

Community Consultations for Locally Led Anticipatory Actions in Key Sectors for Flood Hazard in Matara District, Sri Lanka

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Objectives of the Consultation	5
Community Consultation Process	5
Introduce AWARE platform and it's usefulness in Strengthening Anticipatory Action	10
Outcomes of the Community Consultation	11
Annexures	12
Annexure 1: List of Participants	12

List of Figures

Figure 1: Discussion with Participants for the community consultation on Anticipatory Action.	6
Figure 2: Five groups, each representing the Agriculture, Health, Livestock, Education, and WASH sectors, are developing AA protocols.	6
Figure 3: Community participation for during the community consultation and the protocol development.....	7
Figure 4: Sample Locally Led Early Action Protocols developed by the community.	8
Figure 5: Dr Niranga Alahacoon introduced the AWARE functionality of the community	10

Community Consultations for Locally Led Anticipatory Actions in Key Sectors for Flood Hazard

Introduction

In the face of increasing flood risks and intensifying climate variability, communities across the Matara District continue to experience recurrent disruptions to their livelihoods, infrastructure, and essential services. Within this evolving context, community consultations have become a foundation for enhancing knowledge of Anticipatory Action (AA) strategies, ensuring that early warning systems and preparedness measures are grounded in community experiences and needs. Recognising the importance of directly engaging those most affected by flood hazards, a dedicated consultation was organised to enhance community knowledge of anticipatory action, preparedness measures, and locally led responses activated upon receiving flood forecast warnings across key livelihood and service sectors.

During the field-level community risk assessment, it was observed that even though the 20 Grama Niladhari (GN) Divisions in the Malimboda and Thihagoda Divisional Secretariat (DS) areas are geographically close to one another, the nature and severity of flood impacts vary considerably. In some locations, floodwaters lead to prolonged inundation of farmlands and residential areas, while in others, communities become completely isolated due to rising water levels, cutting off access to critical services and external support. These localised differences highlight the need for context-specific and community-informed early action strategies that can guide anticipatory involvement.

The consultation aimed to capture community-driven insights and document the actions taken once flood forecast information is disseminated, with a focus on the importance of timely preparedness, coordination, and proactive decision-making at the grassroots level. Discussions centred on identifying sector-specific actions undertaken by communities in five critical sectors, i.e. (1) Agriculture, (2) Livestock, (3) Health, (4) Education, and (5) Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) to reduce flood-related losses and safeguard lives and livelihoods.

The Malimboda and Thihagoda DS Divisions, identified as two of the most flood-prone regions in the Matara District, served as the focal areas for this consultation. Participants represented a broad cross-section of the local population, including farmers, local leaders, women's representatives, and other community members from 20 GN Divisions. Their participation ensured that diverse local perspectives, indigenous coping mechanisms, and lived experiences were comprehensively documented and integrated into broader Anticipatory Action planning frameworks.

Through open dialogues, participatory mapping exercises, and group discussions, the consultation provided valuable insights into community priorities, available resources,

institutional constraints, and existing coordination mechanisms that guide flood preparedness and response. These findings will strengthen locally led adaptation and anticipatory action protocols, ultimately supporting the creation of a more resilient, well-prepared, and self-reliant community system capable of responding effectively to future flood events.

Objectives of the Consultation

The Anticipatory Action community consultation focuses on achieving the following objectives:

- To document community perceptions, experiences, and traditional coping mechanisms related to flood hazards in the Malimboda and Thihagoda Divisional Secretariat Divisions, highlighting local knowledge that supports anticipatory action planning.
- To identify sector-specific early actions undertaken by communities across key sectors, Agriculture, Livestock, Health, Education, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) upon receiving flood forecast warnings.
- To strengthen the link between early warning information and community-level early actions by identifying existing communication channels, decision-making structures, and coordination mechanisms within the community.
- To generate community-led early action insights for integrating locally led initiatives, ensuring that future interventions are inclusive, community-informed, and context-specific.

Community Consultation Process

To ensure a comprehensive and effective consultation process, two dedicated field teams were established to represent the Thihagoda and Malimboda Divisional Secretariat (DS) Divisions, both of which are highly flood-prone areas in the Matara District. These teams were composed of individuals who possessed a solid understanding of the Anticipatory Action (AA) framework and its operational principles, enabling them to facilitate meaningful discussions with community members.

