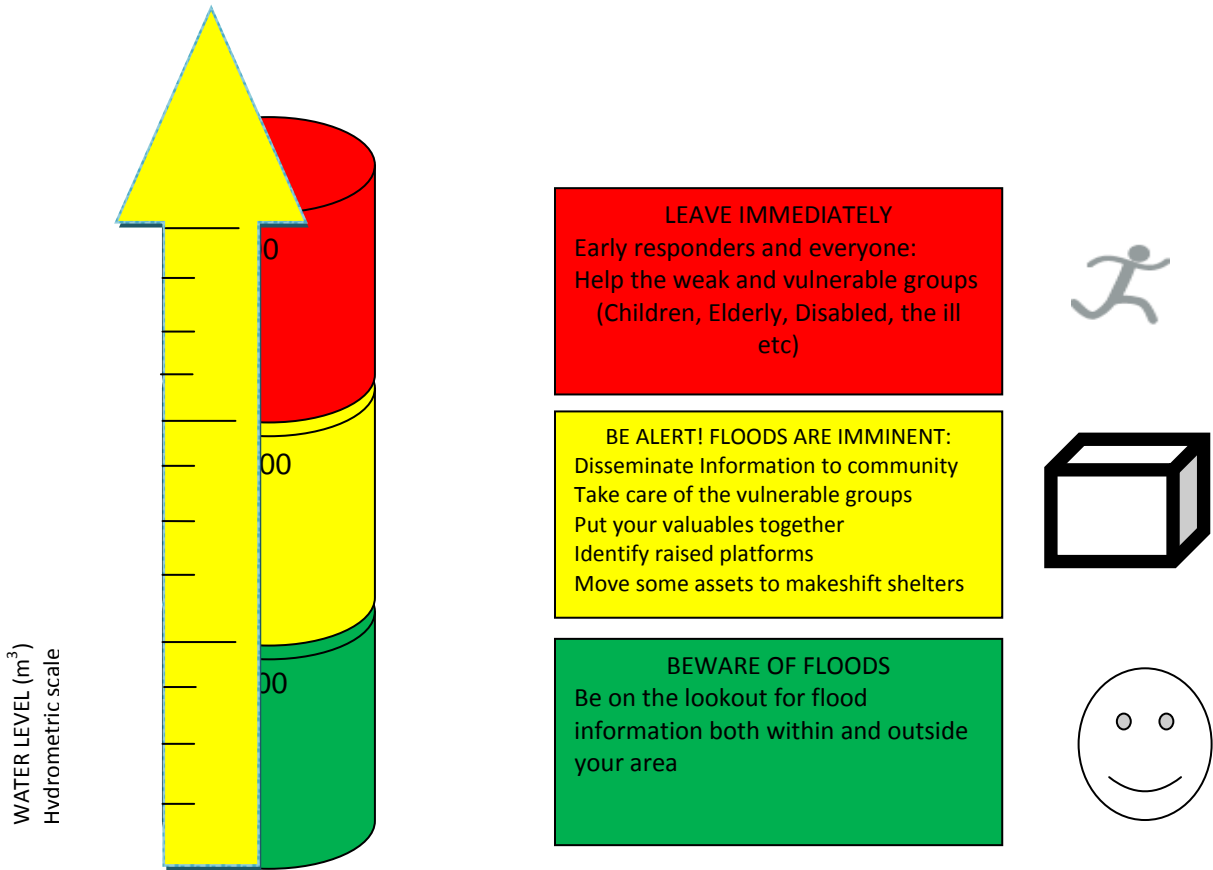


**A community based early warning system in Malawi:**

In March 2009 in the Chikwawa district of Malawi, heavy rains from upland areas were experienced. The local branch of the Civil Protection Committees (CPC) from the uplands communicated by phone with the Village Civil Protection Committee (CPC) downstream in the flood impact area. The VCPC representative monitoring the gauge in the upper middle course of the river, (July station in the diagram), then phoned the representative from the Mosses Chimphepo VCPC from the lower course to alert on flooding risks due to rising water level.

Using a megaphone, the Chimphepo-Mosses VCPC chairman immediately issued a 'yellow' alert warning about possible flooding to households in his village. The alert and warning messages were disseminated throughout the villages and warned people not to cross the river in question (Mwanza River), and not to wash, collect water or do other forms of work along the river banks. VCPC leaders gave megaphone warnings to the communities to update them on the flooding levels. Posters were also placed in strategic locations - churches, schools, clinics, etc.

*The colors and their corresponding actions are as shown in the picture below:*



**The actions taken after an alert was communicated included the following:**

Children who had to cross the river to reach their schools stayed at home for the day. Households moved their livestock from flooding areas.

All valuable assets were removed to safer ground, away from the proximity of the rivers and those routes believed to be in the danger zone.

The elderly and the sick were moved to safe places in schools.

Just four hours after the alert, huge volumes of water were gushing down the Mwanza River, flooding fields and sweeping away everything through sheer force. The quick reaction prevented the potential loss of assets and possibly saved lives. 6660 people from 1332 households and their assets were protected by this action. This was the first Community Based Disaster Preparedness project in the target area. It was funded by the European Commission and implemented by Christian Aid in partnership with the Evangelical Association of Malawi.

This new programme was effective for several reasons:

- The intervention was Community-based; devised and managed by the communities themselves.
- The involvement of both affected communities and communities at the source of the flooding gave accurate information in time.
- The project was low cost: €2500, which included the purchase of weather measuring equipment & installation costs, communication costs and protective clothing

Illustration of the early warning information flow

