



The role of "cultural leaders" as identifiable reference points in the prevention and preparedness phases

Ideally, "cultural leaders" should already be identified during the prevention and preparedness phases, so that emergency and disaster workers have established contacts through which they can communicate, as it may not be easy, or done quickly, to identify these influential people in actual emergencies. Additionally, practitioners believed that "Civil Protection coordinators need to carefully assess those people working as mediators" (G6; R4 - see source document for full reference). Generally, there was an awareness that cultural leaders come from an array of backgrounds, many of which are related to formal or informal associations, and they are expected to share their knowledge and actively encourage citizens: "In Val D'Aosta, the hotel managers, the Mountain Guides Association and the Ski instructors association have made an agreement with the Regional Civil Protection. They convey information and teach self-protection to their citizens" (G3; R4). "They both have a list of people representing the reference stakeholders of that community. I have worked in the Central Police Station for 30 years, and I know there are religious heads, ethnic representatives and so on. The Presidents of the associations, e.g. Language Mediators Association, Elderly Association, the Italian hunting association... those may be reference stakeholders" (G5; R1). Beyond links already established in the preparedness phase, cultural leaders can also be identified by practitioners in emergency situations, building an immediate connection between different forms of hierarchies: "A leadership coming from the bottom is possible; it can work as a link between citizens and the institutions at the top. You are talking of a leadership coming from the top. However, there could be some people gathering the population's requests, in order to make these clearer" (G4; R8), "My husband was sent to Molise, and he had to find the reference people he needed" (G5; R6). Although practitioners mentioned that this may prove difficult in some disaster situations in large cities: "The problem would be if an earthquake occurred in Rome. In this last case, I would not know who the leaders are, where camps should be built" (G4; R1). Local leaders, including doctors or religious figures, were seen as important reference points following disasters in communities, as they could provide reassurance and enhance social cohesion: "Based on the interviews to survivors of Rigopiano we know that a qualified source is important at such a time. Not any voice saying "stay calm, we're going to save you" in the dark can reassure you" (G1; R2), "As head of the camp, I had to talk to the imam and put down some ground rules we agreed upon. I mean, I couldn't even talk to the women" (G2; R4). One practitioner noted awareness of how different cultural groups may interpret trusted symbols differently. However, it was also outlined that the use of too many uniforms by practitioners may be perceived as too many symbols and, therefore, may be confusing and unproductive. Generally, it was felt that the use of a uniform as a symbol may further instil trust in some people, but distrust in others, depending on their experience: "In Italy, people often say that they do not understand whom we belong to. During joint interventions, people say that they do not understand our roles, because there are too many uniforms. Sometimes, this is true. When I was sent to Mugello, I went in a school, wearing my uniform. There was a little girl from Ex-Yugoslavia, which started to cry. Probably, she feared we would take her away from school, as the soldiers did with her little friends in her former



country” (G6; R5). Cultural leaders should also “encourage trust” (G3; R3), particularly if they are able to influence large numbers of people, for example, teachers, celebrities or TV personalities who stand up for citizens: “I’m thinking also of some journalist, e.g. Mentana, or some TV shows, e.g. Le Iene, which always stand up for the citizens” (G3; R2), “I remember our reference person was a teacher, which was always with us. She trusted us, and consequently, the population showed their trust as well, once they saw our synergy” (G6; R2). Further, a small number of practitioners reflected that in smaller and more isolated communities some cultural leaders have more respect from citizens as they are more directly involved in with them: “In the Mugello, for example, they have a local procedure of self-help because there are some areas that are very hard to reach so they do not need an earthquake to be isolated and they have their problems in the inside every day, so they have their reference people, i.e. the GP, the district nurse, the pharmacist... they each have some competences” (G2; R1).

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: [Social control](#), [Social networks](#), [Communication](#), [Norms/values](#)

Disaster Phases: [Response](#), [Recovery](#)

Types of Actors Concerned: [National civil protection body](#), [Local authorities](#), [Healthcare and emergency services](#)

Hazards: [Natural hazards](#), [Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations](#), [Man-made intentional hazards](#)

Recommendations:

- [Use local knowledge, collective memory and shared cultural values to improve disaster preparedness, response and recovery](#)

Source

[Deliverable D5.11 "Report on Stakeholder Assembly 2 \(Italy\)" \(page 49\)](#)

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