

Fritz Institute

Logistics training: necessity or luxury?

by Anisya Thomas and Mitsuko Mizushima

"I believe that creating specific and standard training modules geared towards humanitarian logistics will greatly enhance the quality of the programmes as well as promote a higher perception of a logistician's role in general. This consequently helps us achieve the overall goal of humanitarian aid."

[a senior logistician]

As we work with humanitarian logisticians around the world, a refrain that we hear over and over is that there is a lack of professionalisation of the logistics function. There are several reasons for this. A lack of recognition of logistics by programme staff and senior management in organisations means that logisticians are rarely included in the planning stages of a humanitarian response. Thus the voice of logisticians is absent, and programme staff are often oblivious of logistical costs and challenges. Since most funding is for direct relief, these infrastructure or support services receive minimal resources for development between operations. In the field, short-term contracts translate into very high turnover among logisticians, limiting institutional knowledge and learning. The cumulative result of all of these factors is that the function of logistics often remains isolated from finance, emergency response, information technology and management, leading to the sub-optimisation of operational efficiency and effectiveness.

The benefits of professional logistics

In our conversations and convenings, we ask logisticians from global, national and regional organisations about their aspirations – for themselves and their function. It is not surprising that their response calls for a knowledge-based field with a clear career track, collaboration with peers across organisations and the ability to demonstrate the value of logistics with unambiguous measures and metrics that tie in with

organisational strategy. It is also clear to the community of logisticians with whom we collaborate that progressive training and, eventually, a standardised, externally-recognised certification programme are what is needed to create a marketplace of respected professionals able to meet the requirements of different organisations.

The benefits of a comprehensive, sector-specific logistics training and certification programme are numerous, including:

- cost-effective delivery and increased efficiency substantiated by reliable metrics
- improved communication and cooperation across agencies and with donors as a result of standardised catalogues, terminology and processes
- increased career mobility and job satisfaction for logisticians in the humanitarian sector
- a pool of trained logisticians whose skills have been externally verified, providing agencies and donors with greater hiring flexibility and options

Step 1: Identifying scope and mechanics

At the 2004 Humanitarian Logistics Conference, the community of logisticians decided that they were interested in systematically exploring the path to a sector-wide training and certification programme. In response to this, Fritz Institute established an advisory committee on humanitarian logistics training and certification that included senior logistics representatives from the UN's World Food Programme, UNICEF, UNHCR, Oxfam UK, Médecins Sans Frontières Holland, Erasmus University and the private sector. This group resolved to understand existing training approaches available to humanitarian logisticians both within their

organisations and from external sources like universities and training institutes.

Since the sector does not even agree on a common definition of logistics, this was the first step. After significant deliberation and discussion, humanitarian logistics was preliminarily defined as "the process of planning, implementing and controlling the efficient, cost-effective flow and storage of goods and materials, as well as related information, from point of origin to point of consumption for the purpose of meeting the end beneficiary's requirements."

When asked about the tasks that fall under the broad umbrella of humanitarian logistics, over 80% of the respondents included the tasks of: preparedness, planning, procurement, transport, warehousing, tracking and tracing and customs clearance.

Step 2: Surveying the field

Fritz Institute in conjunction with Erasmus University and APICS, a widely-recognised training and certification body for commercial logistics, conducted a survey of approximately 300 humanitarian logisticians at the field, regional and headquarters levels of major humanitarian organisations. The purpose was to identify the providers of logistics training in the humanitarian sector, explore whether any training programmes currently existed that covered all of the functions and list the training methods used in various organisations.

Respondents to the survey (30% response rate/92 respondents) represented a wide variety of organisations including: ADRA, American Red Cross, CRS, DFID, MSF (Holland and France), ICRC, IFRC, IMC, IRC, WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF. Approximately 50% of respondents worked at head-

quarters, 40% at regional level and 10% at field level.

