

## Reaching out to the Public

*Raising Community Awareness to Flood Risk Reduction in Cambodia*

### ABSTRACT

**T**his case study describes the flood risk awareness campaign undertaken under the “Flood Emergency Management Strengthening (FEMS)”, Component 4 of the MRC Flood Management and Mitigation Program (FMMP) which is implemented by the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS) with support from the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) in two target provinces of Cambodia. FEMS’s experience will be of interest to individuals and organizations who are contemplating the initiation of similar awareness campaigns. It was chosen to illustrate the good examples of cost-effective and replicable practices and the adoption of a sound overall approach towards flood risk awareness. In the conduct of the flood risk awareness campaign, a process is facilitated whereby local stakeholders were given the opportunity to review existing flood information materials, adapt these to local conditions and disseminate it to the public. The result is the implementation of a well thought out flood risk awareness campaign that also targeted specific vulnerable segments of the population: women and children.



Flash flood in Prash Vihear. Community awareness on floods needs to be heightened to minimize the negative effects of floods on people in flood-prone areas. [Source: 6th Annual Mekong Flood Forum, Cambodia Country Report, 2007].

### THE INSIDE STORY

■ The Strategy of FEMS for Flood Risk Awareness	1
■ Channels of Communication	2
■ Lessons Learned	3
■ The Next Steps	4

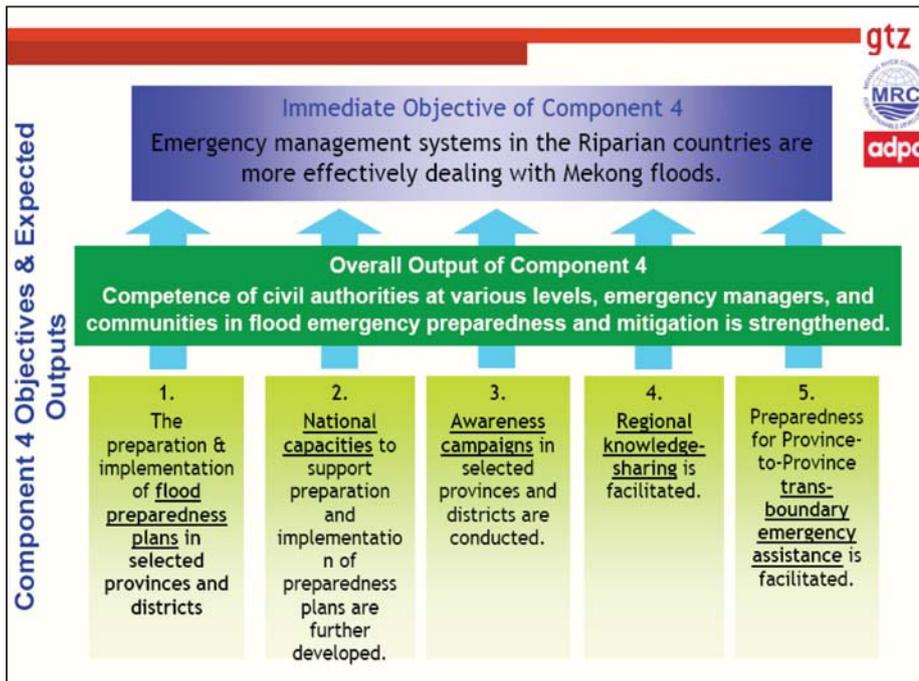


Photo source: 6th Annual Mekong Flood Forum, Cambodia Country Report, 2007

**I**n any disaster risk reduction effort, the design and implementation of a good public awareness and education campaign is one of the key activities that is undertaken. A good public awareness campaign serves as the foundation from which flood reduction initiatives can be more effectively undertaken. Local officials and community residents must be made to understand and be convinced of the value of flood preparedness and mitigation, that they are not at the mercy of floods and that there are simple and practical measures that can be taken to minimize and mitigate the adverse effects of floods. Without the local authorities and communities acquiring such a perspective it would be difficult to sustain their participation in flood risk reduction activities and projects

### INTRODUCTION

In September 2004, the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS) began the implementation of a German Technical Cooperation Agency or Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) funded “Flood Emergency Management Strengthening” (FEMS) with support from the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) in two target provinces of Cambodia; Prey Veng and Kandal. Flood emergency management strengthening is one of the five components of a comprehensive and long-term program of the Mekong River Commission (MRC), the “Flood Management and Mitigation Program (FMMP)”, that seeks to prevent and minimize adverse effects of floods in the lives of people while preserving the environmental benefits.



