



Remote Household Food Security Survey Brief (m-VAM)

Sri Lanka

DECEMBER 2025



The background of the slide features a large, abstract graphic element in the upper left corner. It consists of several concentric, slightly curved blue lines that transition in shade from dark blue on the left to light blue on the right, creating a sense of depth and motion.

This brief was prepared by WFP in December 2025 to assess the impact of Cyclone Ditwah on household food security in affected communities. The analysis compares findings from the December 2024 Household Food Security Survey to understand changes over time. This is a longitudinal study, meaning it tracks the same indicators across different periods to measure trends and impacts.

Sri Lanka: IN NUMBERS

People are relying on coping
strategies to put food on the table

Households are consuming
inadequate diets

Food security is at concerning levels



59%

RESORTING TO COPING STRATEGIES
Food-based coping strategies



39%

of households reported poor and
borderline food consumption



32%

OF HOUSEHOLDS ARE FOOD INSECURE (rCARI)*



70% are relying on less preferred food



35% are borrowing food



33% are reducing portions



Households are consuming dairy,
fruit and protein **less than three
days a week**

Overview

Cyclone Ditwah made landfall in Sri Lanka on 28 November 2025, bringing several days of continuous rainfall, flash floods, landslides, and heavy winds.

With over 2.1 million people affected across the island and a rising death toll*, the cyclone rendered several areas inaccessible for days due to infrastructure damage, causing the most destruction in the central highlands of the Central Province and Kandy district.

WFP, together with other UN agencies and national disaster management authorities, conducted a [Joint Rapid Needs Assessment \(JRNA\)](#) of the impact within 72 hours of the cyclone. Phase II of the JRNA aims to include field-level data for an in-depth understanding of the impact and needs across key sectors. According to the JRNA, nearly 1.5 million people live in high-impact areas, which were already classified as medium to high levels of food insecurity, based on results from WFP's Household Food Security Survey conducted in late 2024.

WFP activated remote household food security surveys (mVAM) to supplement the Government's response and provide real-time analytics on the food security situation on the ground. The results of these surveys will inform the ongoing response and provide critical insights for interventions planned by the Government, WFP, and humanitarian partners.

Methodology

To design a representative sample for the rapid food security assessment in flood-affected areas, WFP adopted a stratified multi-stage sampling approach. First, districts were ranked by total number of flood-exposed households using the most recent disaster impact data. Districts above the 75th percentile (P75) of exposure were classified as High-Impact. Within each selected district, Divisional Secretariat Divisions (DSDs) were categorized into High, Medium, and Low exposure strata based on tertiles of flood-exposed households relative to the district distribution.

A total sample of 400 households were allocated proportionally across districts according to their exposure burden, with a minimum of two clusters per district to guarantee coverage. Within each district, clusters were distributed proportionally across strata and selected using Probability Proportional to Size (PPS), where DSDs with higher exposure had greater selection probability. Each cluster comprised 10 households, ensuring operational feasibility and statistical representativeness.

This design balances precision in highly impacted areas with inclusivity across exposure levels, enabling robust comparative analysis of food security outcomes.

Additionally, the same group of households were extracted (longitudinal dataset) from the food security survey sample conducted in late 2024, allowing WFP to track changes and understand evolving patterns in food security.

In Brief

Cyclone Ditwah has deepened the risk of food insecurity. Findings show that 32 percent¹ of households are food insecure. In December 2024, food insecurity levels were at 16 percent. The food security situation, at the time, witnessed a significant improvement, due to enhanced household economic capacity in 2024 compared to 2023, leading to an increased ability to spend on food.

Consumption of adequate diets remains low. Thirty nine percent of households are now facing inadequate food consumption, with many consuming less diverse and nutritious diets.

