



**Figure 3.3. Traditional Khmer houses including boathouses**

The communities studied from the flood-prone provinces of Kandal and Prey Veng, along the Mekong River provide an overview of how the hazard warning is disseminated and how the community responds to the warning.

There is no systematic early warning system in these communities. No guidelines have been issued by NCDM to the communities on early warning. People's resilience and natural instinct to survive dictate the traditional response to natural warning. In addition to

these, those who have the capacities to respond to flooding and other threats naturally extend a helping hand to those who are in need of assistance. Alarm bells are used as a warning signal in the wake of continuous rainfall for a significant number of days in areas identified as flood prone due to past experience.

### **3.5.1 Deunn Rise Commune, Kandal Steung District, Kandal Province**

The Commune Chief, who is appointed by the District Chief, heads the Deunn Rise Commune. The commune is composed of a number of villages, each with about 65 families and an appointed Village Chief. It is prone to flooding from the Kantout River, a tributary of the Mekong River. It used to experience two to three flood episodes each year, but the construction of an irrigation dam has since protected the community from floods, except from extraordinary ones like the floods of year 2000. Within the commune is a pagoda, raised areas such as the road shoulder and the bridge. The local police take the responsibility for evacuating those in danger from the rising water while the government provides plastic sheets to serve as temporary roofs for the evacuees.

#### ***Warning dissemination***

The District Office is responsible for issuing warnings to the Commune Chief through the radio or meetings called by the District Chief. The Commune Chief, with the help of Village Chiefs, issues house-to-house warnings about threats from floods and when a flood is likely to affect the community. Alternatively, the Commune Chief relays the warning through radio communication to the village leaders, who pass on the warning to the families. The warning also advises the public to evacuate, reiterating old and tested practices of evacuation, to prepare food and dry clothes for evacuation purposes, and to mobilize cattle to higher grounds.

#### ***Community preparedness***

Before the water level rises to a dangerous level, the elderly are transferred to the pagoda. Normally constructed on the most elevated location, pagodas make a good refuge for people. Those who cannot be accommodated in the pagodas go to the other safe places like the roadside or bridge approach, which are normally higher than the surrounding fields and areas for habitation. Children go with their parents, and the animals are also evacuated with the families.

### 3.5.2 Sdao Kong Commune, Ba Phnum District, Prey Veang Province

The commune is composed of 15 villages, each led by a village leader. The Sdao Kong Commune is located in a low-lying area near the River Trabaek. Flooding is a result of river overflow as well as from continuous rainfall. An irrigation canal traverses the farms, which serve as the main source of income for the community. Following the administrative practice, the District Chief appoints the Sdao Kong Commune Chief.

The community receives warning from national radio stations and from meetings called by the District Chief. The local folks unintentionally learn about threats of flood or bad weather from warnings or advisories aired between drama broadcasts, which are popular in the community. Although 75 percent of families own radio sets, not all of them receive information about impending floods through radio broadcasts.

Warning also reaches the community through the deliberate warning dissemination by the Commune Chief. Upon receipt of warning from the District Chief, the Commune Chief calls small meetings of Village Chiefs at the commune office (Figure 3.4). Since the commune has 15 villages, there will be 15 Village Chiefs calling meetings of 10 households each time. Under a critical situation, the Commune Chief also goes around disseminating the information.

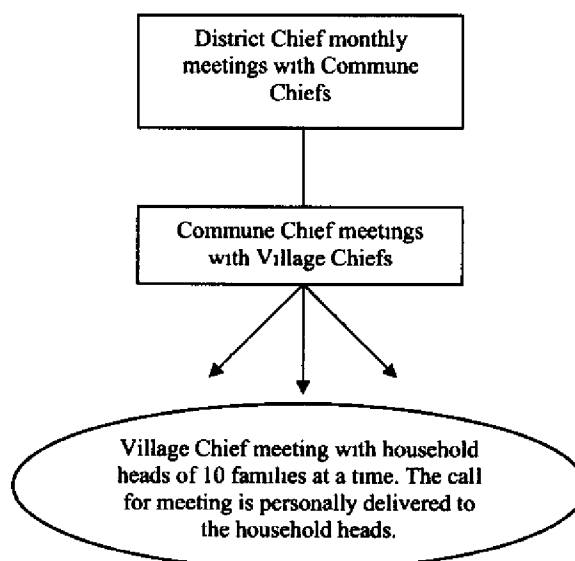


Figure 3.4. Flow of warning from the District Chief to the villagers in Sdao Kong Commune, Cambodia

### *Commune vulnerability and capacities*



Figure 3.5. A Khmer house raised on stilts, with lower grounds used for livestock or storage

The community has acquired traditional coping mechanisms to deal with flooding. House posts are used to measure water levels, giving an indication of when to evacuate (Figure 3.7). A water impoundment area is being constructed to steer the waters away from sensitive crops. Raised areas scattered in farms serve as refuge for animals. Following this traditional practice, CARE started constructing similar facilities with the participation of the community. A landowner donated the land for community use. CARE

modified the original concept by digging a moat around the raised area. The idea is to use the moat as a water reserve to handle short dry spells.

While the community does not have a hazard map, past experiences serve as bases for doing what is most appropriate in cases of flood. The water impoundment structures in the community serves dual purpose: first, to serve as a retention pond for flood water so the increase in water level is slow, giving time to the community to evacuate; and second, to act as a water reservoir for agricultural needs after flooding recedes.