Over 90% of the respondents indicated that they felt training was directly linked to performance on the job and that standardised training would be useful to the field. However, only 73% of the respondents had access to any logistics training with 27% indicating no such access. For those with access, training was most often provided by co-workers on the job or by in-house training staff. However, respondents noted that job training within organisations tended to be non-standardised, the content largely dependent on who the trainer happened to be.

Outside the sector, several institutes (e.g. Bioforce and University of Wisconsin) and universities (e.g. University of Geneva, Pennsylvania State University and Cranfield University) provide training in logistics and supply chain management for commercial needs. Although there are workshops to address specific needs, there is no organisation that provides comprehensive, systematic and standardised training in humanitarian logistics.

Particularly interesting were the responses to the open-ended question on perceived gaps in logistics training. It is clear that as a sector there is a longing for more systematic and standardised training. The majority of respondents felt that taking training a step further to the certification realm and setting community-wide skills standards would professionalise the field, provide quality assurance, facilitate consistency of service and be helpful in decision criteria for recruitment. Therefore it was not surprising that respondents were frustrated by factors such as lack of consistency in training, lack of ways to measure the effectiveness of training, lack of funding for training and lack of specific training in humanitarian logistics. Suggestions for improving existing training included collaboration with local universities, associations and training institutes.

Step 3: Looking to the future

At the 2005 Humanitarian Logistics Conference to be held in Geneva in January, these results will be presented to the community of logisticians and possible next steps to the training and certification track will

be discussed. It is clear that humanitarian logisticians are serious about demonstrating the value of logistics to their senior management and programme staff and are looking for the vocabulary and tools to bridge this important divide. Effective logistics is vital for effective relief - and training will be critical to effective logistics.

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Fritz Institute brings private sector experts to enhance the performance of humanitarian organisations. These services are offered free of charge. For more information, please contact Anisya.Thomas@fritzinstitute.org.

WFP all-terrain trucks stuck on road from El Obeid in central Sudan to el Fasher, capital of North Darfur.



WFP/Richard Lee

Logistical challenges: WFP in Darfur & Chad

With over one million IDPs needing food aid in camps scattered across an area the size of France with minimal infrastructure, Darfur has always represented a tough logistics challenge for the World Food Programme (WFP). In recent months escalating violence has made it even more difficult. Large pockets of Darfur are closed to UN agencies as 'no-go' areas, making it impossible for food and other assistance to be provided. The situation is acute in the mountainous Jebel Marra area, where the three Darfur states meet, and in remote northern stretches of North Darfur. Meanwhile, the nutritional status of many IDPs and residents is cause for serious concern. A WFP-led food security and nutrition survey [www.wfp.org/index.asp?section=2] found that 22% of IDPs under the age of five were acutely malnourished and almost half of all families in the region did not have enough food to eat. As many as 2.5 million beneficiaries may need approximately 440,000 tons of food assistance next year. A poor harvest and locust swarms have further exacerbated the situation.

Refugees from the Darfur region continue to spill over the border into neighbouring Chad. The inhabitants of this barren, remote region have been remarkably willing to share their meagre, but dwindling, resources. In October WFP increased its appeal for the Chad operation to US\$61.4 million from US\$42.3 million, in part to increase its assistance to the local population. The new budget, extending the operation to June 2005, calls for assisting 250,000 people - 225,000 refugees and 25,000 local residents. Delivering food aid to a quarter of a million people anywhere in the world is challenging enough. Chad's poor roads, landlocked position and precarious security conditions make it all the tougher. Thanks to an agreement signed between WFP and the government of Libya, WFP is now able to deliver hundreds of extra tons of food per month to eastern Chad via Libya - involving a spectacular but grueling trek through the Libyan desert.

In October WFP added a second aircraft to its humanitarian air service in Chad. The two 18-seater planes travel from the capital, N'djamena, to several points in eastern Chad at least five times per week. The flight (free of charge to humanitarian personnel) of under two hours saves aid workers a 950-km drive on unpaved, treacherous roads that can take up to two days.

For more information about WFP's operations in Darfur and Chad, see www.wfp.org/crisis/darfur/