“PUBLIC awareness of flood risk reduction is very important because here it is not uncommon for us to experience six months of floods, in fact flood waters can rise by a meter within 24 hours”.

Mr. Hul Chamroeun,  
PCDM of Prey Veng Province

The two provinces of Prey Veng and Kandal were selected because they are among the most affected by Mekong River-generated floods. In the big floods of 2000 and 2001, for example, more than ninety percent (90%) of the districts and communes in both provinces were affected. This adversely affected close to thirty percent (30%) of the population in Kandal province and up to sixty one percent (61%) of the total population in Prey Veng province. Even in a “normal” flood year, Prey Veng would be flood-affected for up to six months.

Thus, a flood risk reduction awareness campaign was undertaken in support of and complimentary to the overall objectives of the FEMS. Under this public awareness campaign, all major

flood disaster management stakeholders in the provinces were mobilized to design and implement a flood risk awareness campaign within four target districts, two districts in each of the provinces.

At the close of the project's first phase in December 2007, there was widespread acceptance and satisfaction by local government authorities from the provincial to commune levels over the awareness campaign that was launched. The exercise was described as an empowering experience particularly for local government officials who had never conducted a flood risk reduction awareness campaign before.

“This is the first time that we have been involved in an awareness campaign, the first time we have been supported by a Project and the result of this experience has been very fulfilling...we are more confident to do similar activities in the future”

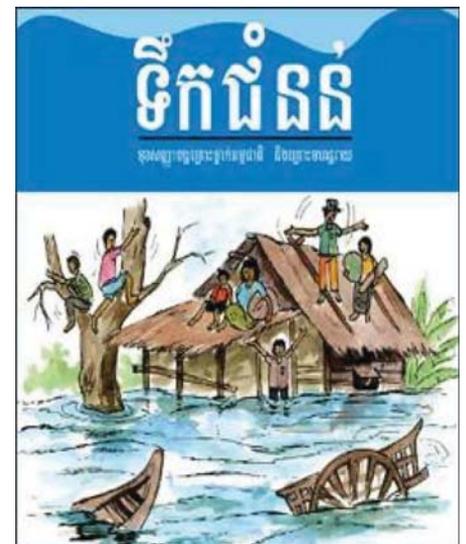
Mr. Puth Sawath,  
Deputy Director,  
Department of Culture  
and Fine Arts

## 1. THE STRATEGY OF FEMS FOR FLOOD RISK AWARENESS

The flood risk awareness campaign launched was two-fold: a mass awareness campaign aimed at the general public and a more specific campaign targeting vulnerable segments of the community population namely, children and women-headed households. The strategy used in the implementation of the flood risk awareness campaign involved a collaborative approach, the use of existing materials adapted to the local context, building capacity for future local replication, and knowledge sharing.

### 1.1 A Collaborative Approach

One of the key factors contributing to the wide acceptance of the public awareness campaign undertaken was the successful mobilization and collaboration of the key disaster management actors in the province. All major stakeholders from provincial government officials to community focal persons were involved in the process. More specifically the awareness campaign was a product of a collaborative effort of local disaster management officials (i.e., the provincial, district and commune disaster management committees), provincial government line departments (i.e., the departments for Education, Women's Affairs, Cultural and Fine Arts, Information), the commune council women focal person, school princi-



pals, teachers and two local NGOs; the Srer Khmer and the Positive Change for Cambodia (PCC).

Involvement of the provincial line departments from inception to implementation of the awareness campaign produced a strong sense of ownership that was vital for the awareness activities to be continued and replicated in other communities in the province. Consistent with the overall strategy of the FEMS program, ADPC went to great lengths to make sure that provincial officials lead the entire process. The ADPC provided adequate technical assistance and support during the entire process based on its own experience and on field-tested methodologies and materials used by other NGOs implementing disaster risk reduction in Cambodia and in other Southeast Asian countries.

