# Nepal's flood survivors face economic ruin as migration beckons

Report by Bibek Bhandari, in Nepal, in *South China Morning Post*, Sept 8, 2026

Taradevi Tamang's village exists on official maps, but on the ground, it looks as though it was never there at all. Two weeks ago, raging floodwaters ripped through her village in central Nepal's Nuwakot district, sweeping away Tamang's tin-roofed home alongside the modest savings and gold jewellery she had accumulated over the years. The Trishuli River also washed away her family's main source of income: 265 piglets and 34 wild boars.

A man looks at photos of missing people outside an army camp in Bidur, Nuwakot, Nepal (photo by Bibek Bhandari)

Tamang, 50, is among roughly 3,500 people currently sheltering in government-run facilities across the three worst-hit districts of Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Dhading. Having lost their homes, land and life savings, survivors now face an uncertain future, haunted by the daunting task of rebuilding from scratch. "We lost our house during the earthquake but still had the land to rebuild with aid," Tamang said tearfully at a shelter in Nuwakot, referring to the devastating quake that hit Nepal in 2015. "We thought our lives would improve, but it's just one stress after another. My heart gets heavy thinking about what to do. We don't have anything to hold on to now."

The swollen Trishuli River has receded since August 26, when the floods killed more than 1,300 people and left over 5,000 missing. But outside an army camp in Bidur, where helicopters ferry relief materials, the search continues. Relatives arrive carrying photographs of loved ones, looking for a wall to post fliers, hoping someone might recognise a face.

*Children play a board game in a dedicated child-safe space at a shelter in Nuwakot, Nepal. (photo by Bibek Bhandari)*

Mental health workers warn that this uncertainty is deepening the psychosocial trauma across affected communities. Thousands of people searching for missing relatives are hanging between hope and despair, unable to find closure.

Children are especially vulnerable. Save the Children, an international non-profit organisation providing psychological support, temporary learning centres and play areas in shelters, has warned that “the need for mental healthcare is growing”.

At a Nuwakot sports hall converted into a shelter, 46 of the 164 residents are children, several of whom lost both parents. While play areas keep them occupied, counsellors assess their condition.

Achitra Thing, a counsellor with Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation Nepal, said many children had not yet processed their loss. Some brought to Nuwakot from Rasuwa also faced a language barrier, speaking only the local Tamang language rather than Nepali.

“When this seven-year-old boy sees a helicopter, he thinks his parents are being brought back, even though he saw both of them swept away,” Thing said. “The body of his 18-month-old brother has been found. We should prioritise more psychosocial support in all shelters.”

Adults are suffering quietly, with few receiving formal counselling. Some men have turned to heavy drinking to cope, creating added safety concerns for women and children in shared spaces.

Suchita Joshi said her 64-year-old mother suffered from recurring nightmares. While the elderly woman had survived alongside two sons and an 18-month-old grandson, she lost her two daughters-in-law and grandchildren, aged five and seven. “My mother sometimes breaks down completely,” Joshi said while tending to her wailing nephew. “The child keeps looking for his mother since he’s breastfeeding. We have not shown her photograph to him because we don’t know how he might react.”

Trail of destruction left by the August 26 flood in Dhunge Bazaar, Nuwakot, Nepal (photo by Bibek Bhandari)

Joshi’s family lost their home and kitchen utensils shop in Trishuli Bazaar, across the river from Dhunge Bazaar. The flood destroyed the property, carrying away their inventory and their silver and gold jewellery. “My brothers are extremely stressed since they have nothing left,” she said. “They have lost hope. How do you start over after losing everything you worked for all your life?”

With the economy already constrained by limited domestic opportunities, thousands of Nepalis leave the country every month to work overseas. Observers expect the disaster to accelerate this out-migration as families look for other ways to survive.

Kopila Tamang, 20, had planned to study hotel management in Japan. But after the flood killed her mother and destroyed her home, her family can no longer afford the tuition.

Karan Tamang, 17, lost both parents and is unsure whether he will be able to sit his secondary education examination, a crucial milestone for students in Nepal. “I just don’t have the courage now,” he said. “I dreamed of living with my parents. Maybe I’ll go abroad for work.”

Others are determined to keep what remains of their families together. Taradevi Tamang is intent on keeping her 13-year-old son at home. She said her brother had already spent 13 years in India and she did not want her family to be separated again. “My son should study as much as he can,” she said. “I hope the government gives us land in a safe area so we can rebuild. We don’t want to go back near the river.”