



## The impact of differences in local cultures on disaster communication

In communicating, apart from the general cultural dominants/dimensions, one also has to take into account the specific local cultural variables that inform a positive or negative communication process between authorities, intervention team, NGO personnel and the general public. Interestingly, field studies have shown that the most important cultural variable that needs to be taken into consideration is the ethnic belonging. Ethnicity is the one characteristic under the umbrella of which gender dynamics, religious faith and practice, profession, social status and relational patterns, for example, need to be framed so as to offer insight into a positive communication process. The importance of integrating cultural variables into the communication process during crisis and disaster situations cannot be overstated. Marsella (2008), for instance, when referring to contextualized cultures, observes that in some cultures (e.g., embedded, contextualized, field dependent), communication is based on relational negotiation in which there are presumptions of interpersonal sensitivities, hierarchy, and roles. There is a strong emphasis on reading non-verbal cues and “what is not said, ” as much as what is said. Indeed, the very nature of the self in this cultural milieu can be considered unindividuated (e.g., relational, collateral, diffuse) in which self as process and self as object become fused (Marsella, 2008, p. 6). Many experts in the field have also noted that ethnic background, especially in the case of minorities is an important factor for establishing vulnerability during crisis and disaster situations (Bankoff, 2009; Coppola, 2009; Eisenman, Cordasco, Asch, Golden, & Glik, 2007; Marsella, 2008). Furthermore, it must also be noted that case studies have repeatedly shown that isolation, small levels of acculturation and high levels of ethnic identification to be indicators of difficulties in relating and communicating in the absence of an acute cultural competence on the part of communicating authorities and field intervention teams. Success and/or failure of the efforts to assist victim populations have been linked to the intervention teams’ availability and skill in not trespassing local norms and taboos and channelling cultural beliefs into adequate survival practices.

Note: See source document for full reference.

### Applicable to:

Stakeholders: [Ethnicity](#), [Customs/traditions/rituals](#), [Norms/values](#)

Disaster Phases: [Prevention](#), [Preparedness](#), [Response](#), [Recovery](#), [All disaster phases](#)

Types of Actors Concerned: [Non-active citizens](#)

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

### Recommendations:

- [Use cultural factors to improve the effectiveness of disaster communication](#)

### Source

[Deliverable D8.1 "Report on risk communication models and best practices" \(page 58\)](#)



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