Each consultation team included key local stakeholders and institutional representatives such as Divisional Secretariat officials, members of the Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMCs), Economic Development Officers (EDOs), officers from the National Disaster Relief Services Centre (NDRSC), District Disaster Management officials, and Grama Niladharis (GNs). This diverse composition ensured that both administrative and community perspectives were reflected throughout the consultation process, promoting an inclusive and multi-stakeholder approach to understanding local flood dynamics and preparedness capacities.

Over two days, the teams conducted field consultations across 20 Grama Niladhari Divisions, with each team covering 10 GNs within its respective DS Division. These sessions involved interactive community discussions (Figure 1), participatory mapping, and focus group engagements, enabling participants to share their experiences, identify risks, and outline priority actions for early preparedness.

Through this structured process, the two teams successfully gathered valuable community insights and collaboratively developed draft community-led Early Action Protocols (EAPs). These draft protocols reflect locally relevant strategies that can be refined and integrated into the broader Anticipatory Action planning framework for the Matara District, supporting timely, informed, and community-driven disaster preparedness.



Figure 1: Discussion with Participants for the community consultation on Anticipatory Action. (Photo: Hasanthi Amarasinghe/SCI)

Throughout the consultation sessions, community members actively engaged in peer-to-peer learning, with individuals with prior experience in managing flood situations guiding and supporting others. Participants shared firsthand accounts of previous flood events and explained the strategies that had proven effective in safeguarding lives, assets, and livelihoods (Figure 2). This open exchange of experiences created a collaborative and trust-based learning environment, allowing participants to collectively analyze what worked, what challenges persisted, and how local knowledge could be better utilized in future preparedness and early action planning. The process not only strengthened mutual understanding but also enhanced the community's collective capacity to anticipate and respond to flood risks more effectively.



Figure 2: Five groups, each representing the Agriculture, Health, Livestock, Education, and WASH sectors, are developing AA protocols. (Photo: Hasanthi Amarasinghe/SCI)

Youth participation emerged as a significant and dynamic component of the consultation process. In many of the villages, local youth groups played an active role in proposing innovative ideas related to early preparedness, communication networks, and rapid response coordination. Their contributions reflected a forward-looking perspective, ensuring that

community preparedness plans were inclusive of intergenerational insights and energy. The involvement of youth also fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility among the younger generation, reinforcing their role as key actors in disaster risk reduction and Anticipatory Action at the local level (Figure 3). By bridging traditional knowledge with modern thinking, youth engagement added both creativity and sustainability to the overall resilience-building process.



Figure 3: Community participation for during the community consultation and the protocol development

Following the consultations held with each Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMCs), the members collaboratively developed draft Anticipatory Action (AA) protocols (Figure 4). These protocols were shaped through the active participation of diverse community groups, including men, women, elderly individuals, youth, and other marginalized populations. Through this inclusive and participatory process, a total of 15 comprehensive AA protocols were finalized, covering key sectors such as agriculture, livestock, health, education, and WASH, ensuring community-wide preparedness and response capacities.

