INTRODUCTION

The objective of this report is to document the Learning activities of the Disaster Mitigation Institute (DMI). For each type of activity conducted by DMI, this report will discuss what has been done, why it was done (DMI's approach), and what the results and impacts have been.

1.1 DISASTER MITIGATION INSTITUTE HISTORY AND APPROACH

DMI is a community based research and action planning organisation. It works towards bridging the action-learning gap between policy, practice and research in disaster risk mitigation from the community to the international level. Born out of repeated 1987–1989 droughts in India, DMI developed from a project to a programme into an autonomous organisation in 1995. DMI actively promotes community preparedness from project to policy and grassroots action to advocacy. Disasters that DMI addresses also include floods, earthquake, cyclone and communal disturbances or riots. Sustainable and quick recovery, as well as disaster preparedness, are the subject of DMI's work.

DMI values both, action and learning.

DMI primarily focuses on four security programmes addressing the basic human requirements of livelihood, food, water and habitat. These four requirements or securities link disaster preparedness with sustainable development of the vulnerable among the poor at the local village or urban slum level.

DMI's main interest is in mitigating risks faced by the poor among the victim or vulnerable communities.

Victim saved whatever they could, they knew its value.

DMI's basic principle is that people most affected by disasters, usually the poor, are not "helpless victims" but are just more vulnerable than other people. One of the ways that their vulnerability can be reduced is through information sharing and learning DMI prefers the term "learning" to "education" since the latter sometimes implies a paternalistic relationship rather than an equal relationship where the community can share insight and information about their condition and needs and DMI can share information or insight on reducing vulnerability to disasters, risks and other communities' experience.

1.2 ACTIVITY CENTRES OF DISASTER MITIGATION INSTITUTE

DMI's work is organised into eleven Activity Centres, each with a well defined team. Projects strive to cut across Activity Centres to ensure an integrated approach to disaster risk mitigation. The Activity Centres are as follows:

- Action Review and Research Services
- Bhuj Reconstruction Project
- Building Peace and Protection
- DMI-AMA Joint Centre for Disaster Risk Management
- Emergency Food Security Network
- Emergency Health Unit
- Learning Resources
- Livelihood Relief Fund
- Organisational Resources
- Sphere Resource Centre
- Water Security Programme

More details on the Activity Centres are available on DMI's website: www.southasiadisasters.net.

Some Activity Centres are new and others have been running for now five years.

1.3 LEARNING RESOURCES AT DMI

The goal of the Learning Resources Activity Center of DMI is to invest more in learning where it matters: in communities. Learning is defined by DMI as an active and ongoing process of absorbing lessons and translating them into action. DMI's learning system consists of three action components:

1. Learning In (from the humanitarian sector and own practice with disaster-affected communities)
2. Learning Out (sharing learning with other humanitarian actors and the community)
3. Lateral Learning (establishing a relationship of learning exchange with partner communities, NGOs, Universities and Governments involved in disaster mitigation, and between the various Activity Centres within DMI).
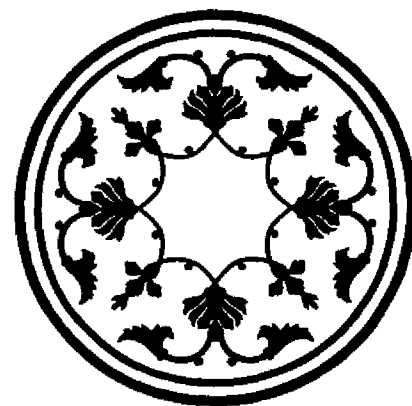
The symbol signifies the never-ending dimensions of learning continuity, connectivity, creativity, and unfolding of learning. The four flowers represent the learning goals: the duty to learn, the pleasure of learning, the liberation that learning creates, and the capacities that learning builds
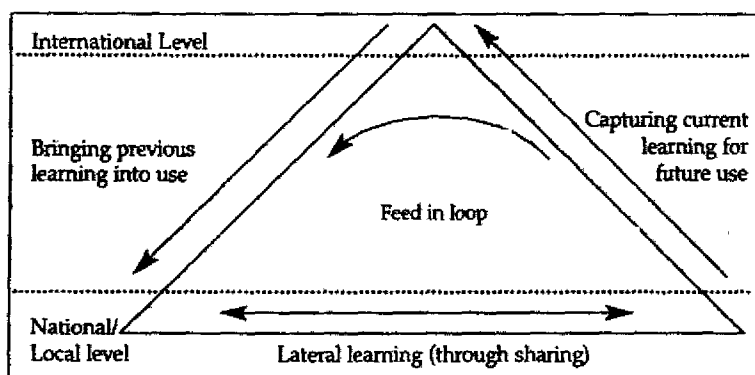
DMI Tri-directional learning Flow

Within this system the DMI tries to ensure tri-directional learning flows to capture and utilise lessons for disaster risk mitigation.

The aim of DMI's learning system is to ensure learning within and across disasters in the larger humanitarian sector, for sustainable disaster risk reduction at community level. From its vivid experiences of disaster risk mitigation, DMI has learnt that India has the widest range and most valuable depth of experience in mitigating disaster risks. However, these experiences are seldom shared and used for preparedness or risk mitigation.

Knowledge of Disaster Mitigation Methods

In order to improve this situation DMI has developed a model for its learning activities, as follows:

The objective is for both DMI and others (communities, government agencies, NGOs, etc.) to all know about disaster mitigation methods, especially at the local, community level. This ideal situation is represented in square Number 1. When only DMI is knowledgeable about some aspect of disaster mitigation (Square 2) there must be an effort made to share this knowledge with others, be they the community or GOs or NGOs. When only others know about something (Square 3) DMI must make an effort to obtain this knowledge and then share it with others who may not know. Lastly, where hardly anyone knows about something, DMI must attempt to gain this knowledge and share it with others who may benefit.

Learning Resources of DMI is an Activity Centre initiated to bridge the gap between knowledge and action—action that can be taken by community members to be better prepared for disasters. Examples of actions taken that were the outcome of information provided by DMI include preparation of first aid or disaster preparedness kits by individuals or families, construction of rooftop rainwater harvesting systems, and the building of more earthquake safe houses. Learning Resources also gives a voice to the preparedness needs of vulnerable communities and victims. Aimed at building preparedness capacities at various levels, Learning Resources strives to be a hub of action learning activities for disaster preparedness in India.

Learning in DMI is basically an activity of an endless cycle. DMI learns from its own experience in the field. It learns from the experiences of others either by reading about them or hearing of them through

networks. This can be called "learning through sharing." One important activity is learning while teaching or spreading the lessons to various stakeholders. DMI's various publications and capacity building programmes bring with them feedback from the readers and the participants, respectively This learning is further circulated and generates more relevant and recent inputs to augment the learning within DMI.

There are three types of learning in DMI:
1) from the community,
2) from reading, researching and sharing, and
3) from disseminating what was learned. In each of these there is an element of learning and re-learning from the communities, co-partners, and readers. Thus the key learning activities at DMI, which will be discussed in the following chapters of this report, are as follows·
   - Learning from the Community. Village Mapping and Key Community Mapping Research Tools
   - Learning from Review and Research
   - Learning from International Partners: Exchange for Change Internships
   - Learning from the Sphere Project: Sphere Resource Centre
   - Learning from Reading: Library and Data Services
   - Learning from Teaching I: Local Capacity Building Cycles
   - Learning from Teaching II National Course Series
   - Learning through Dissemination: Publications and Websites.

Display of Information, Education and Communication material from DMI 2003.