

Evidence-gathering on community perceptions, priority needs and preferences in Sri Lanka

With the support of the Foreign Commonwealth &
Development Office (FCDO)

December 2022 – May 2023

REACH Informing
more effective
humanitarian action



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

Overview of the assessment



Target groups: Local actors, population groups affected by the crisis



Objective: To understand the perceptions of affected populations and local actors in Sri Lanka on their needs, priorities and preferences in order to support a better alignment of humanitarian, resilience and recovery strategic planning and programming



Geographical scope: Batticaloa, Colombo, Kilinochchi, Nuwara Eliya and districts



Timeline: December 2022 – May 2023



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01

Methodology

Methodology

01

Research Design

- Preselection of four Districts based on these criteria...
 1. Severity of humanitarian needs
 2. Presence of a humanitarian response ;
 3. Presence of at-risk populations.
- ... and through the following approaches:
 1. Key informant interviews with humanitarian actors
 2. Secondary data review (SDR)

02

Data collection

- In four case study areas, interviews with persons or groups more heavily affected by the ongoing economic crisis identified through key informants interviews conducted in the inception phase and an SDR.
- Household surveys

03

Data analysis and outputs

- Production of four Data Saturation Analysis Grids (one per District)
- Generation of a results table based on the findings of the household surveys.
- Presentation and factsheet.

Methodology



Quantitative

Household surveys:

- Target population: 496 surveyed households (124 per District)
- Sampling: Households randomly selected using GPS mapping
- Data collection: Conducted through KoboToolbox



Qualitative

Key Informant Interviews:

- Target population: 45 KIIs in each district;
 - ❖ Local actors: 10
 - ❖ Affected populations: 35
- Sampling: purposive and snowballing
- Data collection: face-to-face semi-structured interviews

Main research questions

How do affected people and local actors perceive the ongoing crisis and its impact on households?

What are affected people and local actors' preferences and priorities when it comes to the type and modality of assistance?

How do people affected by the crisis perceive the ongoing response by humanitarian actors and what recommendations do they have for improvements?

- What are the **most pressing needs** facing Sri Lankan households?
- Which categories of **households and geographical areas** have been the most impacted by the economic crisis?
- How is this community responding to these needs?

- What do people affected by the crisis consider that humanitarian actors should **prioritize in terms of programming**?
- What do people affected by the crisis prefer in terms of **assistance modality** and for what reasons?

- How do affected people and local actors perceive the **relevance** of programming as well as **targeting approaches**?
- How do affected people and local actors perceive their **ability to engage with response actors**?



02

Strengths and limitations



Limitations

- First REACH project in Sri Lanka: longer **inception phase and training** of the staff / data collection team.
- **Difficulties in collecting data and gathering feedback on specific topics** due to cultural aspects (not legitimate to criticize aid providers, etc.) or unawareness of these mechanisms:
 - Community consultations.
 - Complaints and feedback mechanisms.
- Possible data loss or **small confusions due to translations** from Tamil/Sinhalese to English.

Strengths

- Mixed method approach with a high qualitative focus: **complementarity and triangulation of the data** collected through the SDR, household surveys and key informants' interviews.
- Highly **localized data** collected and evidenced through the analysis outputs (Data Analysis Saturation Grids and Results table).
- **Variety of population groups** interviewed at a local level and qualitative analysis highlighted their **specific challenges and perceptions.**



03



Key findings





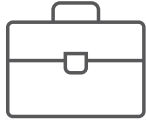
Key findings

- A** Humanitarian needs, effects of the crisis and coping mechanisms
- B** Humanitarian assistance and access to information
- C** Community inclusion and participation



A. Humanitarian needs, effects of the crisis and coping mechanisms

Priority needs



Livelihood

- Access to livelihoods was the most priority need reported in Batticaloa and Kilinochchi. In Nuwara Eliya and Colombo, the most reported need is food.
- Access to livelihoods mainly affected by:
 - Less agricultural production and employment opportunities.
 - Expensive running costs and materials (fuel, construction materials, livestock feed, agricultural inputs, etc.).



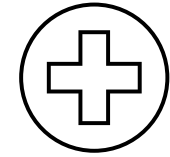
Food

- Most reported need in Colombo (65%) and Nuwara Eliya (84%).
- Food security, access to livelihoods and other humanitarian needs are reportedly strongly interlinked.
- More prevalent in urban areas where it is not possible to grow their own garden plots as reported by some KIs.



Agriculture

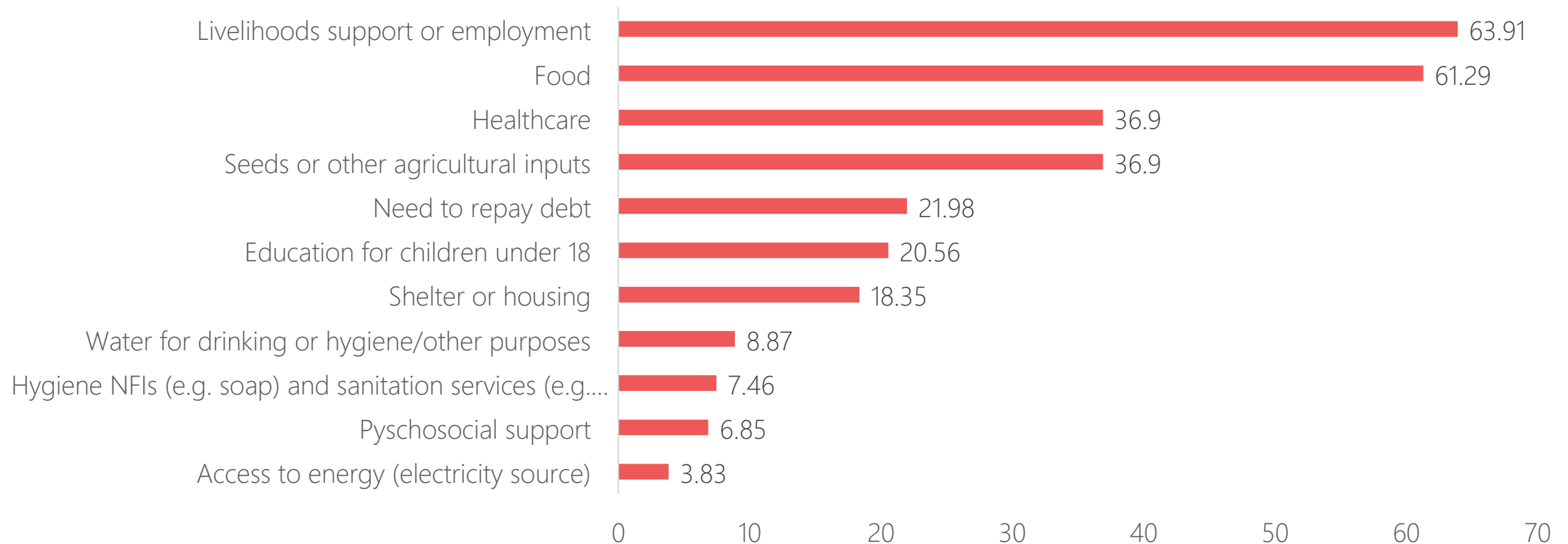
- This was reported by almost half of the respondents in all Districts, except Colombo and is caused by:
 - Shortages of fertilizers and pesticides.
 - High costs of seeds, livestock feed and other inputs.
 - Lack of fuel.
 - Droughts, floods and water scarcity.
 - Crop losses because of elephants (Batticaloa) or monkeys (Nuwara Eliya)



Healthcare

- Highly reported in Colombo (53%) and Batticaloa (47%).
- KIs mostly referred to:
 - High costs and shortages of medicine.
 - Difficulties in access to health services in remote areas.
- 25% of households reported a lower income because of an illness of a family member.

