



February 2024

# RAPID FOOD SECURITY ASSESSMENT ON THE FLOOD IMPACT

AMPARA DISTRICT



World Food  
Programme

SAVING  
LIVES  
CHANGING  
LIVES



## OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

In early January 2024, extensive rainfall across Sri Lanka led to widespread flooding in various regions of the island, causing a substantial impact on infrastructure and livelihoods. The district of Ampara bore the heaviest brunt, resulting in reduced food security in affected communities and households.

Ampara district, situated in the Eastern Province, is segmented into 20 Divisional Secretary Divisions (DS divisions). The main livelihood activities in the district are paddy cultivation, fisheries and unskilled casual labour such as mason work, cattle rearing and carpentry.

According to the National Disaster Relief Services Centre, over 175,000 people were affected by the floods and 294 infrastructures (houses/small and medium enterprises) were either partially or fully damaged.<sup>1</sup>

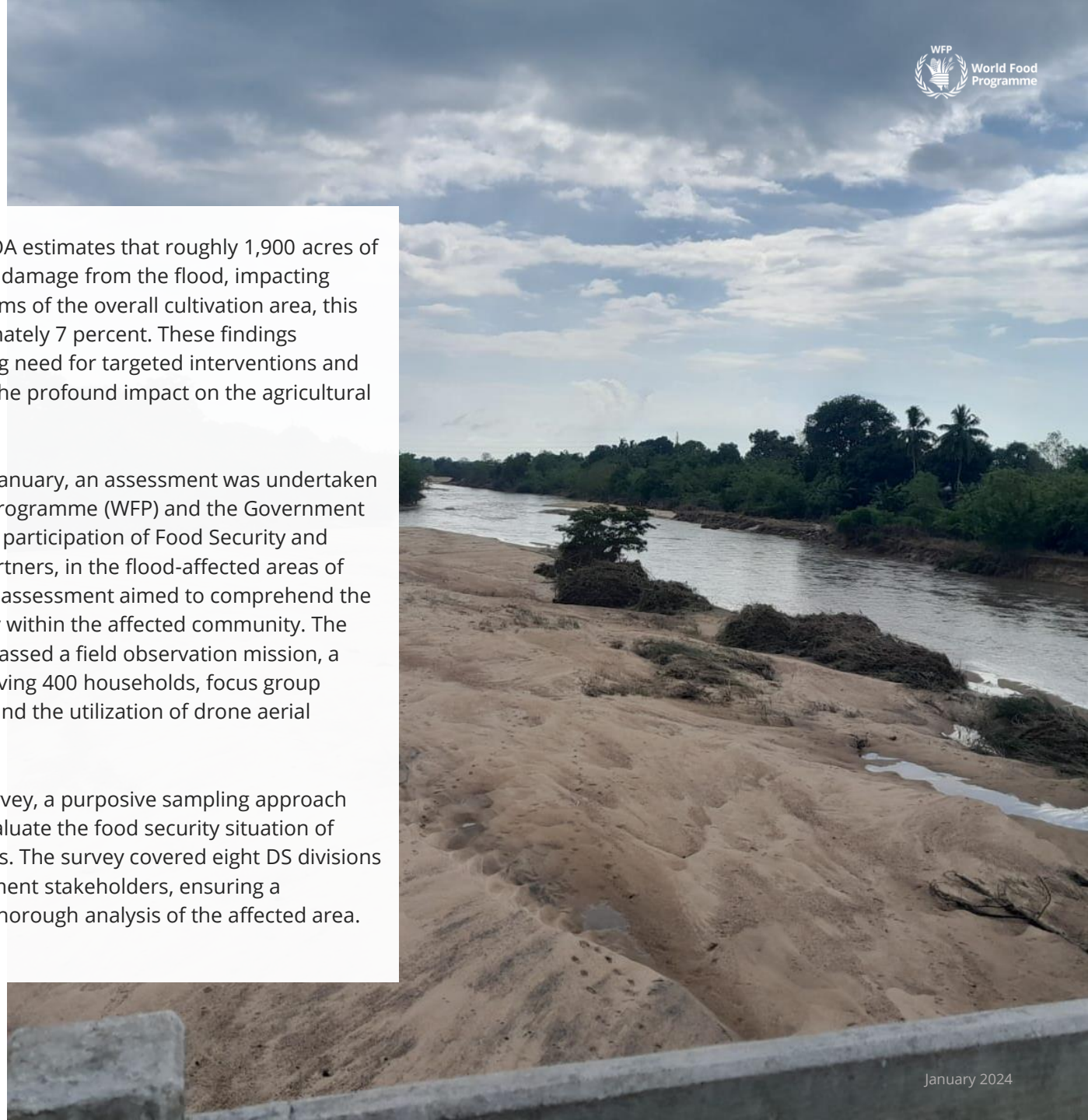
The Department of Agriculture (DOA) reports reveal extensive damage caused by the flood, with around 47,000 acres of paddy fully affected. This impact directly affects 20,064 farmers, constituting approximately 20 percent of the total cultivation area in the 2023 Maha season (74,000 hectares).

