

Logistical Support in Times of Emergency

Various disasters and crises have relapsed rapidly in all parts of the world during the past decade, and the volume of humanitarian aid, especially the kind related to emergency relief, has increased. When disasters and crises occur, it becomes difficult to provide emergency supplies quickly and efficiently at the right time and place; therefore, humanitarian logistics operations represent about 80% of the success of relief operations.

Logistics services involves the coordination of people and materials to deliver goods and services to whoever needs them. Logistic services - humanitarian logistic services in particular - is a dynamic and diversified function, as it requires flexibility and constant change according to the constraints and demands imposed on it.

In order to ensure that logistics operations are efficient, effective, accountable and responsive, organizations must establish a solid foundation of systems and procedures by adopting core international standards, as international and non-governmental organizations spend billions of dollars annually for their humanitarian interventions for victims of natural disasters, civil conflicts and wars. Logistics services' primary mission focuses on the timely recruitment of funds and goods from international donors and the management of services and assistance to those affected by crises and emergencies around the world.

Therefore, this paper provides an explanation of concepts related to logistic services in the human interaction, as it explains some of the means and mechanisms that can help shed light on this area, which has become an urgent necessity with the increasing size of disasters and crises.

Humanitarian logistics:

Before diving into the concept of humanitarian logistics or logistics in times of emergency, it is vital to introduce the concept of logistics in general as well as the concept of the state of emergency.

Logistics is viewed as the science of managing the flow of goods, energy, information, and other resources such as products, services, and human resources from the production area to the area of consumption. An emergency, on the other hand, can be defined as a situation that poses a direct threat to health, life, property, or the environment and often requires urgent intervention by the relevant authorities.

Emergency logistics (humanitarian logistics) refers to the processes and systems involved in mobilizing people, resources, skills, and knowledge to help people affected by disasters, crises, and complex emergencies. Humanitarian logistics has a wide range of activities, including procurement, transport, tracking, follow-up, customs clearance, local transport, and storage and delivery.

The importance of humanitarian logistics:

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Logistics is the cornerstone of emergency interventions for several reasons:

- 1- Humanitarian logistics seeks to maximize the use of time and reduce the losses during crises, and here lies the difference when compared to commercial logistics, which increasing profitability only is its purpose.
- 2- Humanitarian logistics serves as a bridge between disaster preparedness and response, as it ensures the effectiveness and speed of response to major humanitarian programs, such as health, food, shelter, water and sanitation, which can be one of the most important parts of relief and intervention efforts when a crisis strikes.
- 3- The logistics department deals with tracking commodities through the supply chain, and thus it often has a database that can be analyzed to take the lessons learned and benefit from past experiences. The logistical data reflects all aspects of the intervention, from the effectiveness of suppliers and transport service providers to the cost and timeliness of the response, as well as suiting the donated goods and manage information on logistical operations and humanitarian interventions.

Main logistics procedures:

- 1- **Planning and expectation:** In terms of logistical work, planning is defined as the future need of goods, which must be provided in a timely manner to regulate the purchasing process and reduce potential risks and develop practical plans. As for expectation, it is seen as the continuous review of pre-set plans and their improvement or change if necessary. Planning and expectation are very important factors in the processes. Warehousing, distribution, and handling of goods are also integral parts of regular operations, where proper planning and forecasting reduces financial and operational risks and increases effectiveness and promotes awareness of operational needs.
- 2- **Procurement:** Procurement is the process of identifying and obtaining goods and services. It includes sourcing and purchasing items to cover all activities, starting from identifying potential suppliers and providing services to beneficiaries. Procurement is a major activity in the logistics process, as it can significantly affect the overall success of an emergency response process depending on how it is managed. As the supply chain in humanitarian organizations acquires a very large percentage of the total project expenditure, it must be managed effectively to achieve the finest value.
- 3- **Warehouse management:** Warehouses are defined as an organized space for storing and dealing with goods and materials. Warehouses are considered a major component of the supply chain in emergency situations, especially if they were well-managed and properly stored within. This allows materials to be provided properly when needed. Also, documenting key processes related to managing stocks contributes to improving project planning/expectation and overall project management. Similarly, it greatly facilitates reporting for donors and auditors.
- 4- **Distribution:** In most cases, the project manager is responsible for developing the distribution plan, which is consistent with the project objectives and timetables. This plan requires necessary information from the financial and logistic department to ensure its feasibility as well as the existence of a common understanding among all departments within the organization about its goals.

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- 5- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Monitoring in the logistical work is known as a review on an ongoing basis until the completion of the logistical activities and the achievement of objectives. This allows corrective actions to be taken in a timely manner. As for the evaluation, it can be defined as analyzing the progress made towards the set and accomplished goals. This could be done on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis. Evaluation provides insight into future plans and an opportunity to learn and improve performance. Since the logistical support function in NGOs was designed to increase the efficiency of services, monitoring had to be put in place to control strengths and weaknesses to continuously improve performance, reduce risk and enhance response to the needs of affected groups.

Humanitarian logistics challenges:

- Lack of professional staff, as the majority of employees who bear logistical responsibilities, have not received specialized training in logistical work. In light of the local and international business expansion in NGOs, organizations are making a remarkable effort to recruit employees who can manage complex supply chains.
- Logistics is perceived only as a secondary job and is not linked to the various departments and programs within NGOs, while, the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance in emergency and crisis situations depends solely on logistical capabilities.
- Funding short-term aid projects instead of investing in an effective job structure within NGOs to improve their performance and functioning during crises and emergencies.

Recommendations for developing logistical work within NGOs:

- Establishing a logistical work specialized unit within NGOs and linking it with strategic plans and organizational structures.
- Training employees involved with logistical tasks, as most of them have not received training in regards of their work and expected responsibilities. The success of logistical work within NGOs, especially in times of emergency, depends on logistical staff, and therefore they must be trained to work professionally across all different sectors.
- Learning from current and past experiences, including international ones, to improve future performance.
- Coordinating supply needs with all programs, projects, and divisions within NGOs and develop practical plans to identify the most urgent needs of the most affected groups.

Conclusion:

Humanitarian logistics creates an opportunity to increase its contributions to disaster relief. Those contributions can be recognized by undertaking initiatives in areas like information and knowledge management and performance measurement, especially that the transportation of aid materials to crisis sites will remain always a key role for logistics as well as providing timely information that improves providing services to those affected by various crises.



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