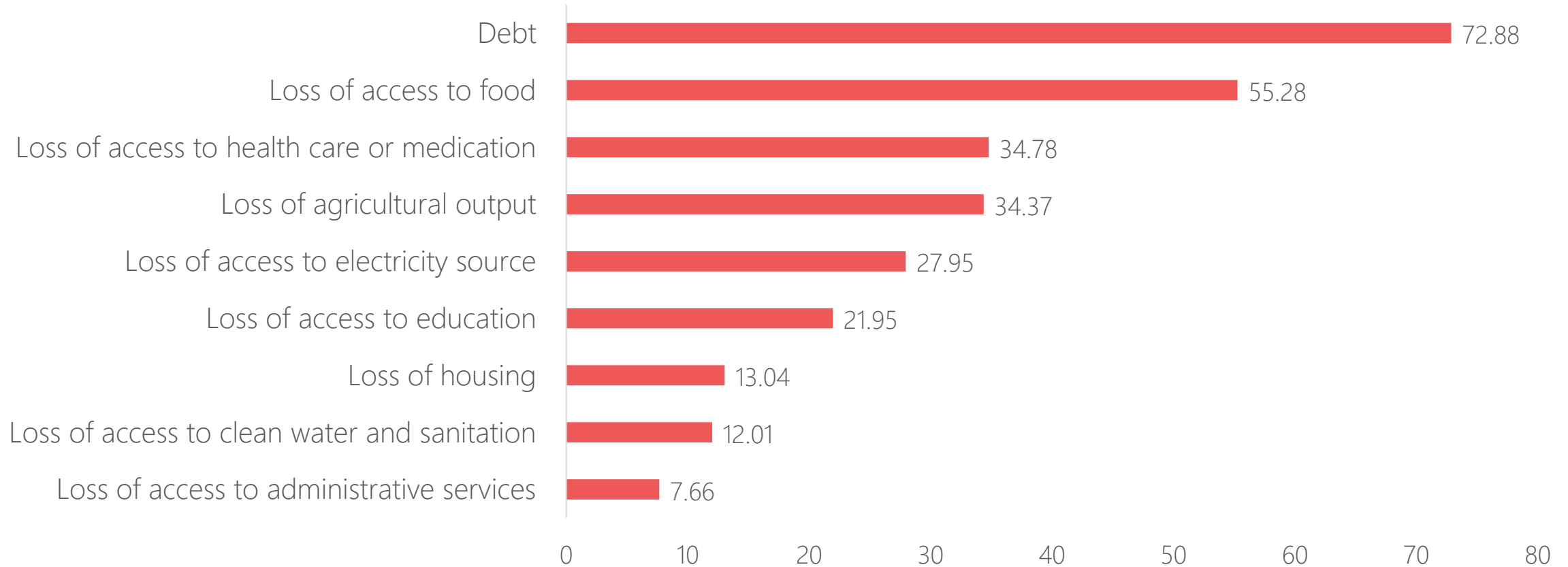
Priority needs



Access to **shelter** was mainly reported in **Colombo (27%)**. Populations living in informal settlements were highlighted by some KIs as the most vulnerable. These areas commonly called "Wattu areas" or "shanties" have irregular access to basic services such as water or electricity and most residents are daily wage earners.

Most reported priority needs of surveyed households in all assessed Districts

Effects of the crisis

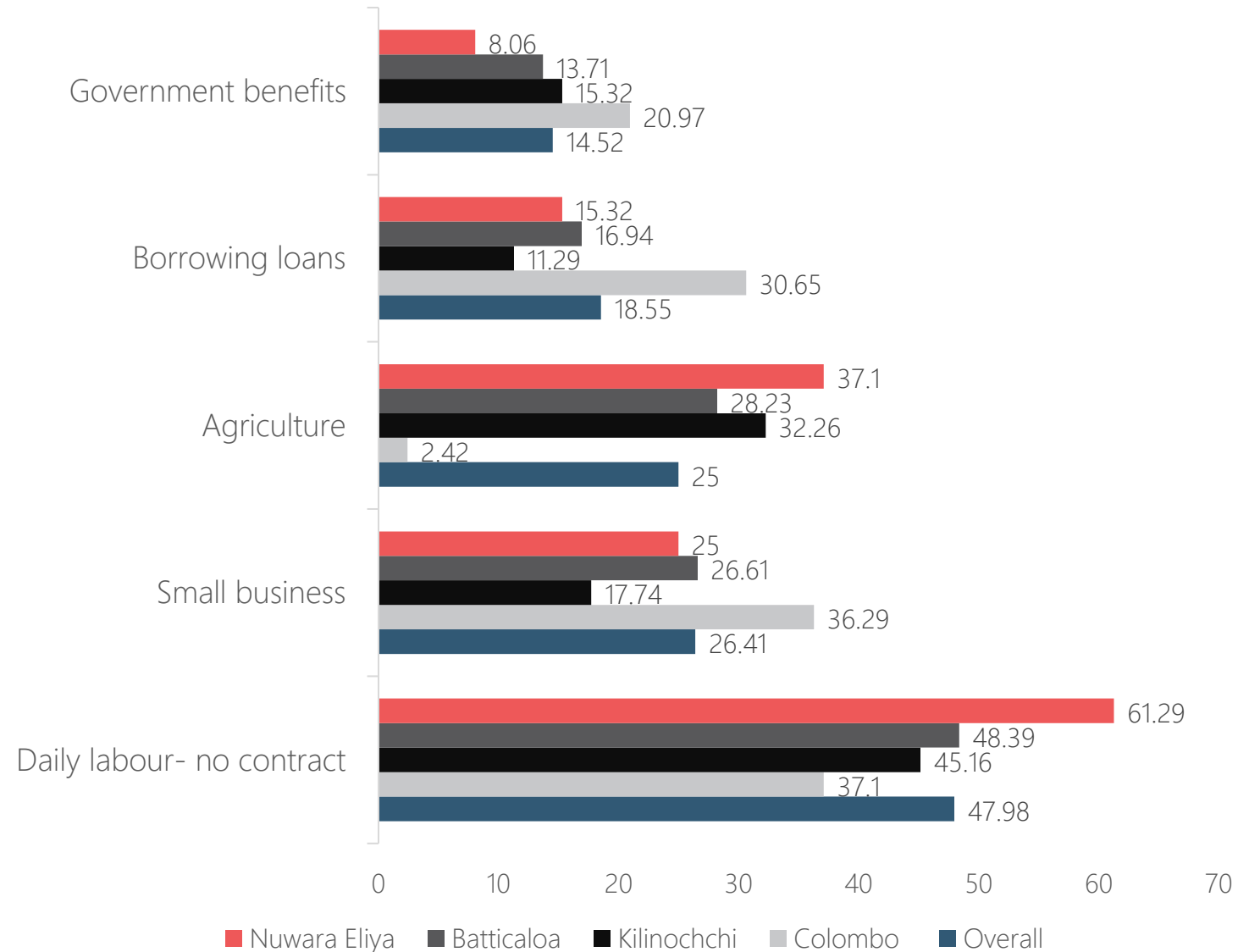


% of surveyed households reporting negative effects following an economic shock faced in the last six months in all Districts

Effects of the crisis

Sources of income

- Almost half of the surveyed households rely on daily labour as their main source of income which highly exposes them to economic vulnerabilities and a lack of access to a stable income.
- 89% of the surveyed households reported that their income became lower in the last 6 months.
- The main reasons in the decrease of the income are:
 - Reduced employment opportunities (74%)
 - Lack of fuel to perform work tasks (47%)
 - Loss of employment (45%)