Furthermore, the DOA estimates that roughly 1,900 acres of maize have suffered damage from the flood, impacting 1,251 farmers. In terms of the overall cultivation area, this represents approximately 7 percent. These findings highlight the pressing need for targeted interventions and support to address the profound impact on the agricultural sector in Ampara.

Between 19 and 26 January, an assessment was undertaken by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Government of Sri Lanka with the participation of Food Security and Livelihood Sector partners, in the flood-affected areas of Ampara district. The assessment aimed to comprehend the level of food security within the affected community. The assessment encompassed a field observation mission, a primary survey involving 400 households, focus group discussions (FGDs), and the utilization of drone aerial imagery.

In the household survey, a purposive sampling approach was employed to evaluate the food security situation of impacted households. The survey covered eight DS divisions provided by government stakeholders, ensuring a representative and thorough analysis of the affected area.

1. National Disaster Relief Services Centre, 17 January 2024

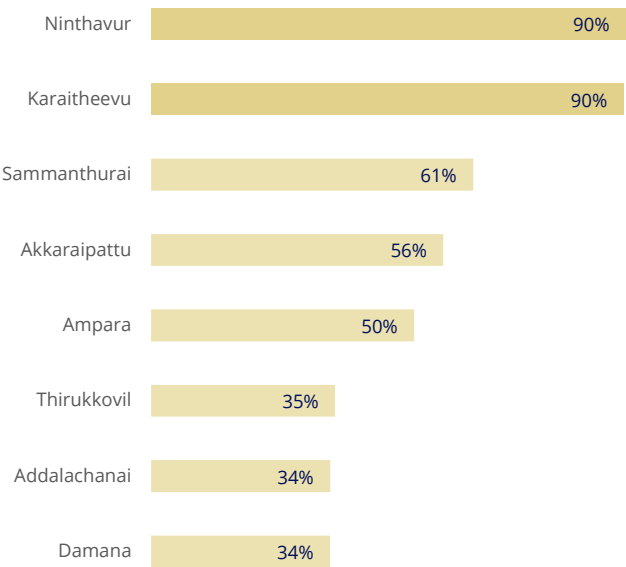


# FINDINGS

**Food insecurity:** Over half of the assessed households (55 percent) are food insecure. Of this, 6.3 percent are severely food insecure. There was no significant difference in food insecurity between female-headed and male-headed households.

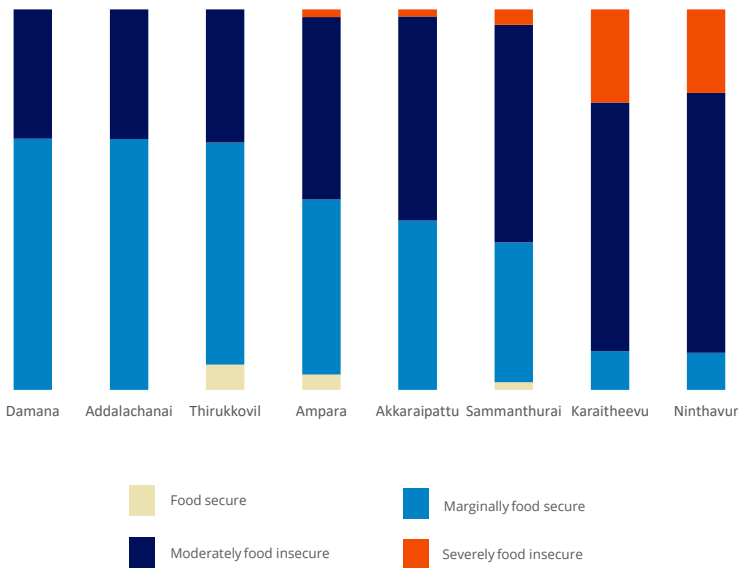
The assessment collected data from eight DS divisions, of which food insecurity was at concerning levels. Of the assessed divisions, Ninthavur and Karaitheevu had the highest food insecurity; nearly nine in ten households were food insecure.

