2.1 ACTION LEARNING THEME AND THE REPORT

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Action and learning have traditionally been two main components of the work that DMI executes. Both are valued and sought after. During 2002–03 the attempt to link these two themes and consciously acknowledge their value within DMI, and in the humanitarian sector generally, was notable. Therefore, action learning was selected as the theme of DMI's Annual Day and Annual Report for the year 2002–03. (For DMI's approach to Action Learning refer to Chapter 3).

The theme was seen as a 'means' to stress the value of learning, ascertain how we learn what we learn and share those learnings within and outside the organisation As an 'end' it was hoped that the theme would enable usage of lessons for informed planning and action. Thus the theme of Action Learning became crucial in the context of capturing past experiences and charting DMI's future planning. This was specifically important at this stage in the life of DMI as an organisation as it is rapidly growing to serve the needs of the at risk communities.

In order to facilitate joint reflection and planning based on action learning, crucial work hours of the organisation were dedicated to a range of learning activities. DMI conducted its review of action learning by involving different actors—local community and international volunteers, coordinators, activity centre teams, partners and mentors—in DMI's Action Learning process. These stages were:

I. **Pre Annual Day Reflection Triggers:** Small action learning reflection exercises during weekly exchange (Samvad–a Gujarati term literally meaning Harmony) and coordination (Samanvaya— a Gujarati term literally meaning Integration) meetings.

II. **Insider Outsider View:** Activities to get the views of Community Volunteers, Exchange for Change (International) Volunteers, visitors and friends of DMI.

III. **Activity Centre Data Collection Exercise:** A checklist was prepared to help the activity centres of DMI uniformly compile basic statistics and core information on their work. In addition all activity centres prepared a presentation on their teams, views related to the bygone year: achievements, learning and future plans. This facilitated collective discussion, reflection and planning within the teams.

IV. **Annual Action Learning Day (April 17, 2003):** The day in short covered the following themes: achievements and challenges faced by DMI during the last one year, DMI's role in building a safer India and

Dr. AWP David, IAS, (EFSN Excutive Coordinator) Lighting the lamp· DMI's Annual Action Learning Day, April 17 2003.

Facing page: Small checkdams appear like huge reservoirs in arid areas of Surendranagar
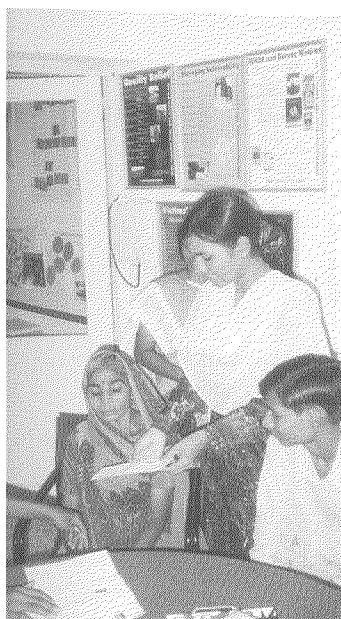
secure world; review of different Activity Centres covering their achievements, learning and future plans for the coming year; concrete ways of realising DMI's Action Learning Model, through Learning 'In', Learning 'Out' and Lateral Learning. The day in short was a celebration of DMI's work of sharing joint account of DMI's Institutional Capacity and Vulnerability and of Planning for DMI's future. On the same day teams wrote down the first draft report for 2002–03

V. Draft Report Analysis of findings: Capturing key findings through reflection triggers, activity centre data checklists and the Annual Day.

VI. Peer Review: The draft report was reviewed by Mr. Tony Vaux (Humanitarian Initiatives, UK), Mr. Michael Kropac (co-author of DMI's Annual Report: 2001–02) and Dr. John Twigg (Benfield Hazard Research Centre, UK). The review findings were incorporated into this final report document.

2.2 ACTION LEARNING ACCOUNT FOR 2002–03

2.2.1 Disaster Mitigation Institute's Action Taken Record[1]

The year 2002–03 can be summarised as one of rapid growth, planned expansion, concrete results and considerable reflection. Planned goals were largely achieved and team efforts ensured accomplishments surpassing plans. The Action Taken Record of DMI in 2002–03, is thus arranged to cover planned and spontaneous activities. These helped the organisation learn, unlearn and relearn various lessons.

Planned Activities:
The two main questions that DMI team asked itself last year (2001–02) received answers in actions this year (2002–03). These were:

Q 1. Should DMI grow more or should it stay small as it was in the past?

