



# LIVING ON THE EDGE: THE HUMAN COST OF SINKING CITIES

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Imagine living in a place where the ground beneath your feet is slowly sinking. Your home starts to crack, roads are uneven, and every day feels uncertain. This is what people in places like Joshimath, Jakarta, Venice, and New Orleans are facing. The sinking of land, or land subsidence, is a problem that does not just damage building but it also disrupts lives. It forces people to leave their homes, endangers their safety, and makes entire cities vulnerable to disasters like floods.

Joshimath, nestled in the Himalayas, is a town in trouble. Its foundation is weak—built on ancient landslide debris in a geologically active zone. Heavy construction, without proper planning, has made things worse. Roads, hotels, and big projects like hydropower plants press down on the fragile land, while heavy rains seep into the soil, making it unstable. Cracks are appearing everywhere—on walls, in roads, and even in people's hearts, as they worry about losing their homes. Despite warnings from experts decades ago, construction has not stopped, and now the town's very survival is at risk.

Far away in Jakarta, Indonesia, the sinking is even faster. Parts of the city are dropping by as much as 25 centimetres every year. The problem is largely man-made—Jakarta's millions of people depend on groundwater for their daily needs, and as that water is pumped out, the land above it collapses. Add the weight of buildings and poor drainage, and you have a city that floods every time it rains. Families in Jakarta live with constant uncertainty, their homes and streets often underwater. The government is even considering moving the capital to a safer location because the sinking cannot be stopped entirely.

Venice, the famous city of canals in Italy, tells a different story but with a similar ending. Built on wooden foundations, Venice has been sinking for centuries. Natural settling, groundwater uses in the past, and rising sea levels caused by climate change have made things worse. The beautiful canals that attract tourists now regularly overflow, flooding streets and damaging historic buildings. For the people of Venice, each flood feels like losing a piece of their heritage.

In New Orleans, the sinking land is a mix of natural and human factors. Decades of oil and groundwater extraction, combined with soft soils and poor water management, have left the city vulnerable. Being below sea level, New Orleans faces constant threats from hurricanes and flooding. The people here have seen how devastating this can be, especially during Hurricane Katrina. Many still work to rebuild their lives, hoping their city will one day be safe.

These stories are not just about sinking cities but they are also about people. Families forced to leave their homes, children growing up in unstable conditions, and entire communities struggling to adapt. Fixing these problems requires more than science. It requires empathy. Cities need better planning, stricter rules for construction, and smarter ways to use water. But they also need to listen to the people who live there, to involve them in solutions, and to make sure their futures are secure. In the end, the fight against sinking land is not just about saving cities, it is about saving lives.

