EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN LOGISTICS: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LAST DECADE

ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the tsunami that swept the Indian Ocean in 2004, humanitarian action faced serious criticism regarding its effectiveness, efficiency and even its relevance. Humanitarian logistics - considered as one of the driving forces of international aid - did not escape this criticism. On the contrary, demands were immediately issued for it to become better-coordinated and more professional in order to improve the response to future emergencies. A number of players have since shown an interest in this area which, until then, had remained mostly neglected, in an effort to try and guide the transformation process of humanitarian logistics.

Ten years on, and despite a proliferation of transformation initiatives along the lines mentioned above, it is sadly difficult to report a positive outcome from these endeavors. Humanitarian logistics has in fact been taken in a direction that seems to be increasingly removed from the real needs of emergency operations. More recent catastrophes in countries with a meager response capacity, such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, have highlighted on-going problems with reactivity and have once again brought into question the operational relevance of humanitarian organizations. Similar observations apply to epidemic situations, food crises or conflict settings that have raged during this period. Taking a current example, the shortage of independent humanitarian activities being carried out today in Syria or during the Ebola outbreak in Western Africa – despite the magnitude of these two crises¹ – raises some worrying questions. There is no doubt that the difficulties that international organizations encounter in providing logistical solutions in this type of environment hold part of the answer to these questions.

It is clear that this negative outcome, i.e. the failure to bring about the promised and expected changes in the last ten years, has mainly – if not exclusively – been caused by a fundamental misunderstanding of operational realities in the field, with little consideration for the finer requirements of emergency humanitarian logistics (EHL). By repeatedly trying to apply existing models – mainly issuing from the private sector – to what is a very unique domain with very unique demands, these attempts very quickly became missed opportunities and systematically failed to produce the highly anticipated improvement in emergency humanitarian response. Today, international humanitarian organizations are facing very important challenges in particular when it comes to vocational training, procurement and logistics innovations where serious challenges need to be addressed.

The process of professionalization of EHL must no longer be conceived from the perspective of academic theory alone but rather through shared field expertise around a common understanding of agile and ephemeral logistical services able to rapidly adapt to an unpredictable, volatile and often hostile operating environment. It also requires from all relief actors, whoever they may be, a genuinely disinterested engagement where the humanitarian needs of the victims come first, before any other political or business issues. With these principles in mind, and taking into account the gradually increasing complexity of the operating environment, EHL good practices and feedback from the field should form the foundation of any models for improvement coming from think tanks, and not the other way round. Contrary to what one hears so often - humanitarian logistics is not fifteen years behind its private sector counterpart. These two areas simply cannot be compared to each other answering, as they do, to very different sets of requirements.

¹ The Ebola outbreak that started in Guinea in March 2014 is the most severe epidemic since the first appearance of this hemorrhagic fever in 1976
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1- FOREWORD FOR NON INSIDERS

To properly understand the analysis presented in this document, it is necessary to keep in mind three important concepts that are regularly interpreted in very different ways, including by humanitarian professionals, namely the definitions of (i) an emergency situation, (ii) what constitutes humanitarian logistics, and (iii) the humanitarian supply chain.

1.1 DEFINITION OF HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

"Emergency medicine is born with the idea of its projection outside the hospital walls: not to bring injured persons to the hospital but the hospital to them." Emergency humanitarian operations are based on a similar concept, taking assistance to peoples in danger who are facing the immediate threat of high morbidity / mortality risks in the very near term. These situations are usually triggered by armed conflicts, natural disasters or epidemics including acute food crises, and require emergency intervention (interventions by “default”). Within just a few months, most of these situations will have moved into a post-emergency phase requiring a more dedicated response based on rehabilitation or reconstruction works (interventions "by choice"). In order to raise more funds, some humanitarian players or disaster affected governments may tend to exaggerate a crisis situation and describe it as more urgent than it actually is. In fact, the vast majority of humanitarian responses are taking place outside of real emergency situations. According to Rauny Brauman, - former President of Médecins Sans Frontières – armed conflicts cause three to five times more wounded than they do deaths, whereas natural disasters lead to more deaths than injuries, most of them light, requiring relatively simple care. Although natural disasters usually strike a clearly defined territory for a very short time, creating homeless populations in the affected areas, war situations often affect entire regions for years, leading to the uprooting of large groups of the most affected population and a more acute vulnerability to malnutrition and the outbreak of epidemics.

