

Members of an assessment team by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kathmandu, and the Nepal Jesuit Social Institute tour flood-affected areas in the Galchi rural municipality of Dhading, a largely agricultural area in northeast Nepal. (Courtesy of Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kathmandu)



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Catholic sisters responding to the catastrophic flooding in rural Nepal — which killed hundreds and left thousands missing — say the extent of damage is staggering.

"Nothing is left there," said Sr. Oliva Kujur, a Sister of Charity of Nazareth, following an initial assessment on Sunday, Aug, 30.

"It is a painful moment to see people suffering," she told Global Sisters Report.

An Aug. 26 glacial collapse is being blamed for the flooding, which authorities say left at least 1,000 dead.

In a report provided to GSR, Kujar said the initial assessment by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kathmandu, and the Nepal Jesuit Social Institute focused on damage and humanitarian needs in the rural municipality of Galchi, located in the Dhading district, a largely agricultural area in central Nepal.

"Witnessing displaced families in temporary shelters — having lost their homes, property, and livelihoods — is heartbreaking," the report said. "Our team observed severe damage to housing, farmland, and vital infrastructure. Urgent priorities include safe drinking water, shelter assistance, medical care, sanitation, and long-term recovery support."

The report also said that in discussions with community members and local authorities, "officials requested urgent aid in the form of clothing for affected families, as well as school uniforms and bags to help children resume their education. We remain dedicated to reaching the most vulnerable during this critical time."

Communities visited by the sisters were fortunate in one respect: People had enough warning to flee before flood waters wiped out their farmlands, homes and roads. But those communities must now determine how to reclaim the lands and homes that were swept away by flood waters.

Following the initial assessment, the congregation plans to provide bed mats, clothing and mosquito nets. The sisters' efforts are part of a coordinated response that includes efforts by government bodies and humanitarian groups and alliances, such as Caritas Nepal and the Nepal Jesuit Institute.

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Teams of sisters and volunteers are returning this week to the affected areas and providing the initial humanitarian items. Larger groups, such as government bodies, are providing food.

"It's a disaster for the people, the land, farms and cultivation, and homes," said Sr. Suchita Kullu, another assessment team member. "There is nothing left except a little ray of hope — human solidarity."

"It will really take time to rebuild for their future," she added. "So, without the help of NGOS and the government they won't be able to do it themselves."

The destruction of land was so total, she told GSR, that it now looks as if many communities will be unable to rebuild at all. "There is literally no place to rebuild houses there," she said.

The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, based in the capital of Kathmandu, have ministries in areas of Dhading, located west of Kathmandu. Residents in mountainous communities there who benefit from those ministries — and who are among the most economically disadvantaged in Nepal — were not affected because of their distance from river areas, Kullu said.

Observers say that climate-related factors may be responsible for the glacier collapse. That does not surprise Kullu, who told GSR that "surely the effects of climate change" contributed to the collapse and subsequent flooding.

Another disaster in Asia: Earthquake in Indonesia

The Nepal flooding is the latest, but not the only, natural disaster in Asia to which sisters are responding.

On Aug. 15, a 7.7-magnitude earthquake on the eastern Indonesian island of Flores killed more than 60 people and left more than 192,000 people displaced, with thousands still residing in evacuation tents.

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Among the sister congregations responding in the western Flores city of Ruteng are Good Shepherd sisters through Good Shepherd Social Services. Congregations in the city are working together in a coordinated response.

Sr. Flora Nirmala, the unit leader of Good Shepherd Social Services, told GSR that the sisters are providing food to survivors in Ruteng, with a special focus on aid to children and their families. The sisters are also providing counseling and prayers to people traumatized by the disaster.

She added that Ruteng is still experiencing tremors and that the sisters themselves must now rebuild parts of their convent, which sustained damage. That has forced the sisters to live in temporary quarters and an evacuation tent on the convent grounds.

"Our convent is damaged but we are safe," she said.