Food insecurity by DS division



Food insecurity levels were lower in Addalachanai and Damana at 34 percent and Thirukkivil at 35 percent, and households in this district had no severely food insecure households.

Breakdown of food insecurity by DS division



The above graph displays a breakdown of food insecurity levels in each of the assessed districts. Severe food insecurity is evident in Akkaraipattu, Ampara, Karaitheevu, Ninthavur and Sammanthurai households. Overall, moderate food insecurity was noted in all assessed districts.

**Food consumption:** 45 percent of households are not consuming adequate diets.

Results indicate that fruit and dairy are the least consumed food groups, less than a day a week, followed by proteins, consumed just below two days a week. Staples and sugar are consumed over six days a week.

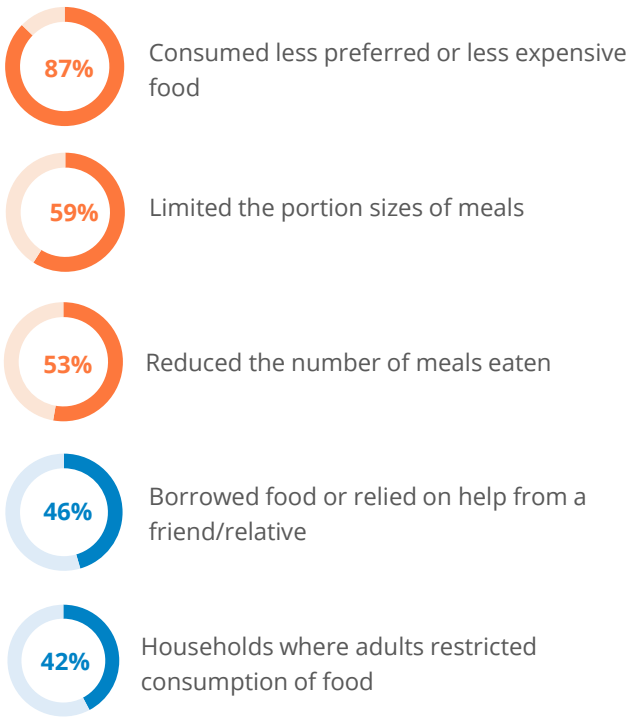
Number of days food groups are consumed in a week



# FINDINGS

**Food-based coping strategies:** 91 percent of households are adopting at least one food-based coping strategy. A majority resorted to eating less preferred and less expensive food (87 percent). Furthermore, over five in ten households limited portion sizes and reduced the number of meals eaten, to cope with the lack of food.

**% of households adopting food-based coping strategies:**



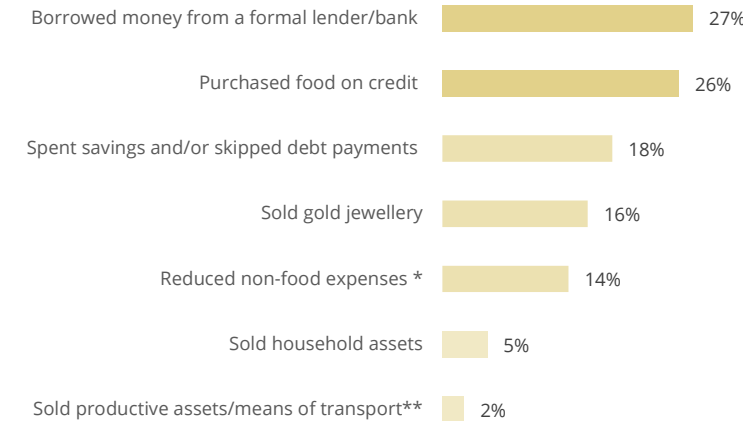
\* On health and education  
 \*\* Such as sewing machines, bicycles, cars, etc.

**Livelihood-based coping strategies:** Concerningly, 99 percent of households are turning to livelihood-based coping strategies to put food on the table.

The livelihood-based coping strategies used by most households are borrowing money (27 percent), purchasing food on credit (26 percent) and spending savings/ skipping debt payments (18 percent). The following graph gives a breakdown of the coping strategies employed.