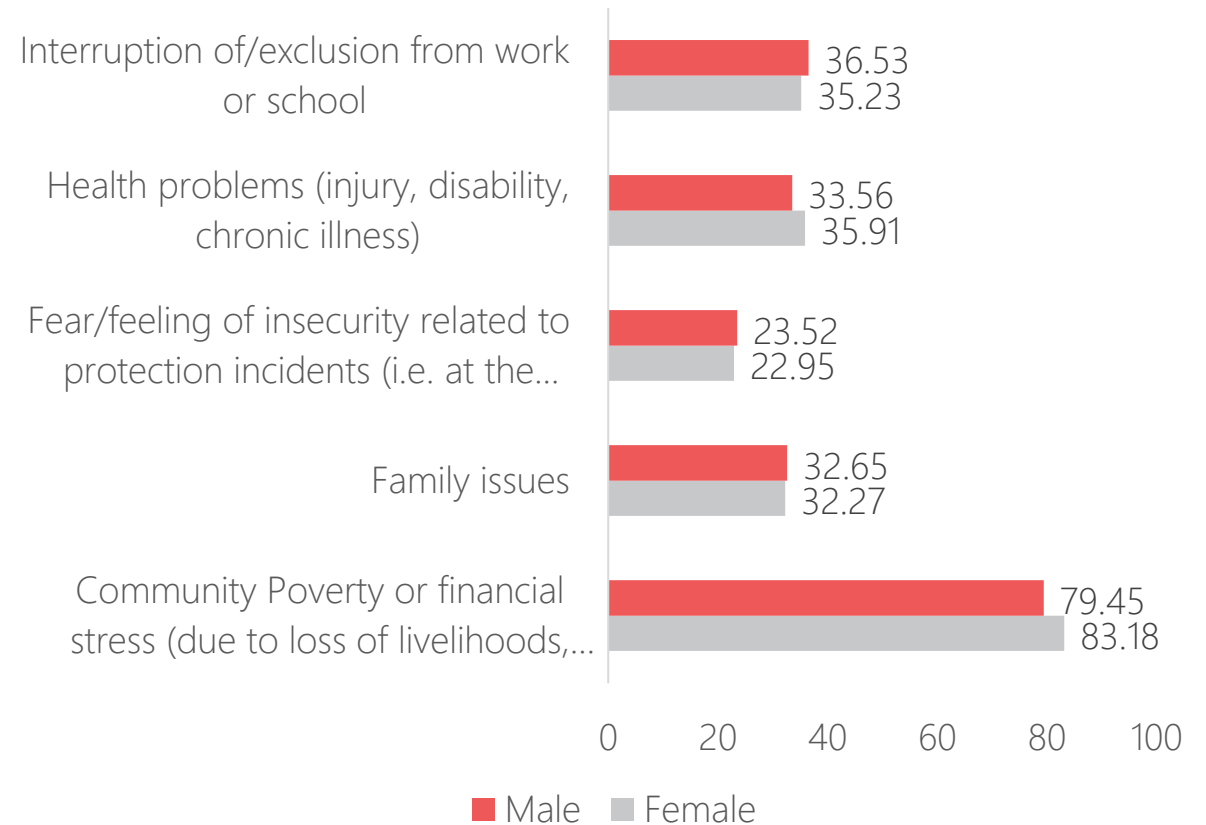


Sources of income in the last six months reported by the surveyed households

Effects of the crisis

Effects on mental health

- Most households reported that a member of their household developed a **change in behavior in the past six months**.
- The two main reported changes in behavior are:
 - Excessive sad mood or crying (53% for female household members and 58% for male)
 - An excessive worry (46% for female and 42% for male)
 - No hope for the future. (35% for male and 36% for female)
- The main reported cause for the change in behavior is **community poverty or financial stress due to loss of livelihoods, debt**, etc. (79% for male household members, 83% for female household members that experienced a change in behavior)



Main causes of the change in behavior reported in the last six months by the surveyed households in all Districts

Most affected population groups

Daily wage earners	Small traders	Agricultural/ livestock sector / Estates workers	Fishing communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily wage earners and small traders working in the following sectors were reportedly affected: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation sector; • Tourism sector and handicrafts; • Textile industry; • Construction sector. • Reduction of income generating opportunities due COVID-19 were exacerbated by the high food inflation. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty to adapt to the lack of chemical fertilizers. • Difficult and precarious work conditions of Estates workers in Nuwara Eliya. • Increase in the expenses on running costs (fuel, food storage expenses, etc.) • Water scarcity and irrigation issues (especially in Kilinochchi and to a lesser extent Nuwara Eliya) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to use boats because of fuel shortages and high cost. • Overfishing (Batticaloa) and smuggling of sea cucumbers (Kilinochchi). • Long lasting effects of the X Pearl shipwreck* (Colombo).

People with existing vulnerabilities such as **people with disabilities, female headed households (widows) and war affected families or older persons** were also highlighted as one the populations groups exposed to effects of the economic crisis.

*The X Pearl shipwreck refers to a Singaporean container ship. It entered in service in February 2021. On 20 May 2021, **X-Press Pearl caught fire off the coast of Colombo, Sri Lanka**. The incident was deemed **the worst marine ecological disaster in Sri Lankan history due to the leakages of chemical products**.

Coping mechanisms to access income

- Resorting to **loans** provided by informal brokers / money lenders (Gini poliya), microfinance structures, banks or the Department of Agrarian Development.
- **Selling personal items** (reportedly mostly jewelry), lands or livestock.
- Multiplying livelihood activities, **longer working hours**, accepting arduous jobs, develop **small businesses** as street vendors, three wheelers driver, food stalls, etc.
- Seeking **new learning opportunities** to develop professional or soft skills (especially among youth or tourism workers).
- Labor **migration** and **internal migration**, particularly in Nuwara Eliya.
- Remittances from the **diaspora**.

Coping mechanisms to access food

- **Home gardening**, especially in rural areas. Some KIs reported receiving support from INGOs to grow their own garden plots.
- Seeking **assistance**.
- **Bartering** and solidarity dynamics in the community.
- Use of alternative **sources of energy or fire**.

Coping mechanisms to reduce daily expenses

- Limit **food consumption** or avoid expensive items (meat, milk powder, fish, eggs, etc.)
- Limit non-essential expenses (social activities, reduction of movements, etc.)
- Stop **medication or medical treatment**.
- Use of alternative **means of transportation** due to lack of fuel.
- Limit **electricity** consumption.

