

STARTUP SAMBAD ROUNDTABLE

Program Report

MARCH 13, 2026 | 2PM

DUSIT PRINCESS, LAZIMPATH, KATHMANDU

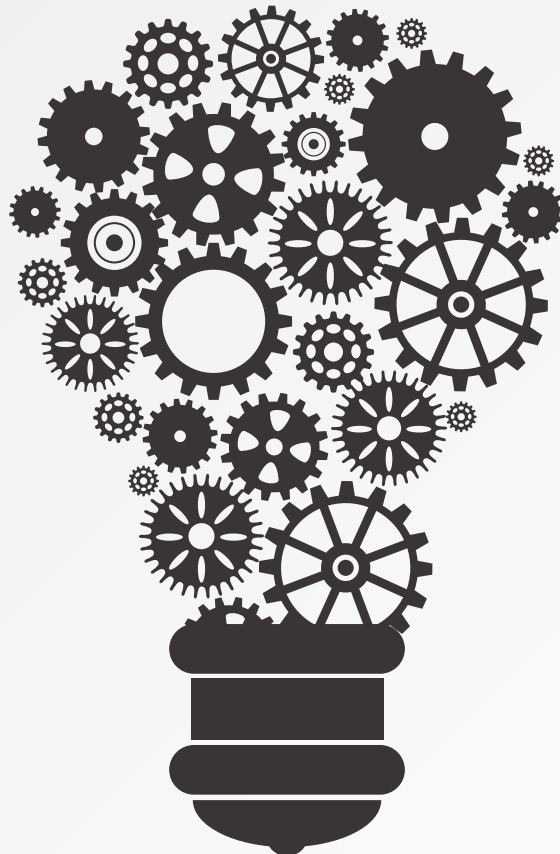


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MARCH 13, 2026 | 2PM
DUSIT PRINCESS, LAZIMPATH, KATHMANDU

The Startup Sambah Roundtable, held on March 13 at Dusit Princess, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, brought together a diverse group of stakeholders including startup founders, investors, academic representatives, and industry leaders to discuss the current realities of Nepal's startup ecosystem and identify priorities for future action. Organized by NICCI under its Startup and Private Equity Committee, the session aimed to create an open platform for dialogue, enabling participants to share firsthand experiences, challenges, and recommendations.

The discussion highlighted several persistent challenges affecting startups in Nepal. Key issues included complex regulatory frameworks, limited access to funding, barriers to foreign investment and international payment systems, and weak intellectual property protection.

Participants also pointed out the lack of adequate infrastructure, such as testing facilities and research centers, which is particularly restrictive for technology-driven and innovation-based ventures.

In addition to structural barriers, the roundtable revealed gaps in mentorship, investment readiness, and market access. Many startups struggle to connect with experienced mentors and investors, while domestic market conditions often favor foreign products over local solutions, limiting opportunities for early growth and validation. The ecosystem was also described as fragmented, with insufficient coordination between government bodies, academia, and the private sector.

Despite these challenges, the discussion reflected strong optimism about Nepal's entrepreneurial potential. Participants emphasized the importance of strengthening collaboration, improving policy frameworks, and building structured support systems such as incubation programs and investment networks. The role of the Nepali diaspora and the need for greater institutional engagement were also highlighted as important opportunities.

The roundtable concluded with a shared understanding that while Nepal's startup ecosystem is still developing, it holds significant promise. NICCI will take forward the insights from the session to support policy advocacy, strengthen partnerships, and design future initiatives aimed at creating a more enabling environment for startups.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE



Nepal - India Chamber of Commerce & Industry

STARTUP SAMBAD ROUNDTABLE

Program Schedule

2.00PM	Opening Remarks, Mr. Gaurav Tayal, Vice President, NICCI
2.10PM	Reflection Segment Startup Realities: A Reflection on Key Challenges
2.50PM	Institutional Facilitation Discussion Startup Committee Members Reponse
3.20PM	Advocacy Priorities & Way Forward Mr. Sandeep Kamat, Member, IBF Committee
3.40PM	Closing Remarks Mr. Kunal Kayal, Vice President, NICCI
3.50PM Onwards	High Tea

March 13th, 2026 | 2PM

Dusit Princess, Lazimpat, Kathmandu

Vista Hall

ROUNDTABLE OVERVIEW

On Friday, March 13, at 2:00 PM, NICCI convened the Startup Sambah Roundtable at Dusit Princess, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, bringing together startup founders, investors, academics, and representatives from key business institutions for an in-depth discussion on the realities of Nepal's startup ecosystem and the way forward for policy and institutional support. The program was organized under the leadership of NICCI's Startup and Private Equity Committee and reflected NICCI's continued interest in creating a dedicated platform for young entrepreneurs, especially at a time when youth migration and the search for opportunities abroad continue to challenge Nepal's talent retention and business growth.

