

Communication and catastrophe: “everything’s under control”

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There are multiple ways to communicate when disaster strikes. But the common denominator is to run the signal that “everything is under control”. Yet, people ‘love’ that. However, it sometimes –very often– happens that disasters are handled so as to serve its own interests at the expense of the public interest. In the context of this paper, we focus on natural disasters. We will travel across three continents to show the multitude of possible manipulations, the objectives of the latter and two common points between these three examples: the defense of some interests (financial or political) and the further impoverishment of the most vulnerable populations. The first example takes us to Vietnam where we will see how the country is affected by climate change. Then, in Benin, we will see how flooding can be whipped up in an election campaign. Finally, a Belgian example (floods in Tubize) will show that sometimes an improvised too reassuring communication can be disastrous on a political level.