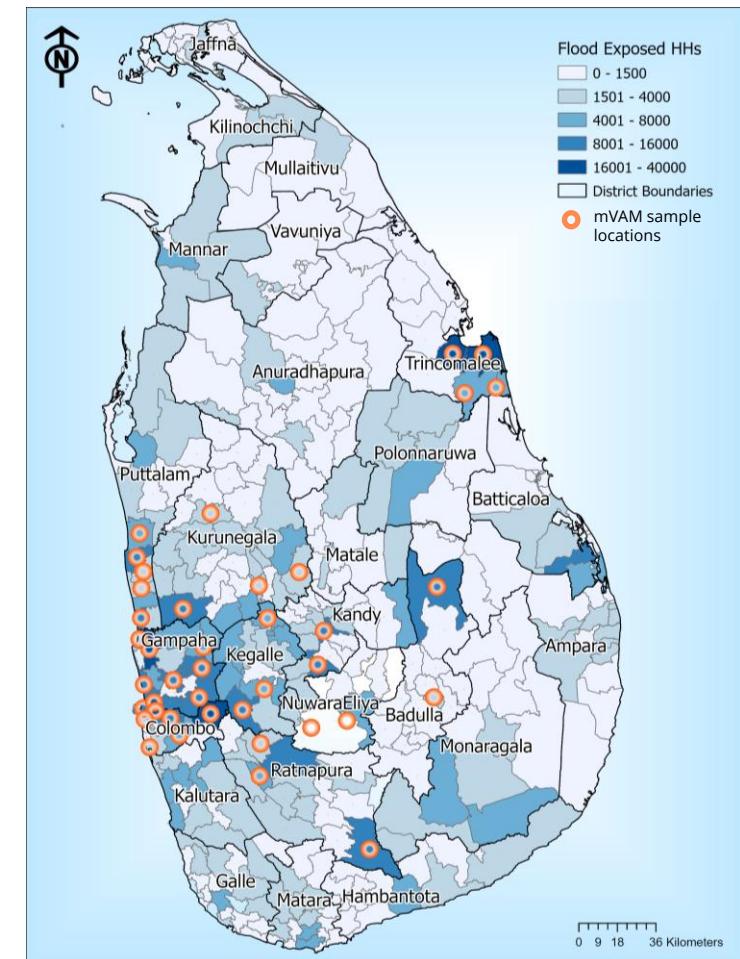
Market access remains a primary concern in several affected areas. Twenty five percent of households reported market access challenges.

Households are applying coping strategies to keep food on the table. Nearly six in ten households reported turning to at least one food-based coping strategy.

Nearly half the assessed households are adopting livelihood-based coping strategies. Compared to the previous survey in December 2024, the percentage of households adopting emergency coping strategies has seen an uptick.

The upcoming Maha cultivation season will likely be affected. Cyclone Ditwah has destroyed several early-stage Maha season crops through heavy rains, landslides and floods. The Maha season crops were at a stage of high vulnerability when the cyclone struck, threatening production and future harvests.

LANSLIDE AND FLOOD-AFFECTED AREAS

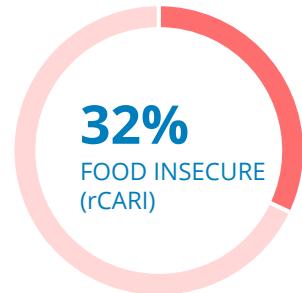


¹ The comparability of the mVAM food security estimates is limited, as the methodology does not fully align with the CARI approach applied in 2024.

Findings



Food insecurity is a growing concern

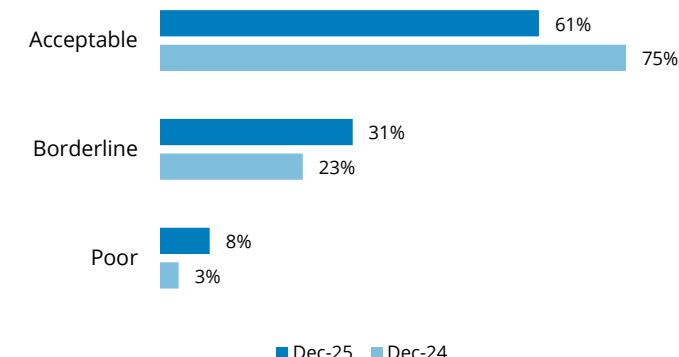


According to WFP's latest remote household food security survey, 32 percent of households are food insecure, following the impact of Cyclone Ditwah. The lower levels of food security are a result of livelihood disruption, widespread displacement, and market access constraints.