The roundtable was attended by NICCI leadership, committee members, representatives from Aadhyanta Fund Management Ltd., academia, industry organizations, and a wide range of startup participants working across technology, agriculture, education, engineering, finance, mobility, digital platforms, and innovation-led services. Among the distinguished attendees were **Mr. Kunal Kayal, Vice President of NICCI and Convenor of the Startup and Private Equity Committee; Mr. Gaurav Tayal, Vice President of NICCI; Mr. Sandeep Kamat, Committee Member; Ms. Roshee Lamichhane, Assistant Professor of Marketing at KUSOM; Mr. Nischal Singh Bhandari of Aadhyanta Fund Management Ltd.; Ms. Razan Lamsal, Chairperson of ICT Foundation Nepal; Ms. Juna Mathema, Chairperson of the Startup and Innovation Forum at FNCCI; Mr. Anurag Goyal, Chair of the Start-up and CNI-YEF** and representatives from NICCI's secretariat and operations team. The session also welcomed a strong group of startup founders and entrepreneurs from across sectors, creating a lively and practical exchange of ideas.

The event was framed around two core agenda items: Startup Realities: A Reflection on Key Challenges and Advocacy Priorities & Way Forward. The program aimed to create space for honest reflection on the operational, policy, and structural issues that startups in Nepal face, while also identifying realistic steps for advocacy, collaboration, and ecosystem strengthening. From the opening remarks itself, the tone of the discussion made it clear that the session was not intended merely as a ceremonial gathering, but as a working dialogue where founders could speak openly about the practical barriers that slow down growth, innovation, and market access.

The discussion opened with remarks by Mr. Marshal Rathour, who outlined the purpose of the roundtable and emphasized NICCI's commitment to building a dedicated platform for young entrepreneurs and startups. He underscored the urgency of supporting Nepal's startup ecosystem in light of the growing trend of youth migration abroad. According to him, this situation makes it even more important to encourage innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaboration within the country so that young talent sees possibility and future within Nepal itself. Participants were invited to share their startup journeys, describe the barriers they face, and suggest where policy advocacy and institutional support are most needed.

Mr. Gaurav Tayal delivered the welcome remarks and began by recapping NICCI's previous startup engagement held on February 4, during which 24 startups were recognized with the participation of government stakeholders. He noted that Nepal has no shortage of creative and energetic innovators; however, the environment in which they operate continues to be constrained by several major issues.

These include limited access to funding, the absence of adequate mentorship and technical guidance, regulatory frameworks that are often complex and burdensome, difficulty in business registration and taxation processes, uncertainty around exit mechanisms, and the lack of real-market testing opportunities for startup solutions. He further noted that through its strong private sector network and Nepal-India business linkages, NICCI aims to contribute to building a more connected entrepreneurial infrastructure, while also supporting the broader goals of Vision 2030 through innovation-led growth. The session was chaired by Mr. Kunal Kayal.

A significant portion of the program was dedicated to hearing directly from startup participants about the realities they experience on the ground. Their interventions revealed that while there is strong entrepreneurial energy in Nepal, the ecosystem still lacks the systems, infrastructure, and policy backing required to help promising ideas become sustainable enterprises. Many participants emphasized that the problem is not only the absence of capital, but also the absence of the right structures around capital, skills, testing, trust, and market access.

Mr. Asim Shrestha of Edtraa.com / Krezona Technology shared the story behind his company, explaining that it was established to democratize education through technology. He noted that digital tools have made learning more accessible, but entrepreneurs still need stronger networking platforms and mentorship support to expand beyond Kathmandu and connect with the broader market. His remarks highlighted an important reality: innovation can emerge from anywhere, but growth often depends on whether founders can access relationships, knowledge, and markets outside their immediate circles.

Mr. Sunil Bista of Mach24 Orbitals raised an especially important point about Nepal's emerging space technology sector. He explained that while Nepal has talented engineers and technically capable young people, the country lacks basic infrastructure, materials, and testing facilities required for advanced work. Even simple procurement needs such as aluminum and nitrous oxide become obstacles, making experimentation and product development difficult. His remarks showed that for deep-tech sectors, a startup ecosystem must include not only ideas and talent, but also laboratories, supply chains, and practical experimentation spaces.