Households (14 percent) are also reducing their expenses on health and education to put food on the table.

**% of households adopting livelihood-based coping strategies:**



Employing coping strategies might make households more susceptible to future shocks, especially if the households have dipped into their savings.





# FOOD INSECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

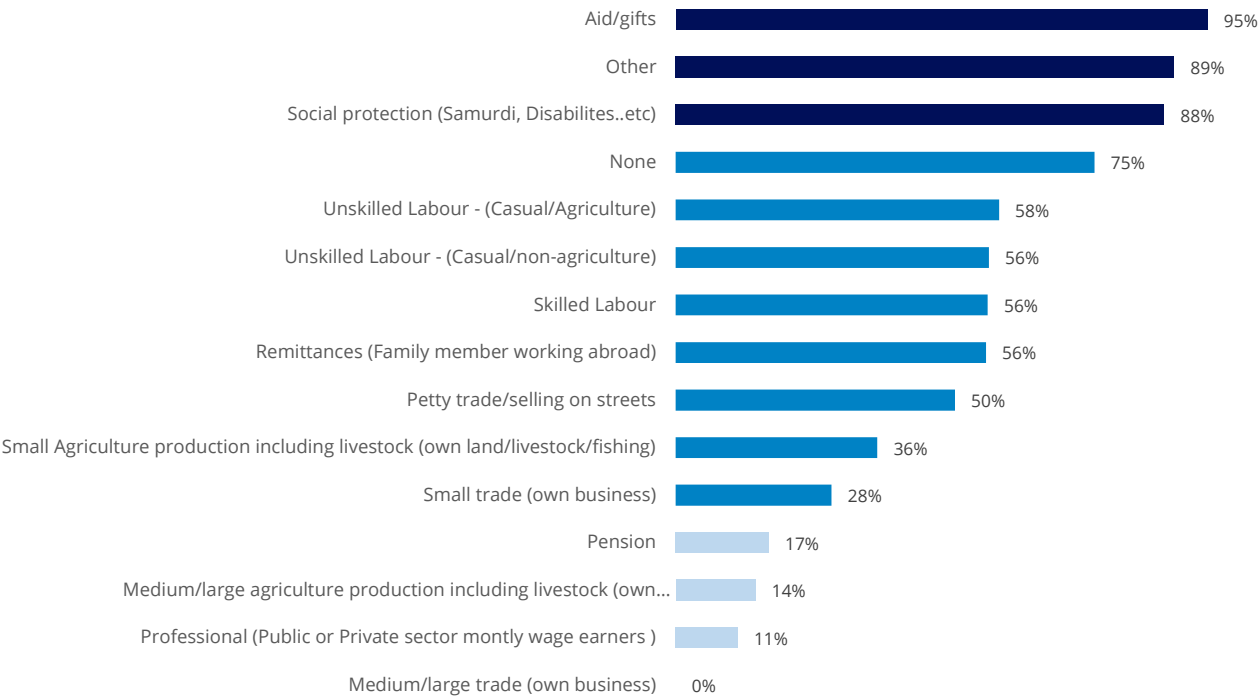
The assessment examined the impact the floods had on the livelihoods, income and consequently, the food security status of the households.

According to the findings, the highest levels of food insecurity were in households that rely on aid/gifts as an income (95 percent) followed by other sources of income (poultry, goat farming, etc.) (89 percent) and social protection (88 percent).

The least food insecure households' sources of income were medium- or large-scale trade (0 percent), public or private sector workers (11 percent) and medium/large agriculture production (14 percent).



Food insecurity by livelihood group



**From the FGDs:** In the assessed districts, the communities rely heavily on fisheries and paddy cultivation as primary sources of income. In addition to these, other activities are prevalent such as mason work, brick preparation, maize cultivation, and home gardening. Generally, men take on income-generating roles, actively participating in occupations like fishing and agriculture. At the same time, women play a crucial role in managing home gardening and supporting men in various tasks, such as weaving nets.