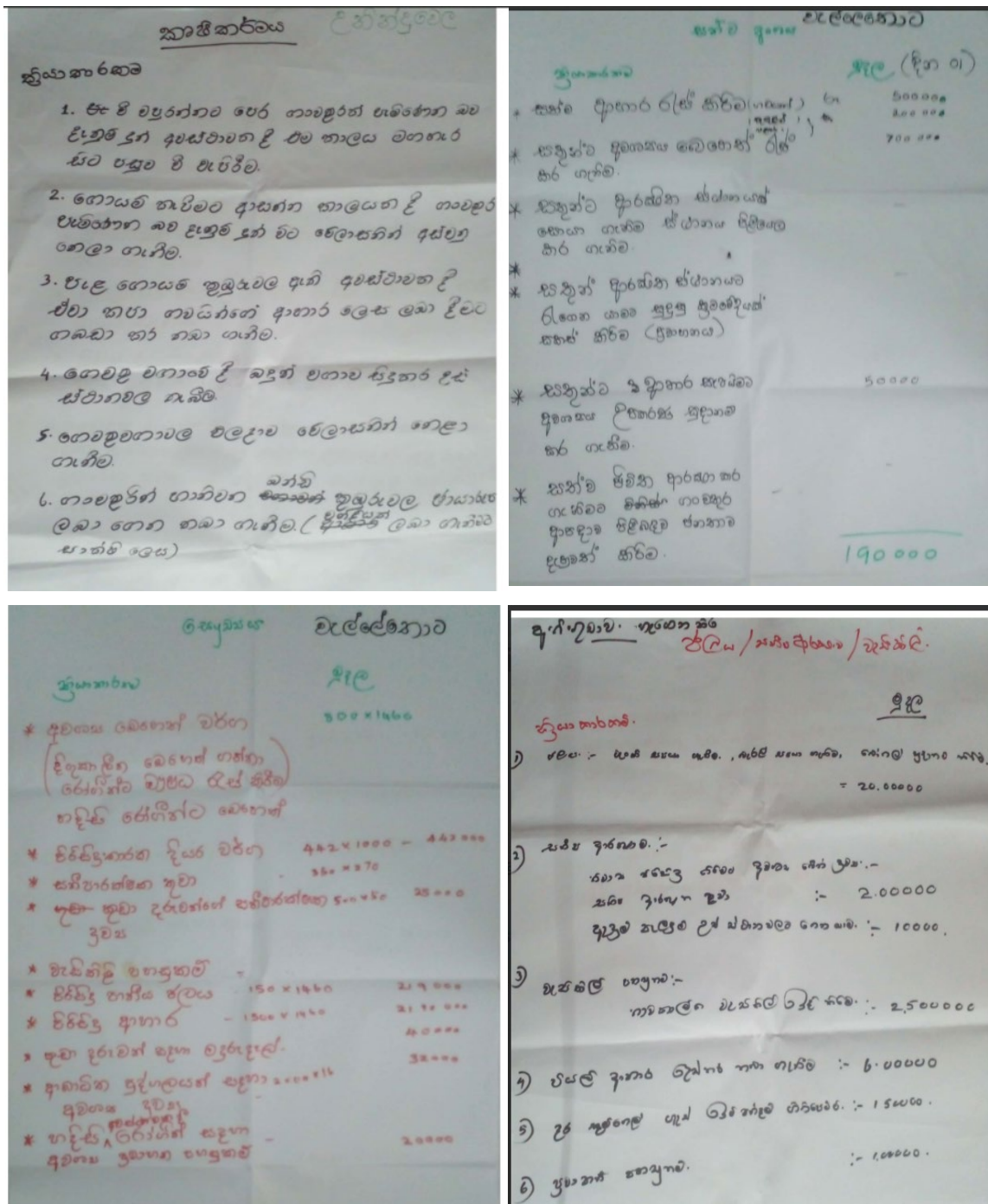


Figure 4: Sample Locally Led Early Action Protocols developed by the community.

Finally, all first drafts of the Anticipatory Action (AA) protocols were systematically digitized and converted into a standardized digital format (Table 1). This process also included translating the content into the required languages to ensure clarity, accessibility, and wider use among community members and local authorities. The table below presents the complete set of digitized and translated AA protocols for reference and future implementation.

Table 1: Draft community-led early actions

Sector	Preparedness Phase	Readiness Phase	Activation Phase
Agriculture	- Inform farmers via forecasting agencies - Complete land preparation - Coordinate with relevant institutions	- Postpone paddy sowing - Delay agrochemical use - Harvest early from upland crops	- Harvest and remove crops nearing maturity - Close gates at water intake place - Clean canals post-flood
WASH	- Store bottled water (6L/person) - Install tanks in safe locations - Stock chlorine, water filters - Store cleaning tools & disinfectants - Prepare hygiene kits - Set up mobile toilets - Establish washing areas	- Ensure WASH items and mobile units are ready for deployment	- Distribute hygiene items and disinfectants - Deploy mobile toilets & laundry areas - Relocate animals to safe places (early action)
Livestock	- Store animal food and water - Stock vet medicine & contacts - Prepare tools for preserving animal products - Train community on animal disease management - Map safe routes - Train local leaders	- Prepare for sale/distribution of perishable animal products - Mobilize evacuation plans for animals	- Relocate animals to safe areas - Implement early sale/distribution of perishable animal products
Health	- Raise awareness via media - Identify vulnerable groups (children, elderly, pregnant) - Identify long-term	- Store clean water - Coordinate with support agencies - Pre-position medicines (e.g., for leptospirosis)	- Relocate vulnerable people - Distribute medicines - Launch vector control awareness (e.g., cholera, dengue)

Sector	Preparedness Phase	Readiness Phase	Activation Phase
	medication users - Engage health staff (PHMs, PHIs, MOHs) - Safe sanitation education - Promote safe food/water storage	- Ready ambulances and medical access	- Distribute nutrition/dry rations

Introduce AWARE platform and it's usefulness in Strengthening Anticipatory Action

Dr. Niranga Alahacoon delivered an in-depth session for representatives from 20 Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMCs). The session primarily emphasized the importance of effectively using forecast data and strengthening early warning systems (Figure 5). Dr. Alahacoon highlighted how timely and accurate forecasts, combined with well-functioning early warning mechanisms, can significantly enhance community preparedness and reduce disaster-related risks at the village level.