Mr. Raju Shrestha of Nepatronix Engineering Solution Pvt. Ltd. spoke about the broader requirements of building a startup beyond having a strong idea.. He also pointed out that even basic cross-border transactions remain difficult, citing the example of Nepali students struggling to pay for online courses abroad. His remarks reflected how financial and regulatory bottlenecks affect both business development and individual learning opportunities.

Ms. Yunika Bajracharya of Edavor noted that compared to countries such as India, Nepal's startup ecosystem still lacks sufficient institutional support, infrastructure, and funding opportunities. She stressed that many founders find it difficult to build sustainable investment networks and often operate in isolation. Her comments reinforced the broader view that a startup ecosystem cannot depend only on individual drive; it requires organized support structures, active capital networks, and continuous ecosystem building.

The discussion also brought in the perspective of academia and incubation support. Ms. Roshee Lamichhane, Associate Professor at KUSOM representing the business school community, shared that incubation centers and mentorship support do exist, but their reach is still limited and often confined to students within specific institutions. She noted that some incubation programs have successfully supported startups and that funding support has been made available through mechanisms such as UGC grants. At the same time, she pointed out that mentorship systems and entrepreneurial culture remain underdeveloped. Her observations were important because they showed that educational institutions can play a role in startup support, but that their current efforts need wider reach and better coordination.

Sector-specific issues were also discussed in detail. Mr. Subash Pandey of Agro Range Nepal highlighted the challenges faced by agriculture-related startups, especially the mismatch between investment requirements and procurement practices. He pointed out that agricultural innovation requires meaningful capital, yet public procurement often favors imported products rather than locally developed solutions. His intervention called attention to the need for procurement reforms so that Nepali innovations are not crowded out by imported alternatives.

Mr. Bijay Bhattarai of Diyo A.I. Technology spoke about the position of the technology sector in Nepal, stating that information technology is often treated as a luxury rather than a necessity. This mindset, he explained, restricts adoption and delays the integration of local technology solutions. He also emphasized that government institutions should take the lead in using domestic technology providers, rather than relying heavily on foreign systems.

Other participants echoed this concern and pointed out that there is still limited trust in Nepali products, even when local companies are capable of delivering quality services. This preference for foreign providers remains a serious barrier for domestic startups seeking early clients and proof of concept.

The roundtable then turned to broader structural issues affecting market access and ecosystem coordination. Participants spoke about the limited domestic market available to startups, weak mentorship networks, the absence of coordinated support among government, academia, and industry, and the difficulty of attracting angel investors and venture capital. Mr. Shreeyanch Shrestha of Sync Technologies emphasized the need for certification systems, research centers, and structured policy frameworks to support innovation-driven companies. His intervention added another layer to the discussion by highlighting the need for credibility, quality assurance, and technical validation in a startup environment.

A notable segment of the discussion focused on investment readiness. Mr. Nischal Singh Bhandari of Aadhyanta shared insights from the organization's work with startups and explained that while many startups seek investment, they often lack proper financial structuring and a clear understanding of equity financing. He described Aadhyanta's efforts to prepare startups for investment through investment readiness programs for agro-enterprises, startup hackathons, collaboration with educational institutions, and exploration of impact investment initiatives such as the Simrik Naari Fund. His remarks highlighted an important gap in the ecosystem: many startups need not only investors, but also guidance on how to become investment-ready in the first place.

Mr. Sandeep Kamat shared experience from incubating startups internationally and pointed out that successful ecosystems such as Singapore, Israel, and Bangalore are built on close collaboration among government, academia, and industry. He observed that Nepal may not necessarily suffer from a lack of funding alone, but rather from a lack of systems that connect founders with the right investors and mentors. He also encouraged greater use of the Nepali diaspora, which has global exposure, networks, and practical knowledge that could be useful for local startup development. His comments added an international and comparative perspective to the discussion and suggested that Nepal can learn from ecosystems that have already solved some of the problems it now faces.

Institutional perspectives from FNCCI and CNI further enriched the conversation. Ms. Juna Mathema of FNCCI reflected on her own entrepreneurial journey and noted that many of the challenges being discussed are not new, having existed for more than two decades. She also spoke about FNCCI's continuing efforts to promote startup-friendly policies and to increase awareness among business chambers about the role of startups and SMEs in economic development. Her remarks made clear that the issue is not only about creating new institutions, but also about changing how established institutions understand and support the new generation of enterprises.

Mr. Anurag Goyal of CNI stated that CNI has been working on startup-related initiatives since 2022, but significant gaps remain. He identified weak incubation programs, limited integration of entrepreneurship into academic curricula, shortage of experienced mentors, and a weak angel investor ecosystem as key constraints that continue to slow growth. His comments aligned with the rest of the discussion and reinforced the need for stronger linkages between learning institutions, industry bodies, and capital providers.