The question raised a serious dilemma. For DMI to stay small and thus render itself incapable of responding to the growing disaster mitigation needs was as irresponsible, as it was to compromise its quality of work in lieu of more work and low capacity. Therefore, DMI planned the following steps.

• Reaffirm Mission: Community-based approach to disaster mitigation was reaffirmed as the mission of DMI. This was clarified to include working with and for vulnerable communities, in recognition of them as partners in disaster mitigation. Responding to the expressed needs of the communities was considered prime.

• Reorganise Structure: DMI reorganised its structure as a matrix of 4 Securities (Water, Habitat, Food and Livelihood) and 11 Activity

Local Capacity Building: Community Volunteers interact with beneficiaries at the DMI office in Ahmedabad. During the year the number of volunteers and such interactions have grown manifold.

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1 This report covers the activity period from March 2002 to April 2003. Many activities have expanded and new initiatives introduced since then. Updates on the same are available on the DMI website. www.southasiadisasters.net

Centres. This was accepted to be a viable method of growth and working for DMI in the interest of a holistic approach to disaster mitigation.

• **Set up dedicated teams and activity centres:** This was done to focus on specific areas of disaster mitigation work while maintaining quality of work, ensuring integration of sectors and addressing new areas. These included three activity centres—Emergency Food Security Network, the Emergency Health Unit, DMI-AMA Joint Centre—and one new team: Sphere Community Campaign Team. A system to ensure relative and related levels of authority and responsibility for these teams and activity centres is currently being charted out.

• **Consolidated Core Competencies:** This was done to build a strong foundation of past and existing capacities that could support the new and growing work. DMI's faith in a community-based approach to designing and executing activities was highlighted. Activities of two existing activity centres—the Livelihood Relief Fund and the Learning Resources—were institutionalised and consolidated. To build on DMI's work related to global Sphere standards and Gujarat riots two additional activity centres were set up: the Sphere Resource Centre and Building Peace and Protection.

• **Build Team Capacity:** The DMI team expanded manifold this year. How to cope with such change? What to do to make this change effective? Capacity building courses for internal team, encouraging their participation in external trainings, follow-up to their reviews and cross activity centre secondments were implemented as key means of team capacity building.

• **Stress on Focused Growth:** Growth was interpreted to cover different dimensions. There was a consensus on pursuing the path of focused growth that balanced institutional dimensions of economy, environment and community. This demanded efforts for comprehensive interventions in existing communities rather than expanding geographical coverage. To accommodate the growing DMI team an additional work space was acquired. Nonetheless the ability to manage growth with expansion is anticipated as a challenge in the coming years.

"We grew so fast and we still managed this growth," said K.K. Prakash at the Annual Day 2003.

Q. 2. Should DMI focus on local level work or should it interact more with key global players in disaster mitigation?

The DMI team relearned the value of interaction with, information from and informing global disaster mitigation players about community related concerns this year. DMI realised that learning is incomplete and ineffective unless it is exchanged with different actors. A link between two sets of actors—Local (Community) and Global—was thus worked on by:

• Bringing Global Actors to Local Realities: Attempted to facilitate Field learning through hosting focal points from the Global Sphere Handbook Revision Process and the Sphere Project Office to the local level (India) and the community; bringing professionals in development and humanitarian aid to India through 12th Bi-annual ALNAP meeting in New Delhi; field exposure for sensitising international university students—potential disaster management and development decision makers—to local disaster management realities in developing countries through two National Courses of DMI and the Exchange for Change Internship Programme of DMI.

Community is the most important and key partner in all DMI work. Students of Oxford Brooks University at DMI are introduced to traditional water supply mechanisms in Patan district

• Taking Local Realities to Global Actors: Indian perspectives in disaster management and community focus for risk reduction were specifically represented in various international forums. These included various interactions with global actors during forums like Global Sphere Project Meetings (in Geneva, London and India), the Third World Water Forum (Kyoto) and conferences in South Asia.

"These are long drawn questions. We need to answer them at different stages in DMI life," said Himanshu Kikani at DMI's Annual Day 2003.

Spontaneous Activities:
Spontaneous activities were conducted in response to the emerging field needs and developing opportunities in different areas.

