



Cultural clashes between disaster managers and local communities example

A case of conflict between the culture of disaster managers and that of local culture could be observed during the government intervention to stop the Botswana HIV epidemic. Disaster responders were part of the state bureaucracy, based on a hierarchical culture inside and imparting a form of scientific knowledge when offering anti-retroviral treatment. This is labelled by the Red Cross as a 'biomedical' culture. Alternatively, traditional culture relied on alternative healing practices, delivered by healers and based on specific rituals. The campaign to eradicate the HIV epidemic created an opportunity for a conflict between the two cultures: the official communication of the state demanded that people test themselves for HIV and not pass the disease on, while somehow blaming those who were infected. This pushed people further into traditional medicine practices, while also labelling these practices as primitive. A better approach was found when trying to convince people to accept anti-retroviral medicine through the mediation of traditional healers who could serve as mediators between different understandings of disease, health and healing" (IFRC, 2014). Furthermore, a bureaucratic culture of disaster response authorities was also a factor in the delayed action during Hurricane Katrina. The on-the-line responders were used to receiving orders from state capitals or Washington, D.C., and acting according to established procedures. It took a significant amount of time until state officials began overruling established procedures and acting independently. Moreover, "these decisions to switch from a "pull" to a "push" system were made individually, over several days, and in an uncoordinated fashion as circumstances required" (US Congress, 2006). The head of the Department of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, was not an expert in disaster and was not able to initiate correct response procedures at the proper time, while on-the-line managers were waiting for a top-level decision. Finally, at the level of the White House Homeland Security Council, there was confusion about the amount of damage that the affected areas had taken (US Congress, 2006).

Note: See source document for full reference.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: [Attitudes toward authorities](#), [Communication](#), [Norms/values](#), [Power relations](#)

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

Types of Actors Concerned: [Military](#), [Government](#), [Local authorities](#), [National civil protection body](#)

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

Recommendations:

- [Inform citizens about the risk they may face and about possible actions and measures, they can take to reduce vulnerability and better prepare themselves](#)
- [Use cultural factors to improve the effectiveness of disaster communication](#)

Source

[Deliverable D8.1 "Report on risk communication models and best practices" \(page 63\)](#)



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This file was generated automatically on: 12.02.2019.

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<https://culturalmap.carismand.eu/a/8-1-14-cultural-clashes-between-disaster-managers-and-local-communities-example>

