

# Youth Leadership: Source of Energy for Building Community Resilience

## Context

The All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) has always embraced the idea of youth leadership in the field of disaster risk reduction (DRR). Since 1987, AIDMI has been consistently inviting students (from 33 countries) and fresh graduates to work on local aspects of DRR across all levels of key action. Till date, 121 students have worked with AIDMI as interns or team members. By working with the policy makers, practitioners, partners and critics involved in the DRR sector of South Asia, these interns have promoted youth leadership in the changing landscape of humanitarian action in the region. They offer fresh and new ideas and pick up work that often seems insurmountable.

AIDMI invests in youth and their leadership as against buildings and campus facilities. The returns of this investment to the society and the DRR sector are enormous.

The following document the experiences of AIDMI interns during their periods, how the experiences enrich their knowledge in DRR, enhance their professional working skills, as well as understanding of context in India. Later, many of which have applied to their work field and future career.

## Musings on AIDMI Internship

Working in AIDMI enabled me to understand very aspects of being successful in the field of disaster risk reduction (DRR). The first thing I realized was that communication is usually an essential aspect to success in this field. It is also important for an individual to have the ability of

multi-tasking during the working hours and as a Disaster Manager we don't have a fixed working hour, we should be willing to work whenever risk wants us to. Risk keeps no working hours.

Working at AIDMI helped me to understand the importance of asking the right questions at the right time. On the other hand, I also realized that it is important to maintain punctuality in order to be successful.

Risks are not punctual. Risks strike any time. We can address this situation by making our risk reduction efforts punctual.

Another key to effective work in the DRR entails that an individual has to have a professional attitude in order to fit in. At the same time, one should have the ability to network with people in the chosen professional field. Both are important and a balance has to be gained. This balance I experienced at AIDMI.

All the team members were really supportive. What I am taking back from this internship is the infinite amount of experience in the field of Disaster Management which will make me a responsible and a successful citizen in future, to continue as a professional in this field and help India to overcome from any disaster risk.

- Russi Singh

From the day I started working with AIDMI, I found the AIDMI team very cooperative. They helped us everywhere whenever we needed them. I learned about so many

things in class but at AIDMI I actually saw how DRR works. I learned about key aspects of Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction. AIDMI has so much going on and it is upto us to understand, reflect, and make use of the experience. AIDMI gave me a platform where I learned so many new things about risk and how to move to resilience building. With this, I would like to thank Mr. Mihir Bhatt and the entire team of AIDMI for giving me such learning environment.

- Ashish Dangar

During my internship at AIDMI, I got an opportunity to learn a lot of things about disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation and how both can be integrated at local level. It was my first experience of working on a local planning project with local authorities. This experience helped me to understand how the government departments work and strive to reduce risks. Perhaps the most important thing that I learnt during my internship was the different perception of disasters among different people. Risk has many faces and many incarnations. The difference in the way risks are perceived by different departments also dictates how they prepare for them. I am grateful to Brijbhai for giving me this opportunity to explore many ways of learning about risks citizens of India face.

- Renuka Poonia

The experience of working with AIDMI for the preparation of District Disaster Management Plan (DDMP) was very satisfying. The wide range of tasks which I was asked to lead added to my professional skills and understanding. Particularly working

in rural areas of Chhattisgarh was completely different from my experience of working in rural areas of Maharashtra. How often we overlook our tribal citizens. Apart from community consultations, working in office was a learning experience. It certainly provided an environment for enhancing professionalism. As the DDMP was made with the support of UNICEF, it gave an idea of how do NGOs work in collaboration with other agencies as well as the administration. Meeting the deadlines and having the pressure of deadlines helped in understanding the vast significance of punctuality. Moreover, the experience improved my knowledge of ground dynamics of risks and disaster management sector, theoretical as well as practical. Documentations, photo quotations, interactions with various line departments, guidance from Vandanaben and Vipulbhai greatly added to my awesome journey with AIDMI!

- **Suresh L. Borkar**

Working with the AIDMI has helped me in honing the skills required to be a successful disaster manager. A healthy blend of professionalism and empathy along with deep respect for the local community was central to my AIDMI experience. People are in the centre of any DRR activities at AIDMI. The documentation of the details gathered through the hazard and vulnerability analysis from the communities and authorities was remarkable and helped me in understanding various risks to which a community is exposed to. I also learned how to coordinate and collaborate with government departments and other non-government agencies to achieve common objectives. Risk cannot be understood from only one point of view. Most importantly, the mentoring and guidance I received

"After the local community leaders and authority officials the youth at AIDMI has been my sustained source of energy".

- **Mihir R. Bhatt**

from Vipulbhai and Brijbhai at AIDMI was critical in making my internship experience fulfilling and rewarding.

- **Akshay W.**

The best thing about AIDMI is that, it has never given the youth a feeling of being interns at any time. We represented AIDMI whenever we went to meet higher authorities or to the last person in the community. The guidance and support received by the field team and seniors for food and accommodations, field visits and documentations and what to focus on has helped us to groom and learn a lot. The forty days helped us to gain professional skills of documentation, drafting of letters, presentations, data analysis and extracting of data and information from the readings, photo and quotes helped me in understanding the different aspects of risk reduction.

- **Vaibhav Naresh Raut**

The internship has helped me in building professional networks among DRR experts and improving upon my risk communication skills at a professional level, which I feel would be a great asset in building stronger relationships (at a personal as well as professional level) with whom I would be working with in the near future. During our day-to-day conversations with our mentors, I also came to know from Vandanaben about certain approaches of advancing in this field of disaster management, owing to its novelty yet growing significance

in the contemporary world. Concrete work speaks volumes in this fast growing DRR sector. The working environment in the field as well as in office proved to be quite challenging due to the deliverables that were to be met on everyday basis in order to complete the plans within the specified time. Risks do not wait. So, risk reduction plans cannot wait. However, this rush got balanced with the friendly, cordial and supportive nature of our mentors. It was with their experience and guidance that the deliverables could be completed on time. On a personal note, I believe that this sort of balanced environment is necessary for every employer as well as for any task to be completed within a specified time limit.

- **Jyotirmoy Deb Goswami**

#### **Way Ahead**

AIDMI is inviting youth to work on areas of risk and culture; uncertainty in risk reduction; why some DRR projects make poor worse off; and who is best suited to reduce risk at the lowest level of the economy.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of these youth leaders to AIDMI has been their novel perspectives on risk reduction and climate adaptation which are totally unencumbered with existing narrative. One such intern is now a young ambassador of a leading Asian country. The other intern shapes the UN thinking on DRR in Geneva. A fresh graduate has moved on to lead response operations for a leading international NGO based in UK, while another youth has moved on to work with a leading management consulting firm. Their idealism, sincerity and dedication are infectious and inspiring in equal measure. AIDMI has been fortunate to work with such youth leaders from all across the world and reiterates its commitment to do so in future as well. ■

- **Kshitij Gupta** of AIDMI.