



# Joshimath Relief Work



# ABOUT JOSHIMATH:

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Joshimath, also known as Jyotirmath, is a city and a municipal board in Chamoli District in the Indian state of Uttarakhand. Located at a height of 6150 feet (1875 m), it is a gateway to several Himalayan mountain climbing expeditions, trekking trails and pilgrim centres like Badrinath. It is also home to one of the four cardinal pīthas established by Adi Shankara. The area was severely affected by the 2021 Uttarakhand flood and its aftermath. Joshimath has an estimated population of around 25,000 people. The remote geography, humble traditional occupations, low demographic indicators, and lack of infrastructure and development contribute to the low socio-economic status of the communities.



## A Grim Situation :

According to the initial reports on the landslides in Joshimath, a seismically sensitive area, as many as 800 buildings were affected from cracks to entire buildings tilting upon each other in the town were affirmed as unsafe to live are being demolished. The district administration relocated a number of families to temporary shelters. 20 - 40 buildings were earmarked by the administration in Joshimath town and the outskirts. District Magistrate Chamoli issued an order to vacate wards by declaring 4 wards under the city area dangerous using Sections 33 and 34 of the Disaster Management Act. The situation was unpredictable thus, as per the safety measure, Hotels and tourist accommodations have been closed since then.

Under the relief activity, the district administration provided some aid towards essential daily items, food packets, blankets and health checkups to the affected people in the area. As the situation was escalating, a lot more support was required. Thus, **Sewa International**, being the first responder in the time of disaster, came in frontline and has started the relief work. Indeed, Sewa International is providing a much-needed service to the community of **Joshimath** to cope up with the on-going situation with multiple interventions.

- Sewa Team and Volunteer engagement
- Networking and Advocacy with local administration
- Household Survey
- Community Counselling
- Ration Kit Distribution





## **Sewa Team and Volunteer Engagement:**

The land subsidence in Joshimath seemed to be a recent stressful activity, but it is assumed that our ancient sages may have foreseen this possibility thousands of years ago. October 2021, witnessed the first cracks appearing in a few houses in the town. 14 months later, by 10th January 2023, around 723 houses in all of the nine wards in the town had developed major or minor cracks on the floors, walls and ceilings. Beams had been dislodged in many houses in this area. As soon as the news broke out, the ground team of Sewa International in Uttarakhand became aware of the disaster which was on the way. With the help of a large team of Sewa, the volunteer engagement activity was started immediately. Along with the 400+ Self Help Groups the volunteers were identified and made ready for the relief activity. The Karyakartas and volunteers were determined to find a solution to alleviate the situation and were also highly committed and worked tirelessly to ensure that no families were left behind in the dire need of help.

## **Networking and Advocacy with local administration:**

The team on ground reached out to the local authorities and administrative department of Joshimath. Several meetings were held with the administrative department of Chamoli district and District Animal Husbandry Department for the inspection of the situation. They also met the Sub Divisional Magistrate of Chamoli district in-person and discussed the ongoing circumstances of the sinking town. They gathered information, conducted baseline study and prioritised the immediate needs of the community.

## **House visit & Survey:**

Sewa Uttarakhand team members visited the affected areas of Joshimath. During the visit, Karyakartas assessed the situation caused by the land subsidence and saw first hand the impact it has had on the community. The team noticed that the disaster affected 723 building

situated in 9 wards of Joshimath city area (Gandhinagar, Palika Marwari, Lower bazar, Singhdar, Manoharbagh, Uppar Bazar, Sunil, Persari and Ravigram). The district administration has so far shifted 94 families to various temporary places. A total of 16 buildings with a capacity of 213 rooms have been selected by the administration in the Joshimath town area for the rehabilitation of the disaster affected community and also the district administration arranged basic facilities in the relief camps for the disaster affected people.

Sewa volunteers interacted with the families and listened to their concerns and needs. Despite the challenging circumstances, the team was determined to assist the families in need. Hence, they gathered information from 250+ households about the housing condition, affected families, children, elderly groups and livestock. It was very hard for the team members to witness the harsh situation as all the families were emotionally attached with their houses that were sinking or were about to sink. Those cracked walls of the buildings were their homes where they had lived their life and seen their generations nurturing. Verily, the team encountered how the people of Joshimath were trying hard to gather their scattered dreams in the form of their shelters.

## **Community Counselling:**

The sinking of the town was uncertain. Though the implications behind the land subsidence in Joshimath is yet to be figured out and might take months to unfold, the disaster has horrendously affected the lives of the community people. The disaster has created a stressful situation and has had a devastating impact on the lives of the people, and has resulted in a range of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and stress. As epidemic of mental issues has been seen in the town, thus Sewa International is offering the community counselling sessions. The counselling will address the emotional and psychological effects of the disaster, and provide childrens, men, women and senior citizens with the tools they need to build resilience and to recover from the trauma they have experienced.

So far, the team on ground has been able to provide counselling to more than 200+ families from the affected area. The sessions are being conducted by Karyakartas who have experience in helping people deal with trauma and stress. It will provide support and guidance to those who are struggling to cope with the aftermath of the disaster. This initiative will aid the people of Joshimath to overcome the challenges they are facing and to enable them to regain a sense of hope and stability.

## **Ration Kit Distribution:**

Ration Kit distribution drive was carried out by Sewa Karyakartas in Joshimath. A total of 250 ration kits were distributed to the families affected. The ration kits typically contained of essential food items such as wheat flour (5kgs), rice (5 kgs), sugar (1 kg), refined oil (1 ltr), arhar daal (1kg), chana daal (1kg), salt (1 kg), milk powder (100gms), chilli powder (100gms), turmeric (100gms), coriander (100gms), tea (100gms), and cumin seeds (100gms), soap (vim), bathing soap (lifebuoy) and washing soap (rin). The ration kits have helped the Joshimath people to fight hunger and alleviate the burden of food costs, allowing families to allocate their limited resources to other essential needs in this time of need.



## Conclusion:

Sewa International's efforts to provide relief support to the community of Joshimath is undergoing and we hope with the gratitude of the Donors we will be able to play an important role in the town's recovery and rebuilding process. By addressing the basic needs of the people, Sewa International aims to help in laying the foundation for a stronger and more resilient community for those affected by the recent land subsidence.





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