Figure 5: Dr Niranga Alahacoon introduced the AWARE functionality of the community

Outcomes of the Community Consultation

- Clear and actionable priority measures were identified for the WASH, Health, Education, Agriculture, and Livestock sectors across the three key stages of Anticipatory Action — Preparedness, Readiness, and Activation. These actions provide a structured framework to guide timely and coordinated community-level responses to flood forecasts.
- Comprehensive documentation was carried out to capture community experiences, indigenous knowledge, and locally driven best practices related to flood preparedness and response. These insights will serve as valuable inputs for enhancing broader Anticipatory Action planning and improving the effectiveness of future community-led interventions.
- The consultation process contributed to strengthening the awareness and operational capacity of Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMCs) and other local stakeholders, empowering them to actively participate in forecast-based planning and early action decision-making within their respective areas.

Annexures

Annexure 1: List of Participants

ID	Name	Affiliation
1	Sadeepa Keshara	Village Disaster Management Committee, Narangala
2	G N D Gunawardana	Divisional Secretariat Office, Thihagoda
3	N G N Dilrukshi	Village Disaster Management Committee, Wellathota
4	W Tharushi	Village Disaster Management Committee, Wellathota
5	Asha Muthukumari	Village Disaster Management Committee, Wellathota
6	Lakshitha Thennakoon	Village Disaster Management Committee, Uninduwela
7	R S Thisalaka	Village Disaster Management Committee, Uninduwela
8	B G Tharuka	Village Disaster Management Committee, Uninduwela
9	Anoma Nilmini	Village Disaster Management Committee, Thihagoda
10	M G Dilani Ishara	Kithaagama west
11	Krishanthi S	Chief Engineer, Kithalagama
12	Chathurika Nisansala	Kekunawela
13	N C A Disanayala	District Secretariat Matara
14	D Kavindi	Kakunawela
15	Rasika Udayanga	Divisional Secretariat Office Malomboda
16	S P C Nadeera	Divisional Secretariat Office Malimboda
17	L M G C Jayathilaka	Divisional Secretariat Office Thihagoda
18	W Nilushi	Economic Development Officer Uninduwela
19	Vishadi Harshani	Grama Niladhari Office Uninduwela
20	Mangala Kumara	Thihagoda Village Disaster Management Committee
21	Gayani Dinesha	Pahalavitiyala Village Disaster Management Committee
22	Madushani	Pahalawitiyala Village Disaster Management Committee
23	HD Dilrukshi	Pahalawitiyala Village Disaster Management Committee
24	L M Wickramathunga	Naimbala Village Disaster Management Committee
25	K M Sehara	Naimbama Village Disaster Management Committee
26	Sumudu Shanthi	Nadugala Village Disaster Management Committee
27	Samadhi Mekhala	Katuwangoda Village Disaster Management Committee
28	S Thauvan	Katuwangoda Village Disaster Management Committee
29	W A Dewmina	Katuwangoda Village Disaster Management Committee
30	H P N Hansi	Nadugala Village Disaster Management Committee
31	Kavindya Gyan	Naimbala Village Disaster Management Committee
32	Pubudu Lakkana	Thihagoda Village Disaster Management Committee
33	H P P Buddhi	Narangala Village Disaster Management Committee
34	M H Lal Chandarathna	National Disaster Relief Services Centre, Malimboda
35	M H Jayantha	Divisional Secretariat Office Thihagoda
36	MEnaka Krishanthi	Wellathota
37	U G N D Gunawardana	Divisional Secretariat Office Thihagoda
38	Gayana Chinthaka	Divisional Secretariat Office Thihagoda
39	Pandula Buddhi	Divisional Secretariat Office, thiahgoda
40	L Sandunika	Wellathota
41	Janith Lakmali	Wellathota
42	Amitha Witharana	Wellathota
43	G A Asha Muthukumari	Wellathota
44	Nisansala Dilrukshi	Wellathota
45	V Amarasdasa	Wellathota
46	J Vithanage	Kithalagama west
47	M S S Narsiya	Kithalagama west
48	W Vineetha	Palatuwa, welalthota
49	Ranjani H	Wellathota
50	S C Siriwardhana	Wellathota
51	H P Theekshana	Wellathota
52	BG Abeypala	Palatuwa
53	H Nandasiri	Wellathota



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