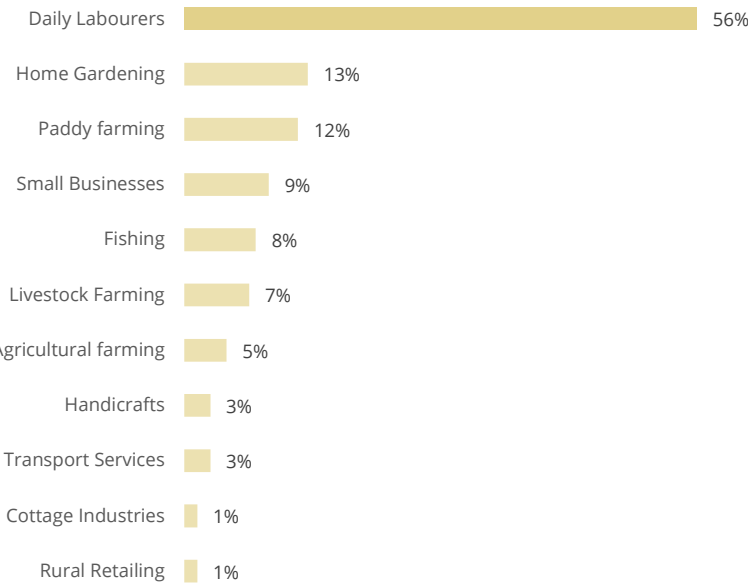


# LIVELIHOODS AFFECTED BY THE FLOODS

The flooding in Ampara has resulted in a significant impact on several types of livelihood activities. Findings show that daily labourers were the most affected, at 56 percent. This was followed by home gardening and paddy farming, at 14 percent and 12 percent respectively. Small businesses, fishing, livestock farming and agricultural farming were other affected livelihoods.

Despite the widespread bearing on various livelihoods, rural retailing and cottage industries emerged as the least affected at 1.4 percent, implying minimal impact.

## Breakdown of the affected livelihoods



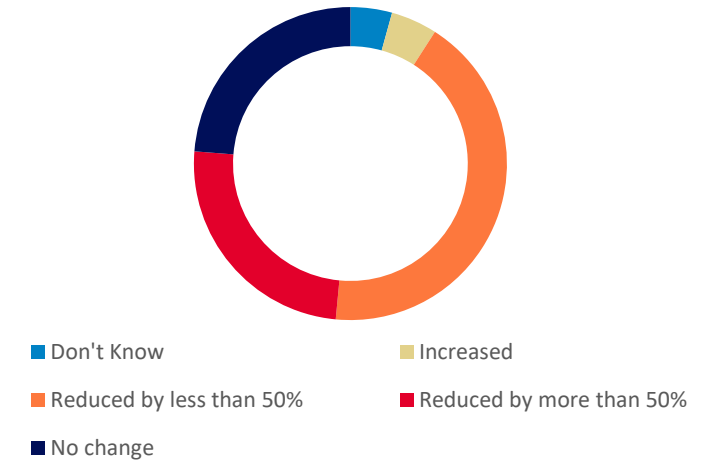
The findings of the assessment indicate significant crop damage in the flood-affected areas. Some of the more severe damage was to paddy (70 percent) and low-country vegetable cultivations (26 percent). Damage to maize cultivation was reported at 11 percent and upcountry vegetable cultivation followed closely at 9 percent.

The floodwaters caused extensive damage and loss, affecting the livelihoods of those dependent on agricultural activities.

The assessment also found that houses and land were the most affected by the recent floods (69 percent) followed by livelihoods and income (41 percent), household and household assets (21 percent) and cropland (16 percent).



## Changes in income within the last month



In terms of income changes during the last month, a large proportion of households (43 percent) reported a less than 50 percent reduction, while 25 percent of households reported an income reduction of over 50 percent.