### 1.2 Adapting to Local Conditions

Another key element in the design of the public awareness campaign is the adaptation of flood risk awareness information and materials to local traditions and culture. In pursuit of this objective, a fruitful collaboration with NGOs operating in the targeted areas was sought, particularly in terms of sharing flood risk reduction information, education and communication materials. This resulted in the development and use of public awareness materials based on the cumulative knowledge and experience of major flood risk reduction actors in the provinces including NGOs, the academe and other relevant government ministries.

Flood risk awareness information and resources were shared by CARE International Cambodia and Oxfam GB in Cambodia. CARE shared flood risk awareness materials generated by previous risk reduction program in the province of Prey Veng while Oxfam provided a flood risk awareness booklet and a video entitled "Living with Floods". Oxfam had already used the video, which was adapted and translated into the local language, and used in the implementation of community-based disaster risk reduction projects in various parts of the country. An ex-

isting booklet on "Health Issues during Floods" produced by the Ministry of Health (MoH) was likewise reproduced and disseminated. The Royal University of Fine Arts was instrumental in the development of the scripts used during the community stage plays.

### 1.3 Creating Multiplier Effects

The entire FEMS project is focused on capacity building and this conscious and deliberate effort to transfer knowledge and skills to the various levels of local government authority was also used in the design and implementation of the flood risk awareness campaign. Adoption of this approach was deemed critical because the awareness campaign, like all other components of the FEMS project, was only designed to be implemented in target areas and communities. Subsequent campaigns would have to be initiated and financed by the local government units themselves.

In the pursuit of this objective, two local NGOs were also identified and selected to participate in the program, namely the Srer Khmer (SK) and the Positive Change for Cambodia (PCC). The SK provided technical assistance and support to local authorities in the facilitation of Community Based Flood Management (CBFM) orientation sessions for commune council members and the PSDD in the orientation and training of school officials and teachers in two pilot schools selected.

For the dissemination of flood risk awareness in school children, local school officials and teachers were provided with methodologies (e.g., session plans) and tools (e.g., posters and flood information kit) for teaching flood safety for school children. This led to a wide dissemination effort in the participat-

ing schools that can be continued in the years to come.

The PCC, on the other hand, was able to mobilize and train some 89 Commune Council women focal persons from almost all of the communes in the project's target districts. Village level focal persons were also identified and took part in the dissemination sessions. Each commune was assisted in developing their own action plans for further dissemination of flood risk awareness messages.

### 1.4 Experience Sharing

Training workshops and conferences are key activities for flood risk awareness as it provide the means by which experiences, methodologies and tools for flood risk awareness campaigns are transferred to areas and communities outside of the target areas. Local officials

were able to enrich their knowledge and skills from their attendance in trainings and workshops. Their attendance in national and regional good practice and lessons learned workshops, on the other hand, enabled them to discuss their own experiences and interact and learn from other communities both in the country and from other countries as well.

The specific workshops attended by local provincial authorities during the course of the program include two National Workshops on "National Lessons Learned/Knowledge

**In this school, myself, the technical adviser in charge of curriculum development and six teachers were provided training on teaching flood safety measures for school children and as a result flood risk awareness is now being taught to some 264 students belonging to primary levels one to six".**

Mr. Chim Choeun,  
Teacher  
Veal Robang-Leu Primary School



This ADPC poster encourages the community to prepare themselves before the flood comes and provides advice on what to do and what not to do during and after floods.



A billboard being set up in Preveing informs the community about important aspects of floods as these affect people. This billboard also provides advice on what the community should do to prepare for the flood and how to live with floods.

Sharing ” and the Regional Workshop on “Innovative Approaches to Flood Risk Reduction in the Mekong Basin” held in Thailand. In a display of commitment and support to flood risk reduction program, the province of Prey Veng hosted the second national workshop on lessons learned in flood emergency management.