Nearly four in ten households are facing insufficient food consumption. Compared to December 2024, the number of households consuming inadequate diets has increased by 13 percentage points, indicating households have lower dietary diversity and frequency. Additionally, the proportion of households with poor food consumption has risen to nearly eight percent, compared to the previous three percent

FOOD CONSUMPTION COMPARISON

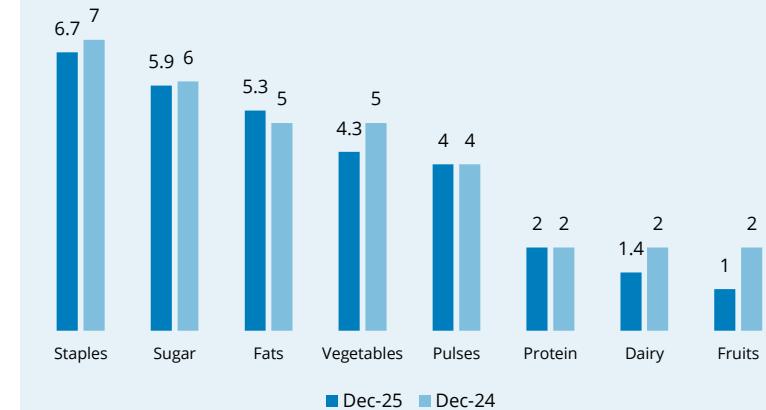


Animal protein, dairy, and fruit are consumed less than three days a week by the average household. Fruit is consumed just once a week. Compared to December 2024, the consumption of food groups has seen a marginal decrease. However, further monitoring is important to understand the patterns of consumption post-disaster, once recovery efforts begin and people return to their homes and resume normal lives.

Consumption of vegetables dropped to just over four days a week, while consumption of staple foods such as rice and flour remained nearly the same.

FOOD CONSUMPTION GROUP

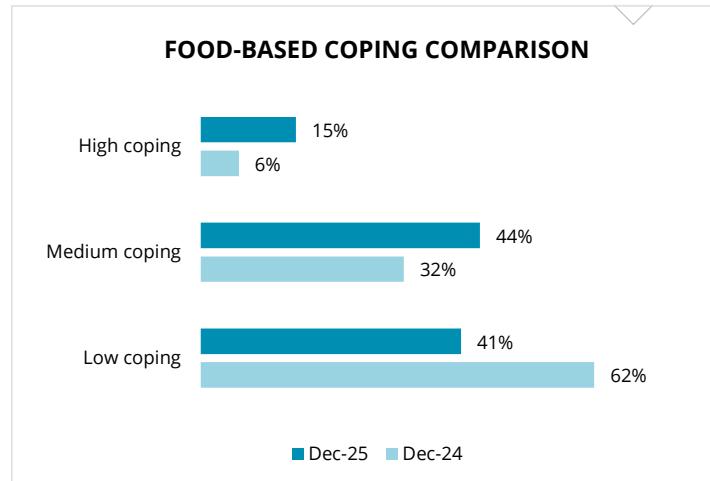
Number of days the average household consumes the following food items (every seven days)



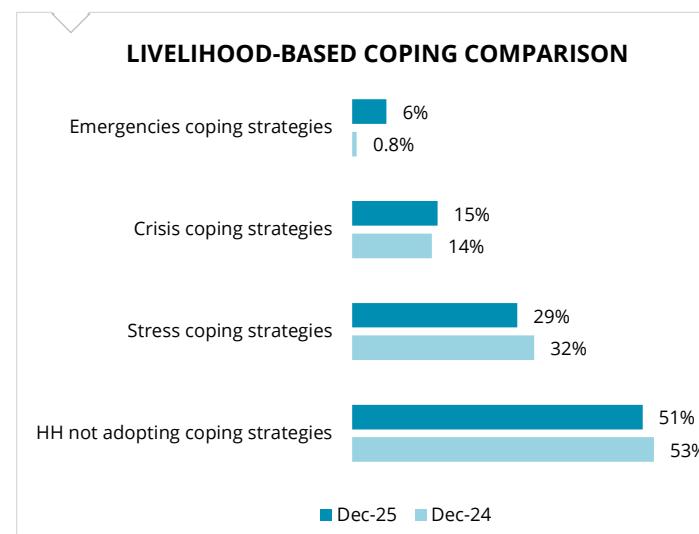


Over half of the assessed households are adopting coping strategies

Reliance on food-based coping strategies was reported by 59 percent of households, an alarming increase from the 38 percent observed in December 2024. Use of high coping is observed in nearly 15 percent of households, compared to just 6 percent from the previous assessment. Similarly, the percentage of households turning to medium coping has also increased.



Nearly half the households (49 percent) are adopting livelihood-based coping strategies. This indicates a slight increase from last year, when 47 percent of households adopting these strategies. However, a notable increase was observed in the use of emergency coping strategies, reflecting an increased use of negative coping during and after the cyclone.



A rise in the use of emergency and crisis negative coping strategies indicates depleting dietary diversity and compromising human capital, which heightens vulnerabilities to future shocks and disasters.

STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY HOUSEHOLDS

- ⚠️ 70% rely on less preferred/nutritious food
- 🔗 35% borrowed food
- ⬇️ 33% reduced portion sizes of their meals
- ☁️ 29% reduced the number of meals eaten in a day
- 👤 16% of adults restricted adult consumption to allow children to eat
- ⌚ 32% purchased food on credit
- ⌚ 31% spent savings and/or skipped debt payments
- 👉 26% borrowed money from a bank/lender (or pawned goods)
- 💰 20% sold gold jewellery because of a lack of money/food
- 👛 17% had to reduce spending on education and health

Households are adopting more than one negative coping strategy

**MARKET ACCESS**

25% report market access challenges

Twenty five percent of households reported the inability to access food items that are usually part of their diet. Households indicated limited access to markets, of which the largest proportion (21 percent) expressed road inaccessibility or lack of transport. Just over three percent of households indicated market closures during the time of the disaster.

**INCOME CHANGE**

55% of households reported reduced income

Nearly half of the assessed households (49 percent) reported a small reduction in income, while six percent reported a large decrease (over 50 percent). The largest proportion (24 percent) are monthly wage earners (public or private), followed by 15 percent relying on unskilled wage labour (non-agriculture) for income.

MAIN CONCERN REPORTED:

Households reported the following four as present/immediate concerns:



62% - Increase in food prices



42% - Extreme weather events (floods/landslides)



42% - Shortages and increased prices of medicine



29% - Loss of livelihood

IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLDS:

The direct impact on the surveyed households:



Nearly seven out of ten households reported loss of livelihood



20% reported partial damage to homes and loss of household items



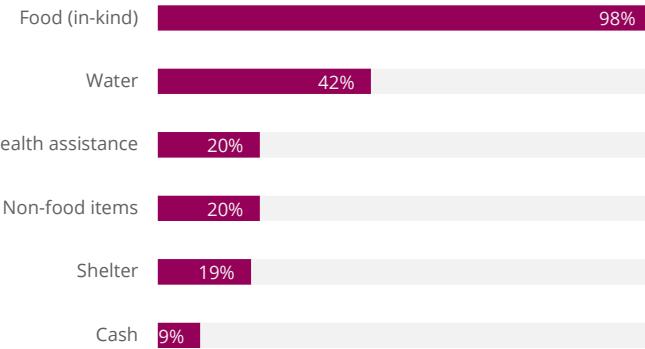
15% mentioned loss of food stocks



Two in ten of the surveyed households were displaced and had to seek shelter in safety centres. Most respondents stayed in safety centres for a duration of two to six days.

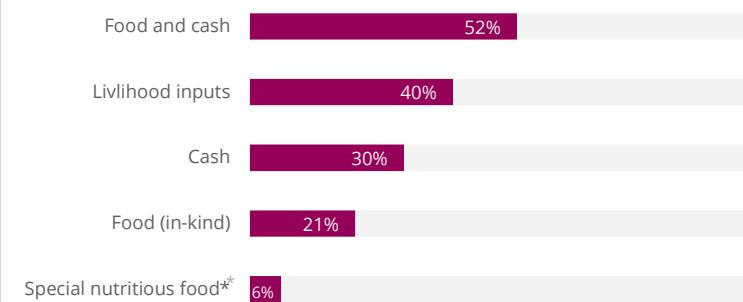
Assistance preference

TYPE OF ASSISTANCE RECEIVED



Food was the largest proportion of assistance received in the aftermath of the disaster, followed by water. Twenty percent received health assistance (such as medicine) and non-food items, while only nine percent indicated cash assistance.

TYPE OF ASSISTANCE PREFERRED



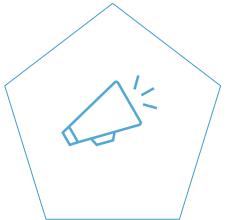
Nutritious food for specific household members (e.g. pregnant, infant, elderly, disability, chronic illness)

Among the surveyed households, nearly half prefer a combination of cash and food assistance. Livelihood inputs (such as fertilizer and seeds) came in second with 40 percent, followed by 30 percent of households leaning toward cash assistance.



Annex: Resources

Additional WFP Sri Lanka products for more insight:



SITUATION REPORTS

A regular update on the situation and WFP's response to the crisis.



HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY SURVEYS

Household surveys providing regular insight into household food security.



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