Foster social connectedness and the development of a strong sense of community, as these encourage citizens to help each other in disaster situations

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Having a sense of community at local level can prove to be an added advantage in the event of disasters, as it would incentivize people to help each other, thus relieving the pressure from civil protection authorities. While there are perceived differences between urban and rural populations in terms of social connectedness, disaster managers should seek to foster its development. Of particular importance in the event of a disaster are connections between family, friends and neighbours. Pre-existing communication networks are also important both during and in the immediate aftermath of disaster.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: <u>Policy Makers</u>, <u>Disaster Managers</u>, <u>Citizens</u>
Disaster Phases: <u>Prevention</u>, <u>Preparedness</u>, <u>Response</u>
Types of Actors Concerned: <u>Non-active citizens</u>, <u>Active citizens</u>, <u>Local authorities</u>
Hazards: <u>Natural hazards</u>, <u>Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations</u>, <u>Man-made intentional hazards</u>

Cultural Map Entries:
- <u>Decreasing trust in industry and political systems and influence on risk perception and behavioural responses to adverse events</u>
- <u>Community participation, collective efficacy and empowerment are positively linked to earthquake preparedness</u>
- <u>Social capital is an asset in making communities more resilient</u>
- <u>Links between trust in authorities and disaster behaviours</u>
- <u>Urban vs rural community differences in 'sense of community'</u>
- <u>Experience of a disaster may bring back a sense of community</u>
- <u>Increase in community cohesion during the disaster recovery phase</u>
- <u>Low vs high levels of social cohesion as weaknesses or strengths in disaster situations</u>
- <u>Community cohesion as an important cultural aspect in disasters</u>
- <u>General factors regarding the disaster response phase</u>
- <u>The general role of cultural factors in citizen empowerment during disaster situations</u>
- <u>Relocation affecting individual and collective identity</u>
- <u>Local identities as a source of coping mechanisms</u>
- <u>Sustainability through collective identity and re-building the sense of "place"</u>
- <u>Measures for recovering the sense of "place"</u>
- <u>Preserving and restoring the physical environment to preserve local identity</u>
- <u>Disaster affecting families' values and belief systems</u>
- <u>Using family values and belief systems as empowering tools</u>
- <u>Education strategies for building values-based skills at the family level</u>
- <u>Using family values and belief systems as empowering tools</u>
- <u>Using family values and belief systems as empowering tools</u>
- <u>Interfaith networks in conflict situations</u>
- <u>Socio-cultural capital in the recovery phase</u>
- <u>Community leaders as gatekeepers in social networks</u>
- <u>Developing of social capital as an empowering tool</u>
- <u>Social networks in the context of the Haiti disaster</u>

General association with cultural factors: Social networks

Implementation steps:

A. Use emotions that citizens have for their family and friends and promote preparedness activities as a way of preserving not only the individual wellbeing, but also that of their loved ones.

B. Volunteering and philanthropism should be actively promoted. The importance of helping other people and saving lives should be emphasised and positive emotions associated with these acts induced in citizens, which, in return, contributes to optimizing their disaster behaviour.

C. Work with volunteers and other local staff to build long-term relationships and rapport with local leaders who can also act as gatekeepers to the community. Related cultural factors: Attitudes toward authorities

D. "Values-based skills", active listening, nonviolent problem solving, inclusion of fathers in household activities should be learnt within families. To assure empowerment, the ideals of empathy, self-sacrifice and responsible citizenship should be nurtured and promoted through education both inside and outside the family (e.g. school programs). Related cultural factors: Educational system, Social networks

E. Family values, skills and qualities, e.g. open communication, clear roles and boundaries, the ability to express and respond to feelings and emotions, and collective problem-solving capacities should be used as a resource to empower individuals and communities.

F. Resilience in families is different from that of individual and requires maintaining safety, quality institutions for family members (e.g. schools, health care facilities), civil associations, vibrant and informal social networks and jobs and adequate public transportation to access the jobs. Building family resilience is deeply dependent on rebuilding community integrity for the long-term recovery of families, especially in "collectivist" cultures, where the family unit is as important as the individuals. Related cultural factors: Norms/values, Customs/traditions/rituals

G. Support families, their value and belief systems, to help them overcome and manage difficult circumstances, as family units may adjust well to disasters, and be able to protect, support and empower each other and the community in general. Related cultural factors: Norms/values, Customs/traditions/rituals

H. Set up "community teams", based on the individual skills of local community members or, similarly, create lists of volunteers that would be made available to local community members. Related cultural factors: Local knowledge

I. Individuals with a strong attachment to place, who may also be more willing to be(come) proactive, should be involved in the recovery process, since their sentiment leads to greater efforts at community revitalisation, general altruism and higher community spirit.

J. Town planners should respect the pre-disaster local identities when re-building settlements. Reconstructing a "place" to its prior state can help survivors reconstruct their own sense of it and mitigate or avoid some of their identity loss issues. The preservation of the urban landscape can be aform of resilience and, as such, stakeholders should consider the multiple place-identities of survivors when redesigning disaster-struck localities. Related cultural factors: Individual/collective memory

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K. Include the elderly as effective leaders during the response stage, and encourage conflict resolution and community justice, and foster problem solving by the elderly. Related cultural factors: Age-related roles

Sources:

Deliverable 4.2: Report on "risk cultures" in the context of disasters - CARISMAND
(pdf, 1.8 MB)

Deliverable 5.3: Report on citizens' reactions and opinions: Citizen Summit 1 (Romania) - CARISMAND
(pdf, 1.9 MB)

Deliverable 5.4: Report on citizens' reactions and opinions: Citizen Summit 2 (Malta) - CARISMAND
(pdf, 2.4 MB)

Deliverable 7.3: Report on cultural factors and citizen empowerment - CARISMAND
(pdf, 2.4 MB)

Further reading:

Federal Emergency Management Agency (2011, December). A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, Themes, and Pathways for Action [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1813-25045 0649/whole_community_dec2011__2_.pdf

Norris, F. H., Stevens, S. P., Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, K. F., &Pfefferbaum, R. L. (2008). Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 41*(1), 127-150. doi: 10.1007/s10464-007-9156-6.

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