## 2. Channels of Communication

Implementation of the public awareness campaign involved the dissemination of flood risk reduction messages through printed materials, video CDs and community stage plays or dramas while the campaign targeting vulnerable groups used more direct communication channels including group discussions and classroom dissemination. In addition, the series of training and workshops conducted as part of the larger FEMS project were also venues for raising awareness and can thus be considered as one medium for which flood risk awareness was undertaken.

### 2.1 Mass Awareness Campaign

#### ■ Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Materials

Printed information and educational materials make up the most basic and common form of public awareness materials. Those used in the flood risk awareness campaign initiated include short but informative flood booklets and large posters. The flood booklets produced was based on a previous ver-

sion used by ADPC in a similar program in 2002.

A review of the materials with the NCDM and provincial officials resulted in some modification after which some 3,500 copies were printed and disseminated. The booklet formed part of the information materials provided during various orientations and training conducted for provincial, district and commune council members, women focal persons, local school officials and teachers

The flood booklet contains a description of the flood situation in the country, simple and easy to understand definitions of flood-related terms, flood preparedness measures including how to react to flood warnings, a description of potential flood impact and its associated dangers, survival tips during floods and measures for mitigating and flood proofing that households can take.

Large posters with simple easy to read and understand flood preparedness and mitigation messages were produced and prominently displayed in public places. The posters came in three types depicting flood risk reduction measures before, during and after the occurrence of floods. A second set was designed specifically for the flood risk awareness for school children. These posters provides highly visual depiction prevention measures for school children and was adapted from the school posters produced and widely used by the Save the Children Alliance in Vietnam.

A video CD entitled “Living with Floods” was produced by the Oxfam GB in Cambodia in 2005 and was used extensively in their own community-based disaster risk reduction program in various parts of the country. The video was, in turn, adapted and produced by Oxfam from an original version produced by the Vietnam Red Cross (VNRC). In collaboration with Oxfam, copies of the video were distributed to the PCDMs, DCDMs in the two provinces with an agreement that these would be played in community social and formal gatherings and further distributed to homes and establishments that have video players.

#### ■ Community Stage Plays

The use of community stage plays and folksongs as media for disseminating flood risk reduction information proved to be extremely popular. Actor and singer troupes are common in the country and while they are very popular, performances are usually limited to special public occasions and celebrations. The use of this popular medium of culture and entertainment was suggested by the provincial Department of Culture and Arts which already had some experience in using the medium in disseminating messages related to HIV/AIDS, and women’s issues like domestic violence.

With the presence of local skills and human resources, ADPC readily agreed and only needed to provide motivational and technical support to local stakeholders led by the Department of Culture and Arts in the provinces of both provinces. The provincial officials played the key role in the conceptualization and eventual conduct of community stage plays that effectively conveyed flood risk reduction messages.

The stage plays proved to be a cost-effective way to reach large sections of the population, transcending social, age



Folk media such as community stage plays were used as an effective tool for raising public awareness on flood risk reduction.

and gender differences in terms of audience appeal. A total of 22 cultural shows were performed that was estimated to have been attended by 7,328 people for an average attendance of more than 600 people for each performance. It is highly unlikely that this degree of audience reach would have been attained using the more conventional awareness raising methods.

**“Almost all of the actors involved in these community stage performances are themselves living in flood-prone areas; hence they understand and appreciate the value of doing this and are in a good position to deliver the flood safety messages convincingly”.**

Mr. Puth Sawath,  
Deputy Director  
Dept. of Culture  
and Fine Arts,  
Prey Veng Province

Another factor contributing to its success was the meticulous and high quality of preparation and high level of the skills of the actors and folksingers involved. This was possible because of the experience of the provincial Department of Culture and Fine Arts together with assistance from the Royal University of Fine Arts in developing a draft script suitable for the rural communities targeted under the campaign. Some of the members of the actor's troupe in Prey Veng province are also composed of some of the best stage performers in the country, several of whom have won national level competitions.

To enhance the effective retention of public awareness messages, question and answer games were conducted at the end of the performance with prizes awarded for audiences who would be able to answer flood preparedness related questions.

