

Logistics

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Introduction

Logistics is a diverse and dynamic function that is flexible and changes according to the various constraints and demands imposed upon it. There is, realistically, no precise name or definition that can be universally applied because products, organisations and systems differ.

Many terms are therefore used interchangeably, in literature and in the humanitarian world. One quite frequently accepted view in the humanitarian sector is: **Logistics = Supply + Materials Management + Distribution.**

Logistics is concerned with physical material and information flows from raw material through to the final destination of the finished product. Major emphasis is now placed on the importance of information as well as physical flows, and an additional and very relevant factor is that of reverse logistics – the flow of products and packaging back through the system.

There is often confusion between “logistics” and “supply chain management”. Logistics is one activity of the end-to-end process of supply chain management. On the other hand, “Supply Chain Management deals with the management of materials, information, and financial flows in a network consisting of suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and customers.” Prof. HauLee -Stanford Supply Chain Forum. Thus, while supply chain management has a rather narrow and specific role, logistics is more varied and difficult to constrain to a single role. However, for the purpose of clarity, the LOG will adapt the logistics definition provided by Thomas and Nizushima, “The process of planning, implementing and controlling the efficient, cost-effective flow and storage of goods and materials as well as related information, from the point of origin to the point of consumption for the purpose of meeting the end beneficiary’s requirements.”¹

Commercial Logistics versus Humanitarian Logistics

Business logistics and commercial supply chains are sophisticated operations based on forecast demand, inventory control and a number of models that optimise a dynamic and fast moving system. Humanitarian supply chains are essentially the same but with the following significant differences:

- unpredictable demand in terms of timing, geographic location, type of commodity, quantity of commodity;
- short lead time and suddenness of demand for large amounts of a wide variety of products and services;
- high humanitarian stakes regarding timelines in the face of a sophisticated global media and the high anticipatory attention of the donors;
- lack of initial resources in terms of supply, [human resource](#), technology, capacity and funding.

The LOG and the Humanitarian Supply Chain

The various elements in the humanitarian supply chain, ranging from assessment right through distribution to monitoring and evaluation, are represented as main topics in the LOG highlighting “best practices” in terms of information, templates, tools and standard procedures.



References;

1. *Logistics training: Necessity or Luxury?* (Forced Migration Review, no 22, Jan. 2005)
2. Balcik and Beamon, 2008

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PNG File LOG-1-1-Logistics-Humanitarian Supply Chain-Diagram_large.png

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