• Partnership Building and Partnership Assessment: "We want partners in improving quality of relief in India. They call us partners because we implement their quality in relief project," said Paola Jani while discussing DMI partnerships with her and a group of interns. Partnership with Ahmedabad Management Association (AMA), a corporate sector association was initiated and will be developed in the coming year. DMI also worked towards partnering with Indian and European Universities. The need to establish mutually beneficial partnerships with various actors in the humanitarian and aid sector was recognised. DMI thus started a partnership review process. This involved discussion on partnership principles, operations and expectations A partnership development checklist has been developed. Independent review of partner relations will be conducted in the coming year to ascertain DMI's future partner strategy. Partnership tracking method is being developed.

• Developed and Availed of Information and Communication Technology (ICT): DMI finds that the humanitarian sector is far behind in the use of ICT. DMI tapped the potential of the latest ICT through a range of innovative steps. It launched 2 websites for its activity centres; installed a LAN system, expanded its mobile network to maintain communication links between and across teams; and installed the latest

software packages for data management and analysis. Still and audio video photography tools were acquired and used to capture field learning and use them for purposes of training, education and advocacy. The use of GIS for mapping vulnerabilities and capacities in slums of Bhuj and Ahmedabad has been initiated These ICT tools are used to compliment the traditional technologies of communication like meetings at water points, use of leaflets and home visits for information dissemination. DMI has also initiated a documentation project on ICT and community preparedness.

• Facilitation of Lateral Learning: A lateral learning approach to work and interaction was developed to capitalise on and develop skills of young professionals who come to work with DMI for a short duration. This involved ascertaining the professional's interest and balancing it with areas of work identified by the DMI Activity Centres. Appropriate guidance was provided to the professionals through a team arrangement and support offered in terms of covering financial cost of the initiative. It was tested in the 11th National Course where the student group from Cranfield University from UK was given three out-put related topics of research whose findings could feed into DMI work.

Exchange for Change Programme Volunteers also developed their interests to the requirement of the field needs. Amita from UK in exploring the link between sustainable tourism and disaster management built the concept of the Afat thi Utsav Earthquake Recovery and Child Education Centre in Bhuj slums. This has resulted in the construction of two community based recovery information centres in Bhuj slums. These are used by the affected communities: to satisfy their information needs and by outsiders who come to understand the realities of risks, vulnerability, damage and recovery in the earthquake affected unauthorised slums.

• Response to Low Profile Local Disasters: An unexpected 'squall' hit parts of Gandhinagar district in Gujarat on February 20, 2003, damaging 170 houses in three villages: Golthara, Amja and Chandisana. Although low profile the affects of the disaster were on vulnerable rural communities. Thus DMI decided to intervene and conducted a rapid damage assessment in the area This was followed by livelihood support to those affected victims who did not get help from other authorities. Their recovery is being tracked.

2.2.2 Activity Centres Action Learning Log
In the background of four securities—water, food, livelihood and habitat—DMI's work is organised around eleven activity centres. The interlinked work of these centres in response to various aspects of disaster risk mitigation is presented hereunder.

Each section covers three parts: one, brief description of the activity centre; two, its Outputs and Learning during 2002–03; and three, its future Action Plans (2003 and beyond).

A. Action Review and Research Services (ARRS):

"DMI should learn from DMI's experience. But DMI should also learn from the experience of other organisations that it respects," said Mehul Pandya while reporting his work to the participants of the Annual Day. ARRS was formally organised in 1999 to serve the needs of learning from research and evaluation amongst humanitarian actors. It was conceived as a means for DMI to objectively capture lessons related to field based humanitarian work from the perspective of local communities. The aim of the centre is to capture the best practice and to learn from the experiences of key organisations or important events. The research work is selected on the basis of its innovativeness and relevance to risk reduction at the community level.

Output and Learning Areas:

Some of the activities undertaken by ARRS last year include 30 action planning and village mapping activities for earthquake rehabilitation; a community survey covering 50 communities and 5000 individuals on long term recovery after the 2001 earthquake; Government Relief Performance Rating by 300 victims after 2002 Riots; real time evaluation of SEWA's relief and rehabilitation of 60000 affected members after the 2001 Earthquake; Shelter Damage and Compensation Resurvey of 6000 Riot Victims with Collectorate Office and, Earthquake Impact on Livelihoods with CIDA.

ARRS has also developed an Integrated Data Base on Shelter Damage and Related Losses after the 2002 Riots. While conducting the above-mentioned research the activity centre learnt about building and maintaining networks with multiple agencies: from local to global, community to voluntary and government players, and troubleshooting problems emanating from field-based research realities. ARRS has developed the capacity to develop tools for measuring recovery. ARRS drew on established methods and developed new methods for its research. "ARRS comes up with original and useful findings, and ARRS also comes up with tools to find these findings," said Tejal Dave who developed tools for the long-term recovery study.