The apparent success of the cultural performances led the provincial department of information to videotape the performance and preserved in CD format so that they could be replayed in another time and location. News of the innovative and successful use of local actor's troupe also caught the attention of one of the largest commercial TV stations in the country, Bayon TV, who invited the actor's troupe to perform on its popular TV program called “Cambodian Cultural Heritage”. In the

### Storyline of Community Drama

The story is about a family that lives in a flood-prone village. Difficulties the family experienced as a result of floods made the father and daughter decide to look for work in the capital city of Phnom Penh. The father finds work as a laborer in a construction firm while the daughter finds work in a garment factory. The mother stays behind in the village and subsequently finds it extremely difficult to cope because she also had to take care of several younger children by herself. She approaches village authorities to seek advice and she is provided with useful and practical suggestions on how her family can prepare for, respond to and recover from floods. The father and daughter found it very difficult to make a living in the city and finally decided to come back, reuniting the family who are now able to better cope with the effects of floods.

province of Prey Veng, flood risk reduction messages were also communicated to the general public using traditional folk song music with the lyrics changed to convey flood risk awareness messages.

#### ■ Commune Training

Capacity building training conducted by the ADPC at the start of the FEMS project

was the primary method used in raising awareness of provincial and district authorities on the concepts and principles of disaster risk reduction. Later on, the very same provincial and district officials were further trained to enable them to relay the knowledge and skills gained to Commune Councils, particularly members of the Commune Committee for Disaster Management (CCDM), through the conduct of Community-based Flood Management (CBFM) training to selected communes. The commune training team consisted of personnel from the NCDM, PCDM, DCDM, Provincial Health Department, DHRW, the provincial Red Cross and the ADPC.

## 2.2 Raising Awareness for Vulnerable Groups

Aside from raising awareness of local government officials, two of the most vulnerable groups in the flood-affected communities were targeted for a specific awareness campaign: school children and women-headed households. The identification and targeting of these groups came about as a result of the deliberations by provincial and district authorities during the selection of pilot initiatives contained in the flood preparedness programs formulated under a separate planning process under the FEMS project.



The School Flood Safety Program enables schoolchildren to be more aware of flood preparedness.

### Flood Information Kit

The flood information kit is specifically designed to provide teachers and educators with information and tools for disseminating flood safety messages to school children. The kit consists of:

- A flood booklet that discusses flood risk reduction
- A booklet on community flood early warning
- A "Living with Floods" information set consisting of a video CD and related booklet.
- A "Health Issues during Floods" booklet

#### ■ School Children

Flood risk awareness-raising for school children was implemented through the training of local teachers and educators. This proved highly successful because teachers are well respected in the local communities. The process involved the initial step of raising the awareness of the teachers themselves. In this manner, they are able to influence the perception and attitudes of not only the school children but other community residents as well. A flood information kit was designed to provide them with a reference to accurate and practical information that they could use over the long term.

A total of four "Orientation for Teachers and Educators" workshops were conducted in the four target districts in Prey Veng and Kandal provinces. These were attended by 76 participants consisting of provincial and district officials of the Department of Education, Youth and Sports, and the principals and technical officers (person responsible for curriculum development) from the schools located in high flood risk areas.

During the workshops, the school principals and technical officers formulated action plans for wider dissemination in their communities, particularly in the schools. A local NGO with significant experience in education sector, Srer Khmer, was engaged to provide assistance and support in the dissemination of the training to the teachers in each of the pilot schools including the design of session plans.

#### ■ Women-Headed Households

A flood risk awareness campaign for women-headed households was conducted as an initial step of a larger

and longer term FEMS project effort to mainstream gender issues and concerns into the provincial and district flood preparedness programs. Women-headed households were identified as being one of the most vulnerable segments of the community population in the targeted areas. The provincial and district officials of the Department of Women Affairs acted as the lead in all the gender-related initiatives with

ADPC and a local NGO, the Positive Change for Cambodia

(PCC), providing technical assistance and support.

The PCC was chosen because of its specific knowledge and expertise in local gender issues.

At the community level, the Commune Council's women focal points took the lead and worked with village level volunteers in the conduct of information dissemination

sessions with women-headed households. Dissemination

was piloted in some 2 to 3 villages in each of the communes.