As the conversation progressed, several major themes emerged clearly and repeatedly. First, there are serious policy and regulatory challenges, including complex registration and taxation systems, weak intellectual property protection, and barriers to foreign investment and international payments. Second, startups continue to face serious access-to-funding issues, including a shortage of angel investors, a lack of investment readiness, and limited procurement opportunities from the government. Third, the ecosystem still lacks adequate infrastructure and testing facilities, especially for deep-tech, engineering, and research-based startups. Fourth, there is a shortage of mentorship and capacity-building systems that can help founders learn from experienced practitioners and navigate the early stages of growth. Fifth, market access remains limited because local products are not always trusted or prioritized, and imported alternatives often receive preference. Sixth, collaboration between universities, startups, and research institutions remains underdeveloped, despite the obvious value such coordination could bring to innovation and commercialization.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Kunal Kayal observed that the discussion had successfully brought together a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including startups, academia, investors, and industry associations such as FNCCI and CNI. He stated that Nepal's startup ecosystem remains fragmented and that there are clear gaps in policy, funding mechanisms, mentorship, and market integration. At the same time, he expressed optimism that the strong participation and practical suggestions from the roundtable show that there is real potential to build a more organized and supportive ecosystem. He also noted that NICCI intends to take the discussion forward into the next phase through policy advocacy, research, and stronger collaboration among stakeholders in order to help create a more robust startup environment in Nepal.

The Startup Sambah Roundtable served as an important and timely platform for honest exchange among entrepreneurs, investors, educators, and business leaders. The event highlighted the creativity and resilience of Nepali startups, while also drawing attention to the many barriers they continue to face in areas such as funding, mentorship, regulation, procurement, trust, testing infrastructure, and market access. More importantly, it demonstrated that there is a shared understanding among stakeholders that the startup ecosystem cannot grow through isolated efforts alone. It requires coordination, patience, policy reform, stronger institutional partnerships, and practical support systems that can help promising ideas move from concept to scale. NICCI's initiative in hosting this roundtable represents a meaningful step toward that direction, and the insights gathered through the discussion provide a strong base for future advocacy and action.

KEY FINDINGS

The Startup Sambah Roundtable brought forward a number of clear and recurring insights regarding the current state of Nepal's startup ecosystem. These findings reflect both the challenges faced by entrepreneurs and the areas where immediate attention and coordinated action are required.

1. Structural and Policy Barriers Continue to Hinder Growth

A consistent concern among participants was the complexity of Nepal's regulatory environment. Startups face difficulties in business registration, taxation processes, and unclear exit mechanisms. In addition, weak intellectual property protection and restrictions around foreign investment and international payment systems significantly limit the ability of startups to scale, collaborate globally, and operate efficiently.

2. Access to Funding Remains Limited and Uneven

While there is growing interest in entrepreneurship, access to capital remains a major bottleneck. Nepal lacks a strong angel investor network and venture capital presence. At the same time, many startups are not adequately prepared to engage with investors due to limited understanding of financial structuring and equity financing. This creates a gap not only in funding availability but also in funding readiness.

3. Inadequate Infrastructure and Testing Facilities

The absence of research parks, laboratories, and testing facilities poses a major challenge, particularly for technology-driven and engineering-based startups. Founders working in advanced sectors face difficulties in accessing essential materials and conducting product testing, which delays innovation and increases operational costs.

4. Weak Mentorship and Capacity-Building Systems

Participants highlighted a shortage of experienced mentors and structured mentorship programs. Many founders lack access to guidance from industry experts, which affects decision-making, business strategy, and long-term growth. Existing mentorship and incubation efforts are limited in reach and often not well integrated into the broader ecosystem.

5. Limited Market Access and Low Trust in Domestic Solutions

Startups face challenges in gaining market acceptance within Nepal. There is a noticeable preference for foreign products and services, even when local alternatives are available. This lack of trust in domestic innovation restricts opportunities for startups to secure early clients and validate their solutions.

6. Fragmented Ecosystem and Lack of Coordination

The ecosystem is currently characterized by limited collaboration between government bodies, academia, industry, and investors. Support systems exist in isolation rather than as part of a coordinated framework, leading to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for synergy.

7. Gaps in Academia-Industry Linkages

Although some academic institutions offer incubation and funding support, these initiatives are often confined to specific institutions and lack wider accessibility. There is a need for stronger collaboration between universities and startups to promote research-driven innovation and entrepreneurial culture.