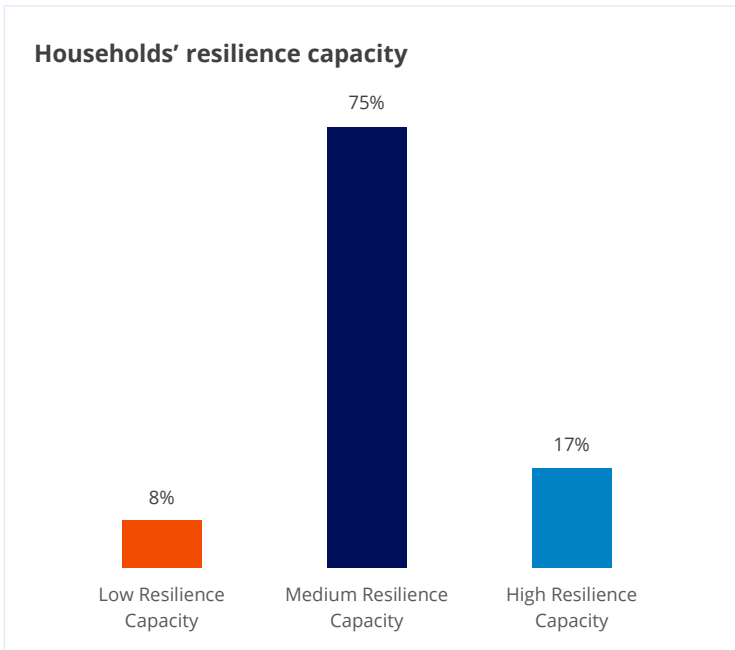
Over half of the households (52 percent) earn an income between LKR 10,000 – 30,000. Approximately 30 percent of households generate an income within the range of LKR 1000 to 10,000, while 17 percent fall within the income bracket of LKR 30,000 to 50,000.

Only one percent earns a monthly income of over LKR 50,000.

## RESILIENCE AND LIVELIHOODS

A large proportion of households (75 percent) have medium resilience capacity, followed by 8 percent of households with low resilience capacity. This indicates that households have minimal capacities to enhance, absorb and transform livelihoods in a way that ensures that shocks and stressors will not have long-lasting adverse development consequences.

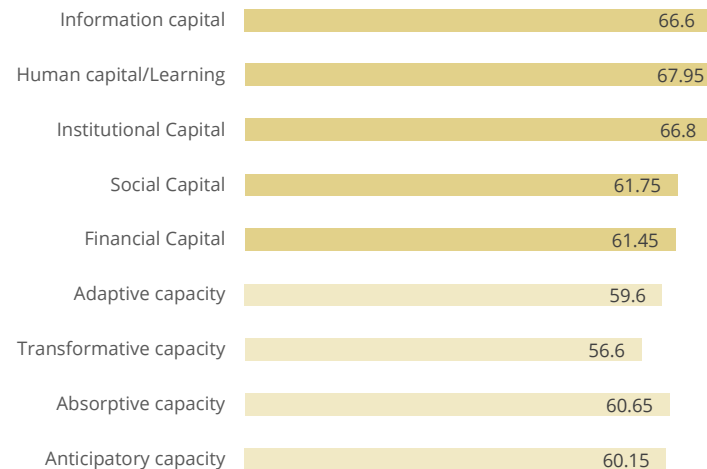
Out of the assessed households, findings show that 17 percent have a high resilience capacity, demonstrating a better perception of their resilience capacities.



The community impacted by the flood has a moderate level (56 percent) of ability to change their primary income source as a short-term resilience approach. Similarly, their capacity to cope with frequent floods and return to normal livelihood activities is at a medium level (59 percent). This suggests that there is a need to enhance the resilience of the affected community by strengthening the diversification of their primary livelihood activities and increasing their capacity to withstand floods and other stressors.

Affected community access to financial support is also at a medium level which indicates short-term support of financial support required for affected livelihoods.

### Household resilience capacities and capitals



The Resilience Capacity Score (RCS) indicator measures a household's perception of their resilience capacities to flood shocks and stressors.

*This indicator refers to the subjective perception of household resilience that may not always be aligned with objective measures of resilience, given that perceptions are personal and can be influenced by a wide range of factors.*



## PADDY AND OTHER CROP CULTIVATION

Ampara district's pivotal contribution of around 20 percent to the national paddy production is noteworthy. Nevertheless, the recent flood situation has introduced challenges for small-holder paddy farmers in the area. These challenges manifest as submergence and sedimentation of paddy lands, resulting in adverse effects on both crop yield and the overall productivity of paddy fields.

- *Farmers express significant concern over the challenges posed by the flood, as it becomes a substantial barrier for those who have invested their savings and borrowed funds. This situation hampers their ability to make essential investments for the upcoming Yala cultivation.*
- *Expert opinions (Department of Agriculture) emphasize the gravity of the situation, with a potential production loss of 40-50 percent for paddy anticipated following 3-4 days of submersion, especially during the reproductive phase.*

*Secondary data from the Department of Agriculture*



During the assessment, paddy farmers were consulted to gauge the extent of damage to the paddy farming sector.