The design of these flood risk awareness and information dissemination sessions was backed up with substantial amounts of information generated from existing gender case studies, research papers and the results from actual provincial and district workshops conducted specifically to identify and address the flood vulnerability issues related to women-headed households.

After the initial round of flood risk awareness sessions, the Positive Change for Cambodia (PCC) facilitated the formulation of an action plan for the women focal points of the Commune Council for conducting the same awareness sessions with women-headed households in the other villages of the commune. A brochure on the impact of floods on women-headed households which will be used in conduct of future flood risk awareness sessions is already being prepared.

**Separate meetings for women-headed households resulted in greater participation, specially compared to their participation in regular village meetings where they rarely speak up ....in these small groups and among each other they are more vocal and involved".**

Ms. Sao Savan,  
Deputy Director Dept.  
of Women Affairs,  
Prey Veng Province



Women-headed households underwent a community-based flood management orientation training. They are another important target audience for flood management awareness activities.

### 3. LESSONS LEARNED

- Formulation and design of public awareness campaigns can be tedious and time consuming but once developed these tend to have a long lifespan and can be repeatedly used.
- When local stakeholders are motivated and take ownership of the initiative, local capacities and resources that were not initially evident will emerge.
- Public awareness campaigns must be designed and communicated based on existing local social and cultural practices if the messages are to be understood and retained.
- One does not have to “reinvent the wheel”; existing awareness materials and tools developed by other organizations can be successfully adapted to local conditions contributing to a shorter research and design phase.
- Public awareness is best approached with creativity and innovation. The most effective ideas and methods came from the organizations and groups with mandates related to the arts, culture, media and women affairs. Use of creative “non-conventional” channels and communication media was a key factor that led to increased community awareness.
- Cost-effectiveness and ease of replication are the key characteristics of the two most effective awareness methods undertaken in the project: community stage plays and incorporation into the school learning curriculum.
- Building local capacity to undertake public awareness campaigns in the future can create a multiplier effect when awareness activities are replicated by local stakeholders themselves.
- Reaching the most vulnerable segments of a community population (e.g., women, elderly, children, etc...) will be more effective if a specific and focused awareness campaign designed toward their specific views and perspective is undertaken.

### 4. THE NEXT STEPS

While the public awareness campaign program has been favorably received and widely seen as effective by local stakeholders, a thorough assessment has yet to be done. This is a key step for this, and any other, flood risk awareness initiative. The large variety of media used (i.e., posters, booklets, videos, etc...) largely contributed to a successful campaign but it is impossible to conclusively determine which of these has been more, or less, effective. Without such an assessment, improvements cannot be clearly determined and the

full breadth of lessons learnt cannot be distilled.

The conduct of a short survey to determine the level of knowledge, attitude and practice (i.e., KAP) of the targeted population before designing an awareness campaign will provide invaluable information in determining what the most appropriate messages and communication channels are. A similar survey conducted at the end of awareness campaigns can provide quantitative measures and feedback on the effectiveness of the different media types used and of the entire awareness campaign as a whole.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*Safer Communities* would like to acknowledge the following for their contribution in the production of this case study:

Mr. Aloysius Rego, ADPC Deputy Executive Director, Director and Team Leader, DMS, ADPC, Thailand  
 Mr. Aslam Perwaiz, Project Manager, DMS, ADPC, Thailand  
 Mr. Thanongdeth Insiengmay, Program Manager, FEMS, ADPC, Cambodia  
 Mr. Vuthy Chum, National Project Manager, ADPC, Cambodia  
 Mr. Ol Seine, Program Coordinator, ADPC, Cambodia  
 Mr. Chantola Bi, Project Assistant, ADPC, Cambodia  
 Mr. Jerome Casals, author  
 Mr. Lim Tara, layout artist

**Safer Communities** is a series of case studies that illustrate good practices of disaster preparedness and mitigation undertaken by either the government or non-government agencies with the goal of reducing the vulnerabilities and risks on the communities living in hazard-prone areas.

The series aims to provide decision makers, development planners, disaster management practitioners, community leaders and trainers with an array of proven ideas, tools, policy options and strategies derived from analyses of real-life experiences, good practices and lessons learned in Asia and the Pacific region, with a specific focus on reducing community risks and vulnerabilities and building more disaster-resilient and better prepared societies.