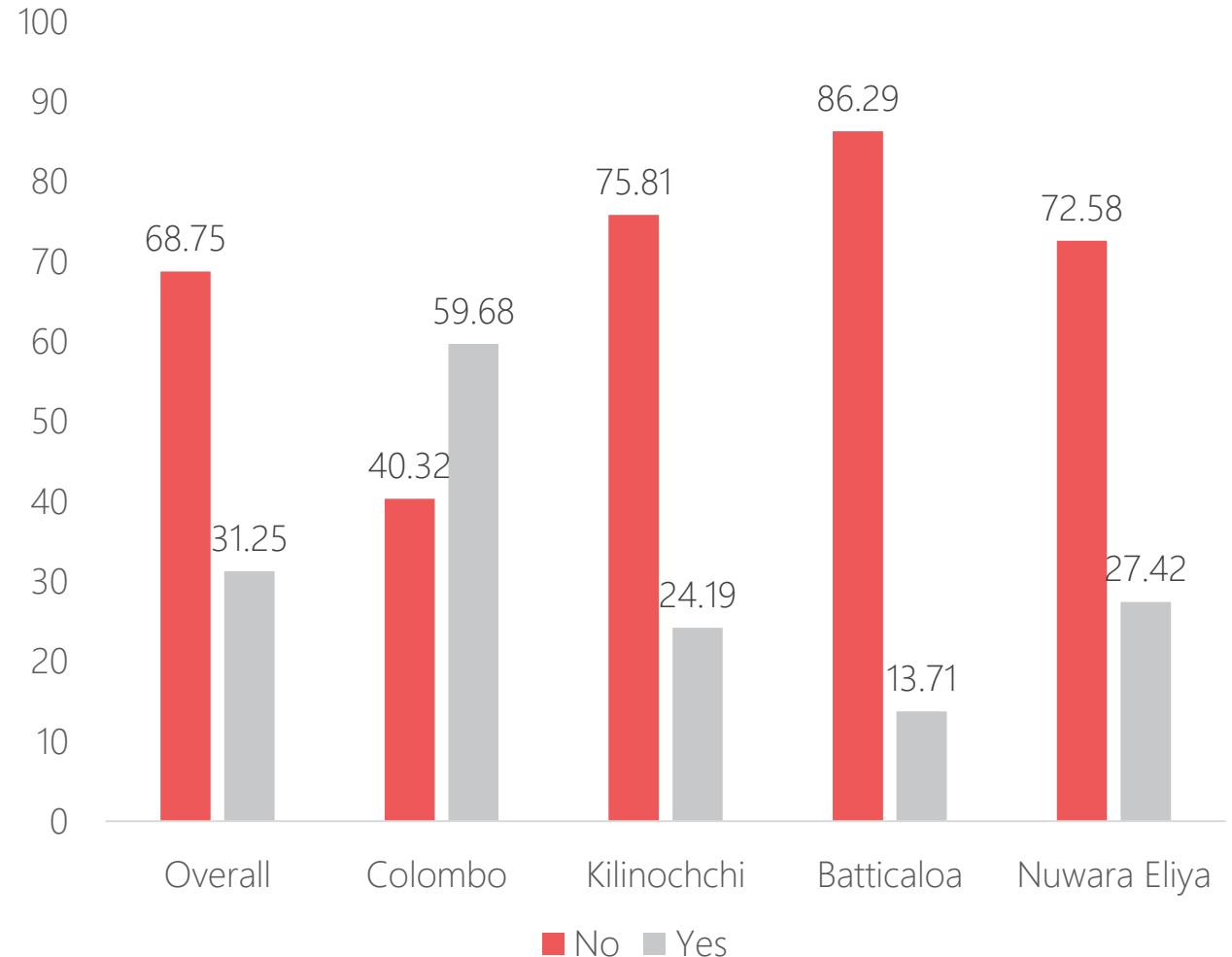


B. Access to humanitarian assistance programmes and information

Humanitarian assistance

Access to assistance programmes

- Access to assistance programmes was reportedly **higher in Colombo** with 60% of the surveyed households declaring that they received assistance in the past 30 days.
- According to the KIs in Colombo, assistance was reportedly mostly provided by public institutions through the **Samurdhi program** or through community-based organisations.
- Almost **1/3 of the respondents in Kilinochchi and Nuwara Eliya** received assistance and only **14% in Batticaloa**.



% of the surveyed households declaring having received assistance in the past 30 days

Humanitarian assistance

The most reported **types of assistance received** according to the surveyed households that declared having received assistance and **most reported preferred assistance modalities**.

71%

Percentage of households that reported receiving in-kind food assistance in the past 30 days

25%

Percentage of households mentioning that their preferred assistance modality would be in-kind (food)

23%

Percentage of households mentioning that their preferred assistance modality would be Physical cash

54%

Percentage of households that reported receiving Physical cash assistance in the past 30 days

Humanitarian assistance

Cash assistance

Public assistance programmes:

- Monthly allowances through Samurdhi: 5000 Rs/ month.
- Allowances to older persons, to people with disabilities or to widows.
- X Pearl Shipwreck cash assistance.

Cash assistance provided by Community Based Organisations (CBOs) or religious actors such as:

- Fishermen association (Batticaloa)
- Dharmarama Buddhist temple (Colombo)
- The Sanasa Development Organization and Sarvodaya (5000 LKR) in Nuwara Eliya.

Cash assistance provided by INGOs or IOs such as:

- Save The Children (18,750 Rs) in Colombo.
- Asian Development Bank.
- ACTED (75000 Rs) in Kilinochchi.
- SLRC through food vouchers (18000 Rs) in Kilinochchi to be used at Cargills Food City and allowances of 5000 Rs in Batticaloa.

Humanitarian assistance

In-kind assistance

A wide variety of actors providing food:

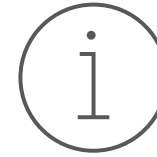
- Dry food rations provided by **religious actors** (Temples, Mosques, Churches)
- **Public actors** such as the Sri Lankan Army, the Indian Subsidy Programme (etc.)
- **Private actors**: Colombo Cinnamon hotel, Shakti television network, Dialog, Lanka Orix Leasing Company...
- **Political parties**.
- **CBOs**: Savordya, RCCI foundation, Damro Institute, fishermen association, farmers association...
- **INGOs and IOs**: SLRC, UN World Food Programme (Batticaloa), Save The Children, World Vision.
- **WASH services** in Nuwara Eliya consisting of water distributions, building latrines and the provision of hygiene items (ADRA).

Humanitarian assistance

Support to livelihoods

- In **Colombo**, four local actor KIs mentioned that **livelihood support** is provided.
- Private actors such as Dialog are involved:
 - Govi Mithuru program launched in 2015: Advice to farmers regarding **land preparation, cultivation, crop protection and harvest**.
- In **Kilinochchi**:
 - **Distribution of fishing materials** by World Vision
 - **Agricultural inputs** (Save The Children)
 - **Money for work** paid 37000 Rs (Save The Children)
- **Batticaloa**:
 - Fishing materials (nets, boats...) provided by the Kavya Women's Organization.
 - Agricultural equipment and inputs.
 - Agricultural inputs at **subsidized prices**.
 - **Low interest rate loans** by the Department of Agrarian Development.
- **Nuwara Eliya**:
 - Agricultural inputs and equipment by World Vision.

Humanitarian assistance



Dissemination of information

Dissemination modalities

- Information is reportedly mostly shared through local authorities at a local level:
 - Grama Niladari
 - Samurdhi officer
 - Agricultural officer
 - Development officer
 - Community police
- Community based organisations and community committees.
- Religious actors.
- The most reported channels are in-person, through phone, loudspeakers or social media.

Improvement suggestions

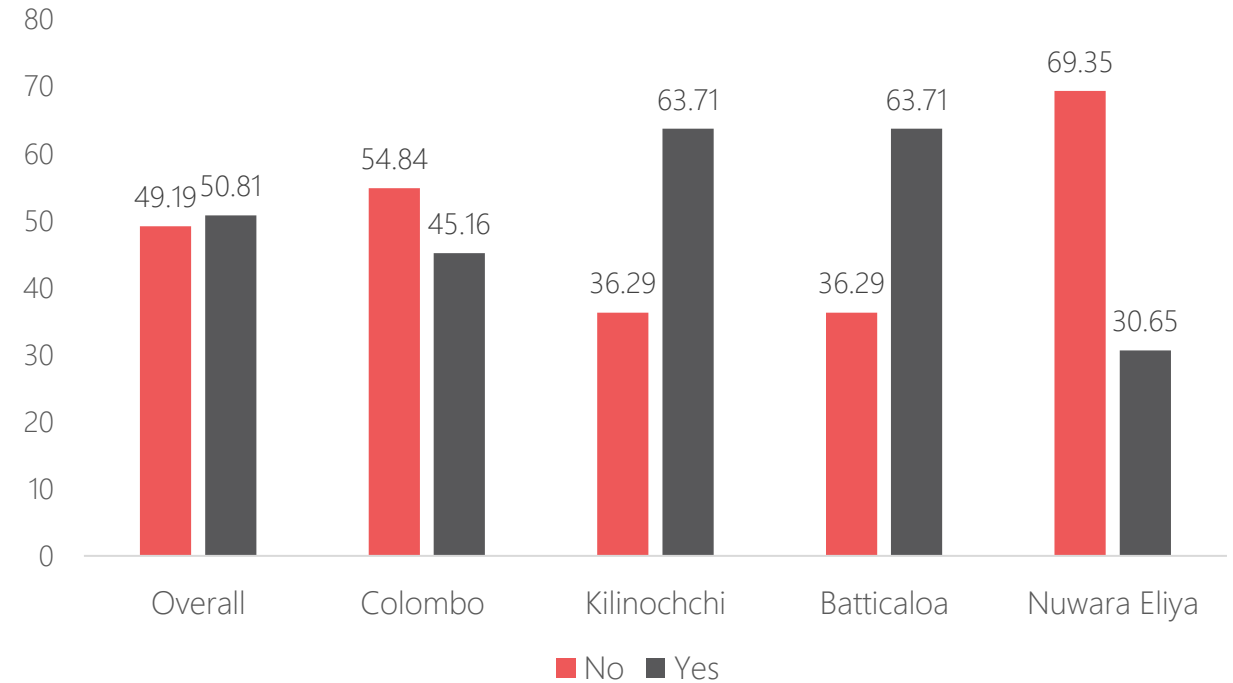
- Adopt communication means that reach a large proportion of the population (loudspeakers, three wheelers, leaflets, public boards...)
- Facilitate access to older persons and people with disabilities.
- Prioritise in person modalities: household visits, community meetings, etc.
- Work closely with local actors (CBOs, Community committees, community relays, etc.)

Humanitarian assistance

Impact of the assistance provided

Difficulties in reaching the most in need

- In Nuwara Eliya, **69% of the surveyed households indicated that humanitarian assistance doesn't go to the most in need**. This was also reported by more than half of the respondents in Colombo.
- In Colombo, the obstacles to allow assistance to reach the most in need are reportedly related to **non-transparent and unfair selection** and aid distribution processes.
- Some KIs reported that **Samurdhi beneficiaries are privileged** and have an easier access to information regarding assistance.
- Even though **estates workers** are among the most vulnerable they are reportedly not eligible to Samurdhi assistance (Nuwara Eliya).