Action Plans:

In the coming year ARRS plans to strengthen its core competency in community research by consolidating its research processes and documenting its community research tools. This will enrich its services by incorporating technical/scientific methods in action review and research. Long Term Recovery, a topic much neglected by independent studies and evaluations will be specifically pursued as an area of research and assessment. Internally, ARRS will help build the research and documentation capacities of the other activity centres to facilitate

ARRS has developed an Integrated Data Base on Shelter Damage and Related Losses after the 2002 Riots. It has developed tools for measuring recovery

self review, generate lessons from work and apply them through internal and external action."I would like to see ARRS come up with some of the evaluations that are as influential as DMI's DEC evaluation,"hoped Hasmukh Sadhu who worked on several ARRS reviews in 2003.

B. Learning Resources (LR):

For years DMI has pleaded for promoting learning in India's humanitarian sector specially covering INGOs and donors. This campaign continues. Meanwhile, to consolidate learning within DMI, as a concrete step Learning Resources was consolidated as an activity centre in 1998. Its mandate is to work towards bridging the gap between knowledge and action for disaster mitigation. Aimed at building preparedness capacities at various levels, the Learning Resources strives to be a hub of action learning activities for disaster preparedness in India with its modest resources. While capturing valuable experience and sharing them through communication tools and demand-based capacity building courses at both the local and national levels, LR also gives a voice to the preparedness needs of vulnerable communities and victims.

Key activities of LR include generation of periodicals; publication of Experience Learning Series, Preparedness Pocketbook Series, Multimedia Learning Series, Awareness Material; coordination of National Course Series, Local Capacity Building Cycles and Exchange for Change Internships. The Exchange for Change Internship Program, based on the principles of lateral learning, offers young graduates from India and abroad the opportunity to gain work experience in the field of disaster mitigation in India.

LR's activities are conducted at different levels: mostly community, and some at national and international levels, covering multiple interests and people. The interactive nature of these activities allows collateral and multilateral learning within and outside LR.

Output and Learning Areas:

This year LR found itself a symbol that reflected its never-ending motto of learning. Learning is continuous, connected, creative and ever unfolding. DMI's reasons for learning are clustered around four themes: (a) the duty to learn; (b) the pleasure of learning; (c) the liberation that learning brings; and (d) the capacities that learning builds."It is not just a symbol, it is a sum of our reasons for learning,"explained Mihir Bhatt while describing the symbol to the DMI team.

LR this year specifically focused on the aspect of organizational learning. In furtherance to a review of DMI as a learning organisation by a student of Cranfield University (UK), DMI appointed a Learning Coordinator The Learning Coordinator worked towards consciously
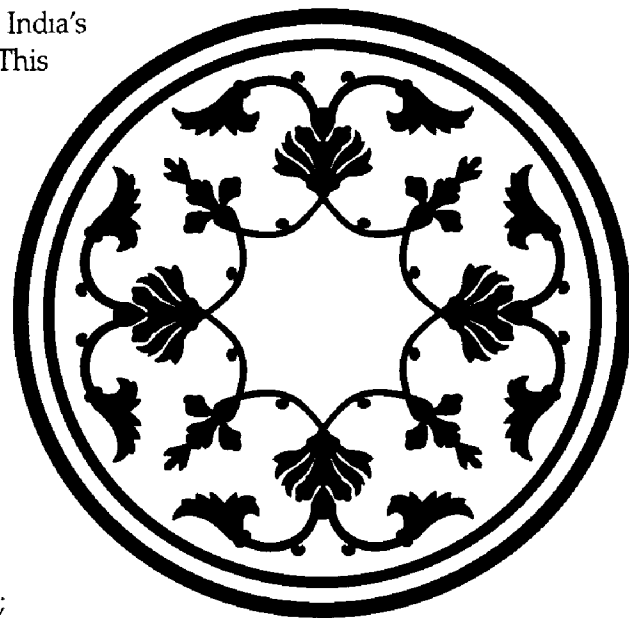
Eternal value of Learning:
"Naasti Gyanat Param Sukham"
(There is no achievement greater than knowledge)
—Chanakya, Arthashastra, 3rd Century BC

"The ability to learn about learning and develop the learning process is the critical issue of the twenty-first century."
(Burgoyne J et.al., 1998)