

Thousands of children face catastrophic conditions following Nepal floods

Rohantha De Silva
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As part of the looming humanitarian crisis in the wake of Nepal's flash flood disaster, the health and safety of tens of thousands of children are at risk in overcrowded shelters without basic necessities. The number at one shelter doubled in a single afternoon, Save the Children said.

The official death toll from the flood disaster in the impoverished South Asian country surged to 1,003 on Tuesday, the sixth day after the disaster, as rescue teams recovered more bodies from eight districts of the country. Sixteen deaths were confirmed on China's side. The number missing in Nepal has reached 3,916, while China's state media reported 546 people missing.

Rescue workers are struggling to cope. Hundreds of workers remain trapped in a huge system of mud-filled tunnels at hydropower plants along the Trishuli River. Also among those unaccounted for are several hundred traders, truck drivers and customs-related workers.

Nepal's road network has collapsed across the central mountainous regions, severely hampering emergency operations. Roads in Rasuwa and Nuwakot have been washed away or buried by landslides, while major routes, including the Trishuli–Mailung–Syabrubesi, Pasang Lhamu and Prithvi highways, are blocked. Entire communities have been isolated, cutting off supplies, rescue equipment and access for emergency teams.

According to a report from the *Kathmandu Post* on September 1, delays in transporting necessary machinery have forced rescuers to dig by hand at sites like the Upper Trishuli 3A project, through deep mud and debris.

UNICEF reports that about 22,100 children across Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading, Gorkha and Tanahun districts are badly affected. Around 70 percent of

children in the worst-hit areas have lost at least one parent. Around 10,500 pregnant and breastfeeding women will require nutritional support, and 2,600 children under five will need treatment for acute malnutrition.

Alice Akunga, UNICEF representative to Nepal, said, "Children across Rasuwa and Dhading saw their lives being literally washed away in front of their eyes in a very short span of time ... With the death toll rising, we know this tragedy is far from over. Children who have survived the floods now face heightened risks of disease, malnutrition, violence and exploitation." The extensive damage and destruction of health centres mean children and families are not receiving care when they need it most.

At least 18 schools have been destroyed and another 20 damaged. Additionally, according to UNICEF, an estimated 10,000 school-age children now need immediate educational assistance, including access to makeshift learning facilities, substitute educational resources, and psychosocial support. With many routes washed out and villages isolated, large numbers of children remain unable to return to school or reach relief points.

Save the Children reported that one survivor, 57, at a holding center in Nuwakot with his family, said some of his grandchildren were coughing while other children in the center had developed low fevers. He said, "There was a lot of dirt, and we felt like we were going to be sick." His wife said, "We were out in the open too long, so we have scratchy throats and fever."

A story about how 900 children were saved has gone viral. Receiving calls about the disaster, principal Rajendra Dawadi of Tribhuvan Trishuli Secondary School in Nuwakot, north-central Nepal, quickly decided to evacuate, telling the children to flee to

higher ground. Moments later, a torrent of mud, boulders, and water engulfed the school, flattening classrooms and washing away entire structures.

In another story, Karbir Gaire, a customs and information officer at Nepal's Rasuwa Customs Office, saw the massive flood coming and saved himself and several others by instantly running uphill. Later, the muddy flood washed away the surrounding structures. According to Gaire, even seconds were decisive: Only those who saw the disaster coming and fled for their lives were saved, while others perished.

This indicates how many more could have been saved if a robust early warning system (EWS) were functioning in Nepal. The EWS in flood-hit northern districts faced an unprecedented failure. Nepal's flood gauges are intended to warn about dangers from monsoon rains, but the system was not built to warn about flash floods. Upstream monitoring stations in Nepal were swept away by the flooding before alerts could be sent.

Austin Lord, an anthropologist, told the *New York Times* on August 27 that the landslide was in a "blind spot" on the northern side of Nepal's Langtang mountain range, an area that he said was scarcely populated and barely monitored by geologists.

The inadequacy of the warning system was not the only failure. The floods inflicted tremendous devastation on riverbank villages, hydropower projects, and the highway network. The *Kathmandu Post* noted in one of its columns on August 27 that the riverside infrastructure is designed based on 50-to-100-year historical averages that are badly outdated because "climate change has altered weather patterns, introducing cloudbursts, intense debris flows, and heavy sediment loads."

This is not simply a natural disaster but one created by man-made global warming of the Hindu Kush Himalaya. It is known as the "Third Pole" because it holds the largest ice reserves outside the Arctic and Antarctic regions. The melting of glaciers, the formation of unstable moraine-dammed lakes, and the increasing frequency of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) are the physical processes. The social processes—decades of under-investment in infrastructure, the commodification of land and water, and the prioritization of private profit over public safety under capitalism—are what turned those processes into a

human disaster.

Despite the region's volatility, successive Nepali governments have failed to build resilient infrastructure, to relocate vulnerable communities on a humane basis, or to build effective early-warning systems and evacuation corridors that could have saved lives. Responsibility also rests with the major imperialist powers that have kept Nepal economically backward and impoverished and used their pittance in aid to further their own economic and strategic interests.



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