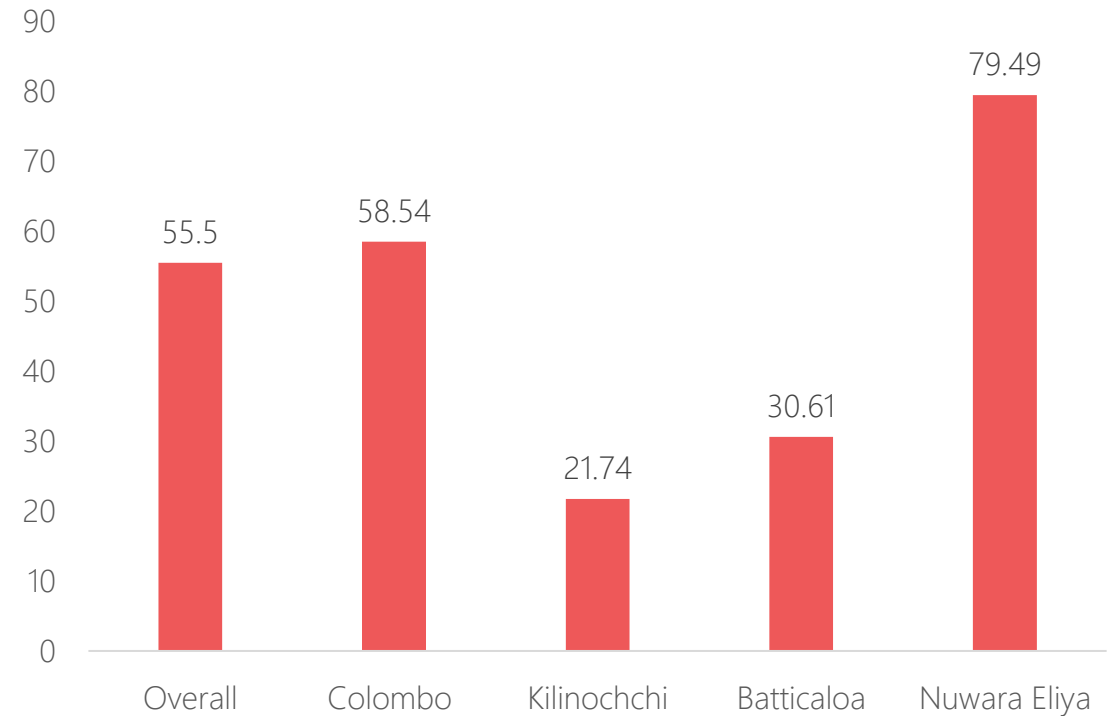
% of the surveyed households indicating if humanitarian assistance goes to the most in need

Humanitarian assistance

Barriers and limitations

Beneficiary selection issues

- 56% of the surveyed households are not satisfied with aid providers because they **privilege certain population groups** when providing assistance.
- Nepotism and **unfair selection processes** of beneficiaries.
- **Centralisation of information** regarding aid generating unfair assistance modalities.
- Political interference.
- Provision of assistance subject to **communitarian considerations**.
- **Lack of documentation** preventing from registering to assistance programs.
- **Drug users left out** from assistance programmes.



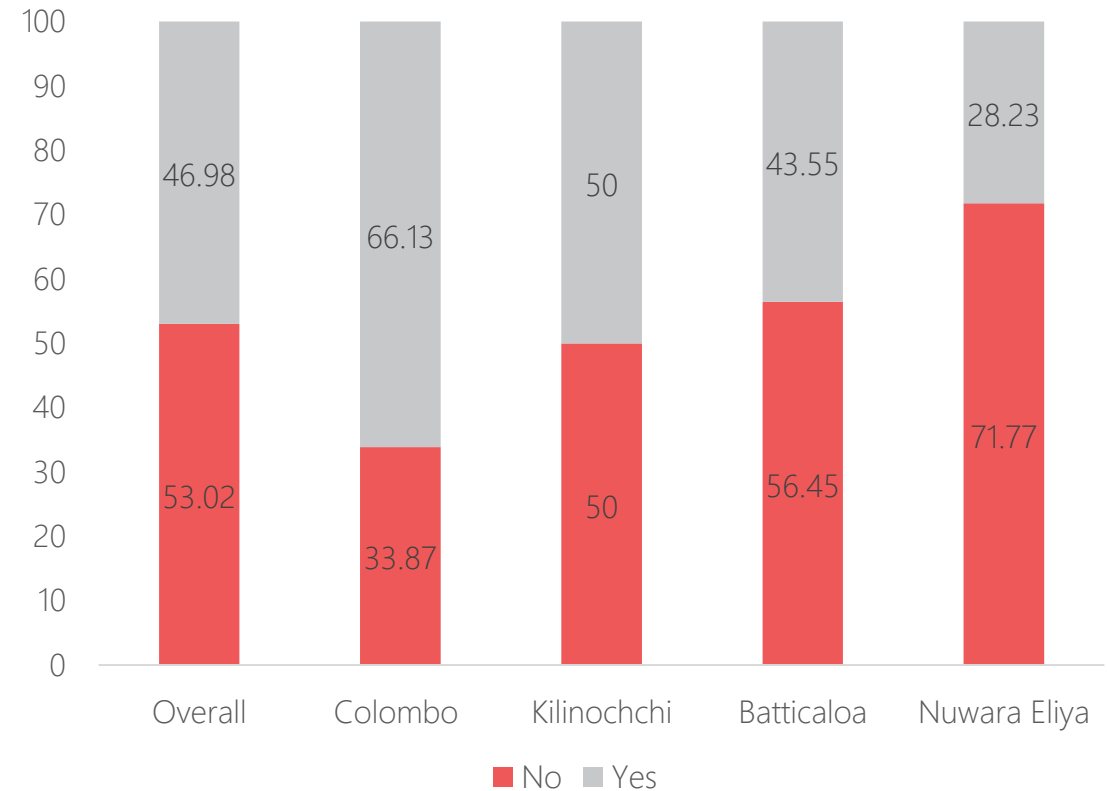
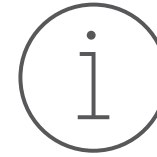
% of the surveyed households indicating not being satisfied with aid providers because "they privilege certain population groups when providing assistance."

Humanitarian assistance

Barriers and limitations

Lack of access to information regarding assistance programmes

- Most KIs reported that there are **challenges in terms of access to information**. 53% of the surveyed households think that aid doesn't go to the most in need.
- Favoritism when providing information regarding assistance: **political, communitarian and religious differentiations** affect the impartial and efficient dissemination of information regarding assistance.
- Persons with disabilities, those who lack **a literacy education, people living in remote areas and older persons** have difficulties to seek and hear about assistance programmes.
- Some KIs underlined the **lack of understanding the local context** and needs of vulnerable populations: no evidence-based interventions.
- Some people prefer not sharing this type of information at a community level due to the **fear of running out of supplies and assistance**.
- Languages issues and **communication with minorities**.



