

# Role of Women in Disaster Management

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## Introduction

The annual global loss resulting from natural disasters gives cause for concern. A single hazardous event can cause injuries, deaths, destroy crops and buildings, thus totally disrupting community life. Two-thirds of the world's population live in developing countries and 95 per cent of disaster-related deaths occur in these countries. During the period 1970-1981, more than one million people died in natural disasters and the economic loss is estimated to be over US \$46 billion\*.

Disasters do not only affect development; there is also a significant relationship between development strategies and the extent to which a country is prepared to respond in the event of a disaster. Through sustained efforts, including those of Hazards and Vulnerability Analyses, Prevention and Mitigation, Preparedness Planning, Education and Training, it is possible to avert some disasters, and in

others to minimize the number of injuries and deaths, and also reduce the resulting socio-economic burden and loss.

In most societies, women constitute more than fifty per cent of the population and are a major human resource in socio-economic develop-

ment. However, this resource can only be realized if women are involved and active in the development process.

The theme of this paper is centered around the need for guidelines relating to the involvement of women in Disaster Management within the context of the development process in each country, and suggests some of the ways in which women can contribute in the following three phases, namely:

## ■ Preparedness Phase

In the development world two-thirds of all households are headed by women, which has significant implications for the influence of women and their contribution to the socialization process of individuals, family units and the community.

Essentially, the role of women in the Preparedness Phase ranges from teaching simple everyday safety measures in the home, to hazard identification in the community.

In this phase, suggested areas in which women can contribute include:



*Women can play an important role in primary health care. Nutritional survey in Haiti.*

\**Social and Sociological Aspects — Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, Vol. 12 — A Compendium of Current Knowledge, UNDRO/UNEP.*