assuring them they would have access to all relevant information, videos and even photographs with the forest department, and that these would be shared with the media persons in a timely fashion.
- If it is not safe at the scene of conflict for media persons to move around, they should be clearly instructed by the forest department to stay at a safe distance or may be shifted to a safer place.

7. USE OF LEARNINGS FROM THE GUIDELINES TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN THE INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK RELATED TO HLC MITIGATION IN INDIA

The guidelines are expected to serve as a capacity development instrument, given that a robust and structured feedback mechanism will be put in place to document the feedback coming from the implementation of these guidelines.

- The feedback from the use of these guidelines may, therefore, be consolidated to form the basis for fine-tuning these measures and for understanding the capacity

needs for effectively implementing the mitigation measures.

- In the long term, the consolidated feedback may also be used in further reviewing the capacity development strategies, HWC-MAPs, HWC-SAPs and HWC-NAP. This, combined with a centralised system of media reporting related data collection and analysis will facilitate learning for fine-tuning future interventions for forest-media cooperation.

8. PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT, PILOT-TESTING OF THESE GUIDELINES AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

- A dedicated framework of experts (Annexe 1) was formed, with the core team consisting of representatives from media, Government agencies, SFDs, research institutions, civil society institutions and international organisations and independent wildlife policy experts.
- A common understanding was developed on the overall purpose, scope, approach and methodology.⁷ The experts had different roles in the drafting and editing process, viz., Coordinating Lead Authors, Lead Authors, Contributing Authors and Review Editors. The Author Group worked on developing these guidelines between July 2019 and August 2021, during which period they consulted a larger group of experts and stakeholders via workshops, meetings and consultations. The authors reviewed the documents and guidelines available from the MoEF&CC and different states, and relevant information and recommendations were brought into the new document. The National Technical Group (NTG), consisting of experts from MoEF&CC, Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and independent wildlife and policy experts, was formed for the overall steering and facilitation of the process. A 'Working Group on

Pilot

- Implementation of Guidelines and HWC-NAP' was formed to facilitate the planning and implementation of the pilot testing, consultations and final editing of the guidelines and HWC-NAP. Detailed terms of reference were provided for each category, and meetings and workshops of the Author Group were facilitated under the Indo-German Cooperation Project on Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation.
- The draft guidelines and HWC-NAP were pilot tested at selected HWC hotspots in India and media institutions to receive feedback on the feasibility and acceptability of the recommendations expressed in the guidelines, using a structured process and tools. On the basis of the feedback received during fortnightly meetings and one-to-one consultations with managers, and media experts, the draft of the guidelines was revised.
- A Committee was constituted by MoEFCC in December 2022, consisting of officials from MoEFCC, and the state forest departments of Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal to review and finalize the guidelines.

9. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF GUIDELINES

- This set of guidelines is not a static document; rather, it is a living document. It will keep abreast of the various developments in field implementation methods and wildlife research. For this, the feedback from field practitioners and other wildlife experts may be analysed to assess the specific elements and sections that need to undergo changes. A review of the guidelines is planned to take place every 5 years from

2023 onwards. However, a mid-term review process in 2024 may be desirable. In the long term, the review cycle of these guidelines can be aligned with the review cycle of HWC-NAP.

- Detailed mechanism, templates and guidance used for collating information and feedback on the use of these guidelines may be developed.

⁷ Approach paper: <https://indo-germanbiodiversity.com/pdf/publication/publication19-04-2021-1618808050.pdf>

ANNEX I

NATIONAL TECHNICAL GROUP (NTG)

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Dr Sanjay Gubbi Wildlife Expert, Nature Conservation Foundation (June 2019 to November 20, 2020)	Member
Dr Neeraj Kherra Team Leader, Indo-German Project on HWC Mitigation, GIZ India	Member Convenor

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