

Briefing Note from the Round Table

Title: “Disasters Without Borders: Nepal’s Voice on Loss, Damage, and Himalayan Survival”

Date: 13 September 2026

Organizers: University of Nepal (UNepal) and the Former International Professionals of Multilateral Organizations (FIPMO)

Nepal stands at the forefront of global warming’s consequences, confronting accelerating glacier retreat, glacial lake outburst floods, compound landslides, and the recurrent destruction of critical infrastructure, despite contributing negligibly to global greenhouse gas emissions. The recent Rasuwa-Nuwakot-Trishuli disaster starkly illustrated the accelerating pace at which the country’s Himalayan risk landscape is evolving. Nepal cannot continue absorbing the costs of global inaction; it urgently needs stronger systems to document economic and non-economic loss and damage, and to protect its most vulnerable populations, notably women, children, and senior citizens. As the region’s interconnected hazards threaten lives, livelihoods, and water systems across South Asia, the Himalayas constitute a regional and global responsibility, not merely a local concern.

On 13 September 2026, UNepal and FIPMO jointly convened this High-Level Discussion at the University of Nepal, Kathmandu, bringing together more than fifty academics, scientists, experts, senior officials, policymakers and gender specialists to deliberate on the measures Nepal must undertake to confront a rapidly changing risk landscape and strengthen its case for Himalayan resilience on the global stage.

Drawing on discussions structured around five thematic pillars, the roundtable puts forward the following priorities and recommendations.

1. Direct Loss and Damage Compensation

The Rasuwa-Nuwakot-Trishuli disaster disrupted five operational hydropower projects (236 MW combined) and three under construction (exceeding 340 MW), following a comparable, smaller flash flood in July 2025 that swept away the Friendship Bridge over the Trishuli River at Rasuwagadhi. Nepal requires rapid, grant-based funding to reach affected communities without exacerbating sovereign debt. Translating this moral case into international funding requires scientifically verified evidence grounded in rigorous climate attribution, comprehensive loss assessment, and precise costing of resilient reconstruction. Such rigor would lend Nepal’s diplomatic messaging credibility, while grounding it in the right to development would humanize the broader narrative of climate impact.

2. Infrastructure Protection and Risk Management

Nepal requires targeted technical and financial support to deploy real-time early-warning systems and build climate-resilient infrastructure and strengthen national capacity. As critical risk zones such as the Bhotekoshi-Trishuli watershed extend across the border into China, Nepal could formalize climate science cooperation with India and China on joint research, co-managed preventive measures, and early-warning systems, while pursuing international support for satellite technology and glacial monitoring equipment. The role of universities and expert groups should be optimally leveraged for this purpose.

3. Targeted Science and Disaster Attribution

Recent high-altitude disasters show that extreme events are borderless and composite, manifesting as cascading debris flows rather than predictable floods. Nepal could urge global scientific bodies to prioritize high-altitude monitoring and modernize disaster assessment, transitioning from localized catchment studies in collaboration with local counterparts toward transboundary, earth-science-based hazard evaluation. As attribution science in data-scarce settings carries inherent geopolitical friction, Nepal could lead a diplomatic effort to redefine standards of valid evidence within UN forums, directly linking localized mountain disasters to global emissions for legal and diplomatic leverage, while asserting that lived experience and indigenous knowledge merit evidentiary weight equal to scientific modeling. Nepal should also sustain an open-door policy for technical collaboration with international scientists on joint risk identification and hazard data sharing. The potential role of universities and think tanks in Nepal should also be recognized and effectively leveraged in this context.

4. Climate and Nature Finance for Local Adaptation

Nepal could lead the narrative on channeling international climate finance directly into Local Adaptation Plans of Action (LAPAs), empowering municipal governments and communities, including those in Rasuwa and Nuwakot, to lead their own resilience investments rather than routing all recovery finance through national institutions. This could be paired with larger finance vehicles, such as Green and Blue Bonds and dedicated GCF/GEF adaptation windows, reaching the municipal level.

5. Dedicated Representation for Vulnerable Mountain Nations

Nepal could position the Hindu Kush Himalaya as critical natural infrastructure sustaining over two billion people across Asia, a unifying frame akin to how Small Island Developing States rally around oceanic vulnerability, to build a coalition of alpine nations spanning the Karakoram, Pamir, Caucasus, Alps, and Andes, advocating for dedicated space on mountain resilience within multilateral negotiations. To convert this solidarity into binding, grant-based commitments, Nepal could establish a Special Envoy for Climate Change and Himalayan Resilience, bridging research, diplomacy, and finance, paired with a Gender-Inclusive Climate Diplomacy Framework positioning Himalayan women and other vulnerable groups as key drivers and negotiators of climate policy. These initiatives should be adequately supported by academic research and evidence-based policymaking.