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Women in the front line

BY DEBARATI GUHA-SAPIR

Women in developing countries should be key players in disaster preparedness and relief

"Women in traditional rural societies feel reluctance to consult male doctors. The use of women health workers and nurses would be a step in the right direction." Above, a community health worker (at right) informs Bangladesh village women about medical treatment for children.

It too often goes unreported that women and children usually suffer more than men in natural disasters, especially in the countries of the South.

Preparedness and prevention programmes mostly ignore their vulnerability and few relief programmes are designed with them in mind. Since they play only a marginal role in com-

munity decision-making, they can rarely commandeer relief supplies or have a say in post-disaster rehabilitation.

Most of the 100,000 people who died in the 1991 Bangladesh cyclone, for example, were women. Many died trying to protect their children and some because they stayed in their homes and kept away from the cyclone shelters ►