

# Belt and Road's financiers fall short on biodiversity

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Tapanuli Orangutans (*Pongo tapanuliensis*) - adult flanged male on the left, and an adult female on the right - which will be potentially threatened by Belt and Road Initiative developments. Credit: The University of Queensland

Most financiers of international infrastructure program, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), are falling short on biodiversity safeguards,

according to University of Queensland research.

The BRI is China's ambitious regional connectivity initiative encompassing thousands of transport, energy and industrial [infrastructure](#) projects, built along eight trans-national corridors spanning 70 countries in Asia, Europe and Africa.

UQ Ph.D. candidate Divya Narain, from UQ's Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science, said biodiversity must be protected in the face of this development for the sake of the world's species.

"The six terrestrial infrastructure corridors envisaged under BRI crisscross some of the most ecologically-fragile geographies in Southeast Asia, Central Asia and South Asia," Ms Narain said.

"The initiative's road and rail routes potentially affect 150,000 square kilometres of critical habitat."

The research team compiled a list of the BRI's financiers and scrutinised their policies for enforceable requirements to protect biodiversity.

"Our research shows that most financiers of the BRI are yet to put in place binding biodiversity impact mitigation requirements.

"The considerable biodiversity impact of infrastructure projects could remain unmitigated."

UQ's Professor Martine Maron said financier safeguards could act as an important line of defence against construction-induced effects on biodiversity.

"Safeguards of multi-lateral development banks offer international best practice that has evolved over decades," Professor Maron said.

"International best practice requires a 'net gain' of biodiversity in cases where there are impacts upon [critical habitat](#).

"Strong safeguards like this are especially important for projects that potentially damage large areas of essential biodiversity habitat.

"Co-financing by multi-lateral development banks offers the opportunity for transfer of best practice to financiers who lack [biodiversity](#) safeguards, through capacity building and technical assistance.

"Biodiversity protection needs its own policy infrastructure if it is to be protected."

The study has been published in *Nature Sustainability*.

**More information:** Best-practice biodiversity safeguards for Belt and Road Initiative's financiers, *Nature Sustainability* (2020). [DOI: 10.1038/s41893-020-0528-3](#) , [www.nature.com/articles/s41893-020-0528-3](http://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-020-0528-3)

Provided by University of Queensland

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