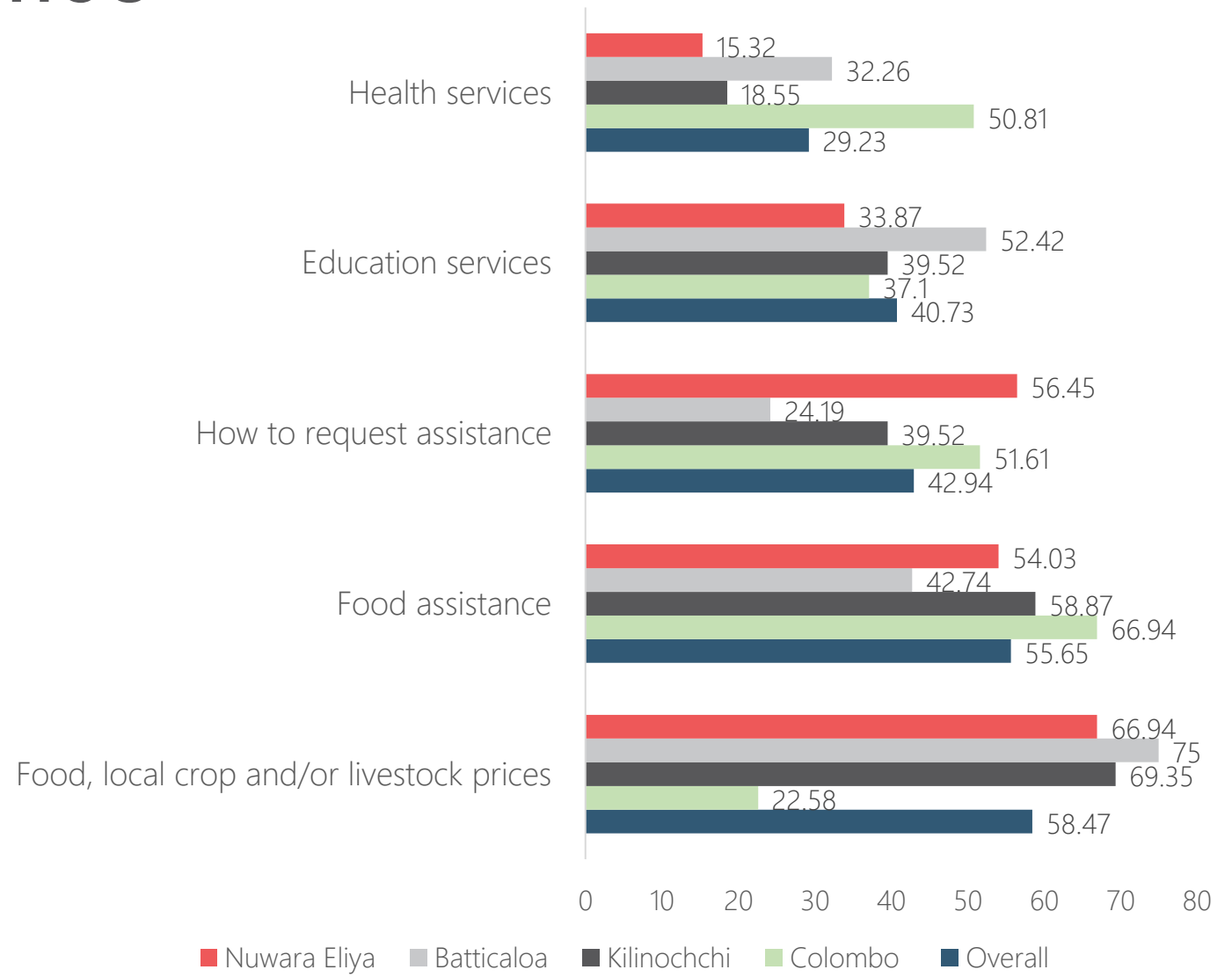
% of the surveyed households indicating if they know how to access humanitarian assistance (e.g. where to go and who to contact?) if you were to need it?

Humanitarian assistance

Preferences of affected populations

Information sought

- Most reported type of information sought in Kilinochchi, Nuwara Eliya and Batticaloa are related to **Food, local crop and livestock prices**.
- According to the surveyed households in Colombo, 19% also reported preferring receiving information on **shelter services**.
- In Kilinochchi, 15% reported preferring receiving **information on WASH services (drinking water, soap, hygiene, etc.)**



Most reported types of information by the surveyed households

Humanitarian assistance

Preferences of affected populations

Preferences in terms of humanitarian assistance: Priority to long term solutions

- Most KIs across all Districts reported that humanitarian actors should prioritise long term effects interventions, namely:

Suggestions to support livelihoods		
More livelihood means	Skills development	Structural change or interventions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distribution of materials (e.g. sewing machines, fishing nets, boats, agricultural materials, etc.)• Improve food storage infrastructures.• Distribution of agricultural inputs.• Provide fuel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve access to vocational training.• Facilitate professional mobility.• Crop diversification trainings.• Facilitate access to public / affordable good quality higher education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve access to water, irrigation systems.• Enhance technology transfer in agriculture• Promote new tourism sites and Sri Lankan cultural heritage (not only beaches) through innovative marketing campaigns• Prevent overfishing

Humanitarian assistance

Preferences: the persistence of basic humanitarian needs

- The need for short term, **tangible and concrete solutions** was also emphasized.
- Almost all surveyed households reported directly experiencing an **economic shock in the last six months**.
- KIs reported that short term solutions should mainly address the following needs:

Food



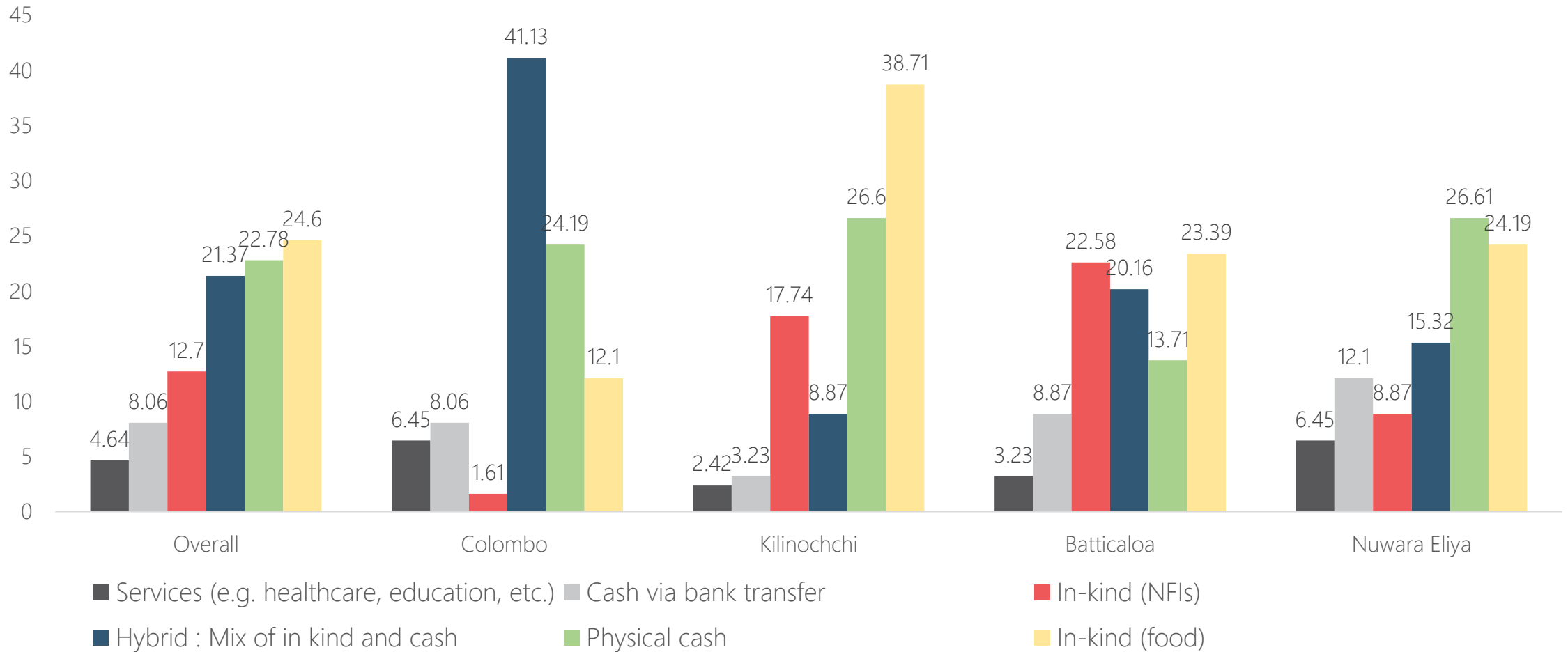
Healthcare and access to medication



- Some KIs in Kilinochchi highlighted the need to facilitate access to **wash services** and some KIs, including in Batticaloa mentioned the prevention of **child labor**.
- Access to **shelter** services in Colombo (27%) and Nuwara Eliya (23%).
- The need to develop **psychosocial programmes and prevention of drug addiction** was mentioned across all Districts.

Humanitarian assistance

Preferred assistance modalities



Preferred modalities of assistance reported by the surveyed households



C. Community inclusion and participation

Community participation

Almost half of the surveyed households reported **not being satisfied with the way aid workers behave** in their area. More than half of the respondents are **not aware of mechanisms to report issues with the assistance received or to participate in decision making** regarding aid.

