

Nepal glaciers shrink by quarter in 30 years

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This file picture taken on May 11, 2009 shows the Khumbu glacier in the Everest-Khumbu region, one of the longest glaciers in the world

Climate change has caused Nepal's Himalayan glaciers to shrink by nearly a quarter in just over 30 years, raising the risk of natural disasters in the ecologically fragile region, a scientist said Friday.

A new study by the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) shows that the area covered by glaciers has decreased by 24 per cent between 1977 and 2010.

Samjwal Ratna Bajracharya, lead author of the report, told AFP, "the shrinking of glaciers in Nepal is definitely connected to climate change, glacial melt is a huge indicator of rising temperatures."

The Norway-funded research project led by ICIMOD took three years to complete, as scientists mapped [satellite imagery](#) from several decades to see the extent of ice loss in the region.

The fastest decline occurred between 1980 and 1990, Bajracharya said, adding that prior to the late 1970s, satellite imagery reflected little change in Nepal's glacial area.

He said the glacial melting is creating huge, expanding lakes that threaten to burst and devastate mountain communities living downstream.

The accelerated glacial loss raises concerns over future access to water resources, particularly in regions where groundwater is limited and monsoon rains are erratic.

"If the trend continues, the immediate impact will be felt by those living in high-altitude regions, who are dependent on freshwater reserves from glaciers," Bajracharya said.

The findings, published earlier this month, also sound alarm bells for Nepal's push to develop hydropower projects.

"Nepal cannot use its [water resources](#) to develop the country without assessing the state of our glaciers and river basins," he said.

A government report in India recently blamed hydropower projects for devastating floods last year that killed thousands in India and Nepal.

The government panel said the build up of sediment in rivers, due to the dumping of soil that was dug up during construction of [hydropower projects](#), exacerbated flooding when record-high rainfall hit the region last June.

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