The first few case studies under the series have been developed under the Component 4 "Flood Emergency Strengthening" (FEMS) of the Flood Management and Mitigation Programme (FMMP) of the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRC). Therefore, the focus of these studies will be on flood risk management and their geographical coverage is limited to four MRC member countries of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. However, good practices from other countries and other natural disasters are to be added over the years.

The Mekong River Commission Secretariat implements a Flood Management and Mitigation Programme (FMMP) designed to prevent, minimize, or mitigate people's suffering and economic losses due to floods, while preserving environmental benefits. FMMP has five components:

1. Establishment of Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre
2. Structural Measures and Flood Proofing
3. Enhancing Cooperation in Trans-boundary Flood Issues
4. Flood Emergency Management Strengthening
5. Land Management

The Component 4 "Flood Emergency Management Strengthening (FEMS)," of the FMMP has been implemented by the MRC with technical assistance from the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) and funding support from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), started from September 2004 to April 2008. The project target areas are in Cambodia and Vietnam, namely two provinces and four districts each in Cambodia and Vietnam. The project partners are the National Mekong Committees, National Disaster Management Offices and their local authorities at provincial, district and commune levels, concerned line agencies, mass organisations, Red Cross Societies, international organisations, local and international NGOs, etc.

Since 2004, FEMS has achieved the following:

1. Flood Preparedness Programs (FPP) in the target districts and provinces developed and implemented
2. Local and national capacity in support to the FPP development and implementation process built through training at local levels on community based flood management, damage and need assessment, search and rescue, emergency kindergarten management, swimming lessons for children, etc. and involving/participating in the project implementation
3. Public awareness on household safety measures at local levels raised, including school teachers' orientation and School Flood Safety Program for schools, identification of special needs of women-headed households, cultural performances, folk songs, distribution of flood booklet, posters, etc.
4. Local and regional knowledge sharing conducted through national and regional workshops as well as distribution of good practice documents

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#### For more information, readers may contact:

FMMP Coordinator, Flood Management and Mitigation Programme  
Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre (RFMMC)  
Mekong River Commission Secretariat  
#576 National Road #2, Chak Angre Krom  
Khan Meanchey, Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
website: [www.mrcmekong.org](http://www.mrcmekong.org)

Program Manager, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC)  
Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre (RFMMC)  
Mekong River Commission Secretariat  
#576 National Road #2, Chak Angre Krom  
Khan Meanchey, Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
website: [www.adpc.net](http://www.adpc.net)

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#### Project Partners



**Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRC)**  
P.O. Box 6101, Unit 18, Ban Sithane Neua, Sikhottabong District  
Vientiane, Lao PDR  
Tel. (856) 21 263 263 Fax: (856) 21 263 264  
Email: [mrcs@mrcmekong.org](mailto:mrcs@mrcmekong.org) Website: <http://www.mrcmekong.org>



**Cambodia National Mekong Committee (CNMC)**  
23 Mao Tse Tung Boulevard, Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
Tel. (855) (23) 218 727 Fax: (855) (23) 218 506  
Email: [cnms@cnmc.gov.kh](mailto:cnms@cnmc.gov.kh) Website: <http://www.camnet.com.kh/cnms>



**National Committee for Disaster Management**  
Street 516, Sangkat Toul Sanke, Khan Russy Keo  
Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
Tel/Fax (855) (23) 882 045

**Permanent Secretariat of Kandal Provincial Committee for Disaster Management**  
Deum Meane Commune, Ta Khmao District, Kandal Province  
Fax: (855) (23) 425 555

**Permanent Secretariat of Prey Veng Provincial Committee for Disaster Management**  
Kampong Leav Commune, Kampong Leav District, Prey Veng Province  
Fax: (855) (43) 944 546



**Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC)**  
SM Tower, 24th Floor, 979/69  
Paholyothin Road, Sanam Pao  
Phayathai, Bangkok, Thailand  
Tel. 66 (0) 2298 0681 to 92  
Fax: 66 (0) 2298 0012 to 13  
Email: [adpc@adpc.net](mailto:adpc@adpc.net) Website: <http://www.adpc.net>

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