39%

Percentage of households that reported not being satisfied with the way aid workers generally behave in their area

53%

Percentage of households not aware of any mechanism to contact aid providers about needs, assistance, problems with assistance, or aid workers

62%

Percentage of households not able to have an influence over decisions made by humanitarian actors regarding the assistance that they provide.

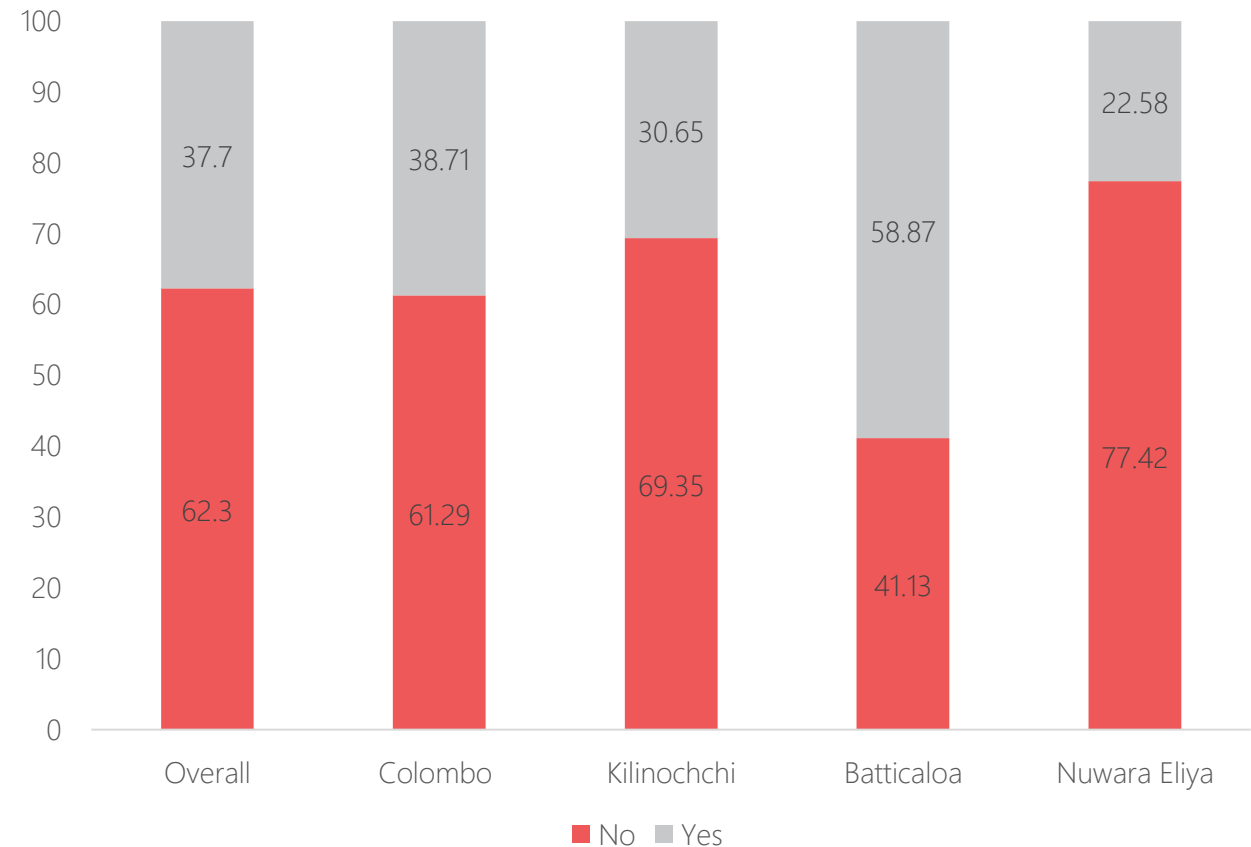
57%

Percentage of households that reported not being satisfied with the way aid workers generally behave in their area because they don't listen to their needs

Community inclusion and participation

Community consultations

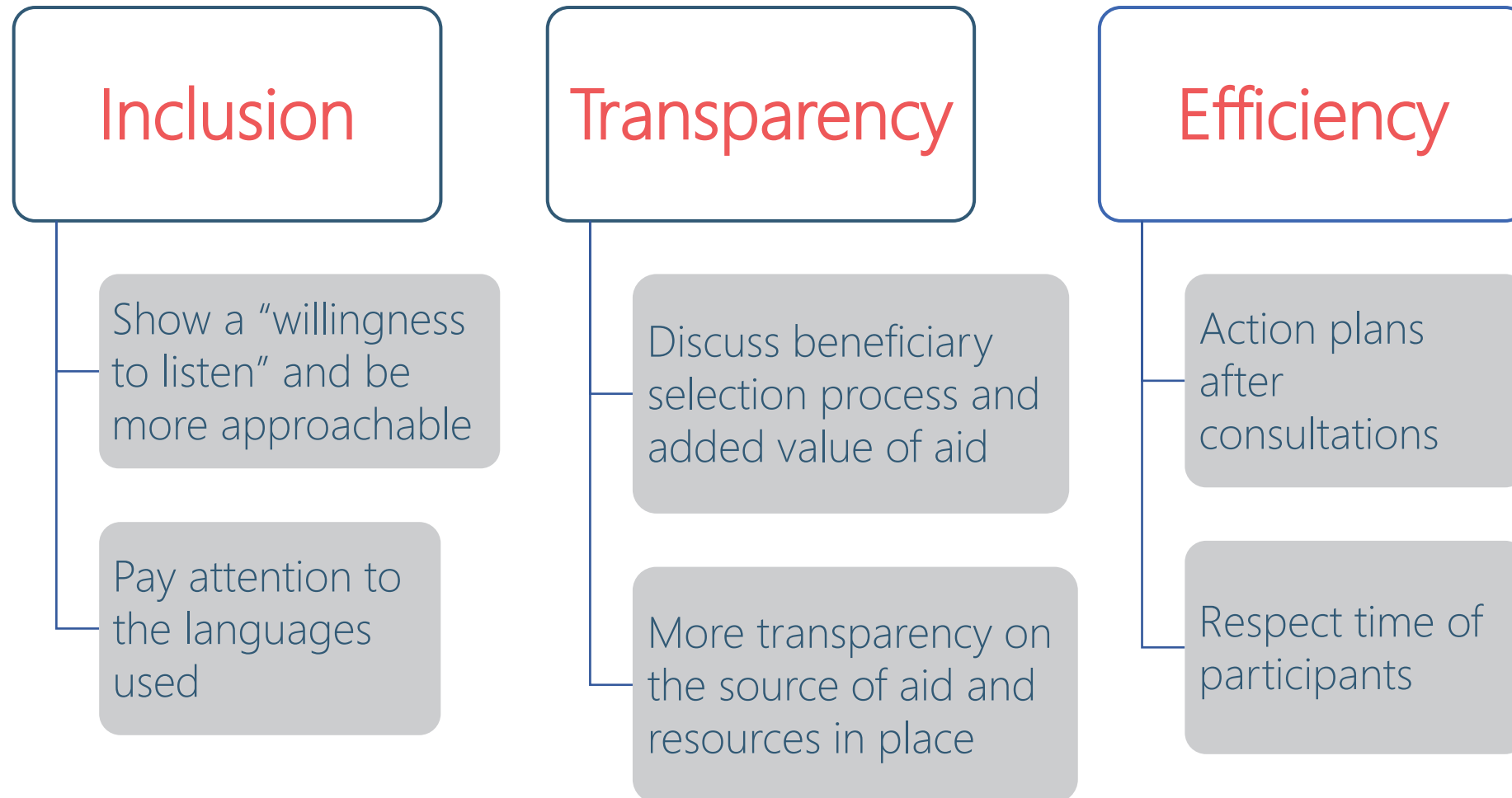
- 38% of the surveyed households reported **being able to have an influence over decision making**.
- KIs mostly reported having consultations with **local authorities** (Samurdhi committee meetings for example, community police)
- Consultations with **CBOs, community committees** and **religious actors** such as:
 - Rural Development Society, Rural Women Development Society, fishermen association, Funeral aid society, child society, etc.
- Consultations with **WFP in Batticaloa**.