The findings indicate that, on average, 85 percent of cultivated lands suffered significant damage due to the flood situation, as reported by the farmers. A majority (54 percent) of farmers reported that approximately 4-5 feet of floodwaters submerged the paddy fields for more than 7 days. Additionally, the majority (56 percent) of paddy lands were in the reproductive phase during this period.

*As reported by the respondents (farmers).*



## EXTRACTS FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS



Despite receiving early warnings, the severity of the situation was not fully acknowledged. Although dry rations were provided by the Government, financial support and assistance were absent for livelihood recovery. In Samapura, people sought refuge in the temple during the flood, while those in Samanthurai opted for a nearby school. On the other hand, displaced individuals in Thrukkivil and Damana were directed to seek shelter with friends and relatives rather than a common location.



The flooding led to a reduction in the frequency and portion sizes of daily meals for affected households. The destruction of home gardens has forced a reliance on the external market, limiting the variety of food options available. The usual practice of consuming fish twice a week has diminished due to a decline in catches, with the acquired fish often being sold instead of being used for household consumption. In these circumstances, priority is predominantly given to meeting the nutritional needs of children.



The majority of the population in the surveyed areas tends to seek medical attention at nearby base hospitals. Common health concerns observed across all areas include issues related to diabetes and cholesterol. In Samanthurai, cases of mild diarrhoea among children have been reported in the aftermath of the flooding, likely attributable to the challenging conditions. Additionally, foot blisters have become prevalent among individuals affected by the flood.



Vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant mothers, and the elderly are given priority in rescue missions. Communication is primarily facilitated through phone usage, including WhatsApp groups and individuals without phones receive information through personal visits by community leaders and *Grama Nilladhari* officials, emphasizing reliance on both traditional and technological means to disseminate critical information.

*Focus group discussions may not always offer an entirely accurate representation of objective realities. These findings are influenced by individual experiences and perceptions.*





# EXTRACTS FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS



The recent floods inflicted considerable damage, including the loss of paddy crops, home gardens and damage to fertilizers.



In Samapura, the floodwaters reached levels of 3 – 4 metres, dampening children’s books and other belongings.



In Thirukkovil, the floodwaters impacted poultry, paddy crops and home gardens. Damage to drainage systems exposed the area’s vulnerable infrastructure.



In Samanthurai, inadequate infrastructure exacerbated the flood situation, hindering proper water drainage.



Food assistance (in-kind or cash assistance) can be implemented in the Ampara district as a short-term assistance programme, considering the household food security situation.

Food availability at markets, financial institution availability, and access to towns through rural roads. Some villages have experienced disruptions in rural roads, but these have not significantly impacted access to the market. Adequate food varieties and stocks are present to meet demand. However, prices remain high, comparable to other areas. No discernible price increase is specifically attributed to the flood situation in Ampara.

*Focus group discussions may not always offer an entirely accurate representation of objective realities. These findings are influenced by individual experiences and perceptions.*





# PROPOSED CONSIDERATIONS

1

## Livelihood impact and food insecurity

The flood has significantly affected livelihoods at various levels, elevating the risk of household food insecurity. Daily labourers, smallholder farmers, and households relying on social protection schemes are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. Targeted short-term food assistance is essential for initiating the recovery process.

2

## Multipurpose Cash Assistance Approach

The affected community, experiencing losses in livelihood and household assets across various sectors due to the flood disaster, necessitates a multipurpose cash assistance approach. This approach is crucial for medium-term recovery, especially when targeted towards specific communities in need.

3

## Medium-Term Resilience Building

A medium-term strategy focused on resilience building is imperative, particularly targeting livelihoods. Emphasis should be placed on diversifying livelihood opportunities to confront the challenges posed by frequent flood situations. This medium-term plan aims to enhance the community's ability to withstand future shocks.

4

## Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation

Updating disaster risk reduction and mitigation plans is essential, incorporating the latest evidence and risk assessment information. This ensures that plans are aligned with the current scenario, contributing to effective preparedness and response measures based on the most recent data and insights.





This Rapid Food Security Assessment report was developed by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to help inform the response to the floods in the district of Ampara, Sri Lanka.

This report consolidates available field-level information to rapidly comprehend the prevailing situation.

The flood assessment mission was conducted in collaboration with the Presidential Secretariat and District Secretariat officials.

**Photo Credits:**

© WFP/ Shehan Fernando, Sachini Pinnagoda and the Survey Department of Sri Lanka (drone aerial imagery).

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