Overall, the findings highlight that while Nepal has a strong base of entrepreneurial talent and ideas, the ecosystem requires more structured support, better coordination, and practical policy reforms to unlock its full potential.

OUTCOMES & CONCLUSIONS

Outcomes:

The Startup Sambad Roundtable resulted in several important outcomes that will guide NICCI's future engagement with the startup ecosystem and relevant stakeholders.

Firstly, the roundtable successfully created a common platform for dialogue among startups, investors, academia, and industry bodies. It enabled participants to openly share their experiences and challenges, leading to a clearer and more grounded understanding of the realities faced by entrepreneurs across sectors. This exchange helped bridge communication gaps between ecosystem actors who often operate independently.

Secondly, the session led to the identification of priority areas for policy advocacy. Key issues such as regulatory complexity, barriers to foreign investment, limitations in international payment systems, and weak intellectual property protection were clearly outlined. These will form the basis for NICCI's policy recommendations and future engagement with government stakeholders.

Another key outcome was the recognition of the need for structured support mechanisms for startups. Participants emphasized the importance of developing investment readiness programs, strengthening mentorship networks, and expanding incubation support beyond limited institutional boundaries. This has reinforced the need for NICCI to play a more active role in facilitating connections between startups, mentors, and investors.

The roundtable also highlighted the importance of improving market access for startups, particularly by encouraging greater trust in Nepali products and services. The need for government and private sector institutions to adopt locally developed solutions emerged as a practical step toward strengthening domestic enterprises.

In addition, the discussion underscored the importance of building stronger collaboration between academia, industry, and policymakers. There was a shared understanding that innovation cannot thrive in isolation and that coordinated efforts are required to create a more supportive and integrated ecosystem.

Finally, the engagement provided NICCI with valuable insights and direct feedback from startups, which will contribute to future research, programming, and initiatives under its Startup and Private Equity Committee. It also laid the groundwork for continued dialogue and follow-up actions, ensuring that the discussion translates into tangible progress.

MEDIA COVERAGE

5 OUTLETS

PARTICIPANTS

15

Conclusion:

The Startup Sambah Roundtable served as a meaningful step toward understanding and addressing the challenges within Nepal's startup ecosystem. The discussion made it clear that while there is no shortage of ideas, talent, or entrepreneurial ambition, the environment in which startups operate still presents significant obstacles that limit growth and sustainability.

At the same time, the level of participation and the depth of engagement demonstrated that there is strong interest among stakeholders to work collectively toward solutions. The presence of startups, investors, academic representatives, and industry organizations in one forum reflected a shared commitment to improving the ecosystem and supporting innovation-driven enterprises.

The roundtable reaffirmed that strengthening Nepal's startup ecosystem will require a combination of policy reform, institutional support, improved access to funding, and stronger collaboration across sectors. It also highlighted the need to move beyond discussions and focus on implementation, ensuring that identified challenges are addressed through practical and coordinated actions.

NICCI, through its Startup and Private Equity Committee, is well positioned to take these discussions forward. By leveraging its networks, facilitating partnerships, and engaging in policy advocacy, NICCI can contribute to building a more enabling environment for startups. In conclusion, the program not only provided a platform for dialogue but also established a clear direction for future efforts. With sustained engagement and focused action, the insights from this roundtable can contribute to the gradual development of a more connected, supportive, and resilient startup ecosystem in Nepal.

MEDIA COVERAGE

EVENT GALLERY



EVENT GALLERY



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Organization	Designation
Mr. Arjun Ghimire	Disurf	Founder & CEO
Mr. Asim Shrestha	Edtraa.com (Krezona Technology)	Edtraa.com (Krezona Technology)
Mr. Bijayan Bhattarai	Diyo A.I. Technology Pvt. Ltd	CEO
Mr. Bishad Koju	NHU AI (Araniko AI technology Pvt. Ltd.)	CEO
Mr. Haru Hirachan	Nepatronix	HR
Mr. Hrithik Babu Shrestha	Gyanbazzar Online Pvt. Ltd	CEO
Ms. Priyanka Karn	Smart Solar Habitat	Architecture Graduate
Mr. Raju Shrestha	Nepatronix Engineering Solution Pvt. Ltd.	CEO and Founder
Mr. Shreeyanch Shrestha	Sync Technologies (Samparka Digital Loyalty)	Founder & CEO
Ms. Shrisha Pandey	VayuDrishhti	Co-Founder

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Mr. Subash Pandey	Agro Range Nepal Pvt. Ltd	Executive Officer
Mr. Sunil Bista	Mach24 Orbitals	CPE
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