% of the surveyed households indicating being able to have an influence over decision making made by humanitarian actors

Community inclusion and participation

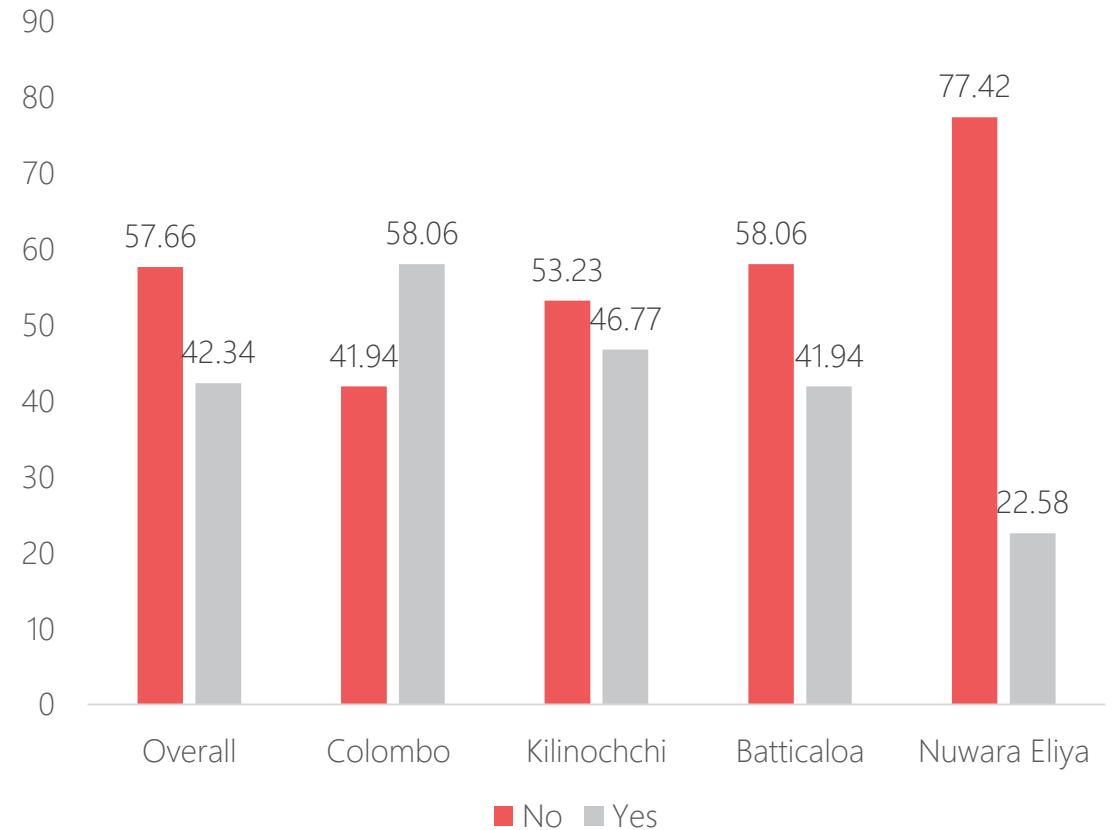
Community consultations: improvement suggestions



Community inclusion and participation

Complaints and feedback mechanism

- 57% of the surveyed households reported **not being aware of a mechanism to contact aid providers** about community needs, assistance received and problems with humanitarian assistance or aid providers.
- Most KIs also reported not being aware of these mechanisms. However, complaints are often reported to local stakeholders in **an informal way and in person**.
- In Kilinochchi, 18 KIs mentioned the **presence of complaint boxes** in the offices of local authorities.
- Some KIs mentioned that complaints are shared through **phone calls or a hotline**.



% of the surveyed households aware of any mechanism to contact aid providers about community needs, assistance received, problems with humanitarian assistance, or misconduct of aid workers?

Community inclusion and participation

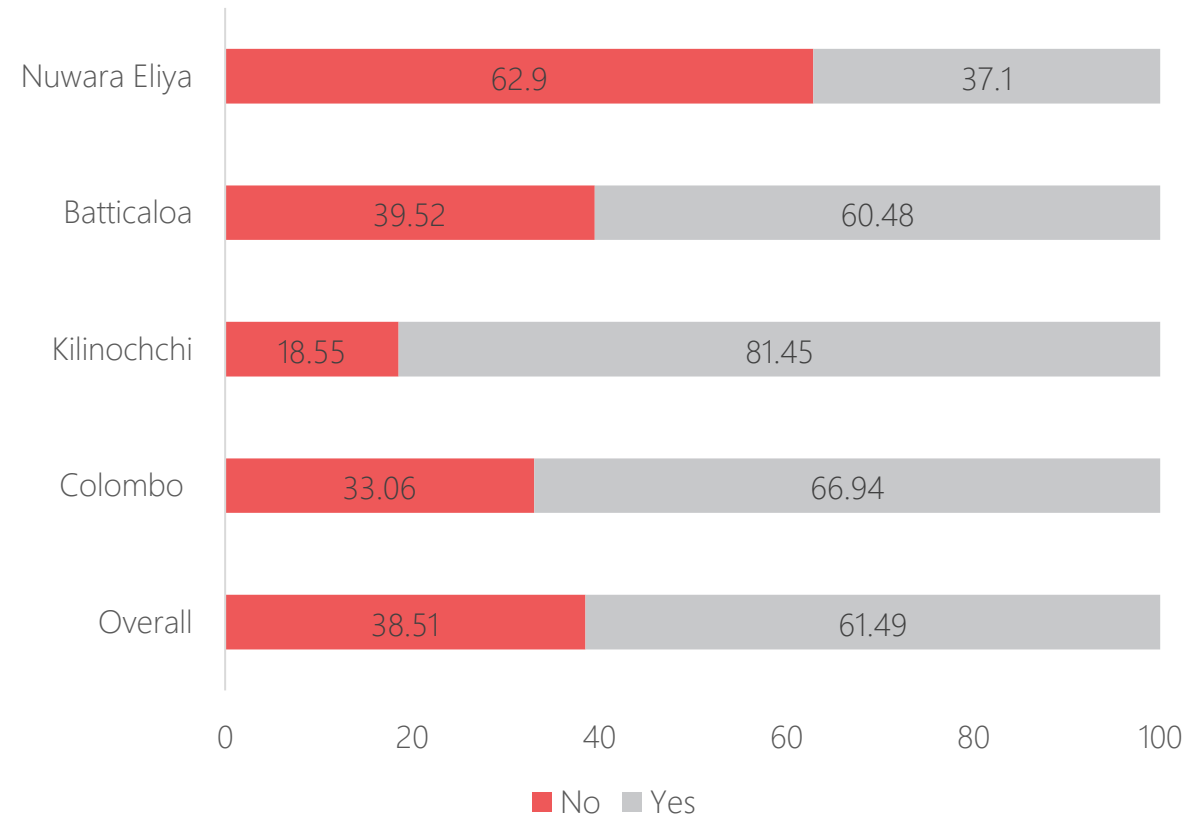
Complaints and feedback mechanism: limitations and suggestions

Reported barriers to the use of CRM	Suggestions to improve these mechanisms / preferred channels
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fear to complain about assistance• No trust in the impartiality of the treatment of complaints.• No hope that complaints will be addressed.• Feeling of not being entitled to complain.• Language issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthen communication between aid providers and beneficiaries.• More field visits to gather the feedback and perceptions of affected people.• Use a hotline.• Use social media to report issues and share dissatisfaction.• Ensure the confidentiality of users.• Raise awareness on the mechanism and communicate about it.• A village committee or a person to inquire and solve complaints

Community inclusion and participation

Perceptions on aid service providers

- Most of the respondents reported **being satisfied with the way aid providers** generally behave in their area.
- However, in Nuwara Eliya 63% of respondents reported not being satisfied. Among these respondents, 79% reported that **they privilege certain population groups when providing assistance**. 65% think that **aid providers don't listen to their needs**.
- As highlighted in the qualitative findings, some KIs reported that **favouritism** is an obstacle to reaching the most in need.



Satisfaction towards the way aid providers behave in their area according to the surveyed households

Thank you for your attention



Amine Bahri (amine.bahri@impact-initiatives.org)

Upul Wickramasinghe
(upul.wickramasinghe@reach-initiative.org)



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