However, humanitarian risks related to emergency situations remains something difficult to anticipate. For political reasons, governments that are affected by a crisis are sometimes understating the obvious risks, most of the time when it comes to epidemics.

1.2 DEFINITION OF HUMANITARIAN LOGISTICS

Although there are often similarities between different forms of humanitarian intervention (any two interventions may contain some similar elements), it is equally true that because the precise structural organization of any humanitarian response is so fundamentally influenced by the operating environment in which it is required, there are as many possible definitions of humanitarian logistics as there are humanitarian programs (this is also referred to "ad-hoc logistics"). For the author, humanitarian logistics is best defined as a support activity to humanitarian operations, also called Support Logistics. This is in sharp contrast to a Logistics of Flow emanating from the private sector. Initially inspired by military operations, but nowadays also influenced by developments in other sectors such as aeronautics, energy and other industries, support logistics - when applied to humanitarian emergencies - describes the organization of all the resources that are required to deploy, maintain and supply emergency programs in acute crisis. In that respect, EHL performance is primarily defined by the objectives of rapid deployment and reliable solutions (e.g. reliability of suppliers, maintainability of equipment, safety of the facilities, transportability). The above-mentioned goals generally prevail over other secondary objectives such as cost control for procurement or stock inventory.

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2 Penser dans l’urgence - Rony Brauman – Seuil
3 See outbreak alerts launched in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, or the exaggerated number of typhoon victims reported few weeks after the Philippines Typhon in Philippines (Nov. 2013)
4 R. Brauman – Global Media and the Myths of Humanitarian Relief – Nov. 2006
5 In April 2014, some humanitarian organizations warned about the risk of an unparalleled Ebola epidemic, a position that was then thought to be excessively ‘alarmist’ by some affected countries, including the World Health Organization which at that time refused to entertain the idea of ‘unprecedented epidemic’.
6 For Y. Pimor and M. Fender, the logistics of flow is mainly dedicated to transports, warehousing and - in extension - to the regulation of supply flows, production and distribution.
In order to ensure a deployment force that is both agile and reliable, humanitarian organizations active in most emergency situations rely on multi-skilled logisticians able to provide adapted solutions for each new emergency situation (e.g. some logisticians were requested to set-up field hospitals in Tacloban - Philippines in 2013; to provide water supply for Sudanese refugee camps - Maban region in 2012; to build cholera treatment units in Port au Prince - Haiti late 2010; or feeding centers in Oromyia - Ethiopia in 2008, etc.).

Despite the fundamentally unique nature of humanitarian logistics, certain theories aiming to bring it in line with logistics templates emanating from the private sector or - more rarely - from military logistics models, have led to an inappropriate over-simplification, which has distanced it from the reality of operations in the field. This trend towards over-simplified logistics very quickly reduces the field of humanitarian logistics to nothing more than a humanitarian supply chain where, in reality, the supply chain is just one part – albeit an important one – of the whole.

1.3 DEFINITION OF HUMANITARIAN SUPPLY CHAIN

The humanitarian supply chain (HSC) is an essential component of humanitarian logistics that includes a large range of services from ordering / forecasting, procurement, kit production and warehousing to shipping and import/export of relief items and emergency kits. HSC’s primary goal should not be - as it is sometimes thought⁷ - to respond to the needs of beneficiaries, but to satisfy orders issued by internal user departments, the vast majority of them coming from programmatic departments (medical, nutritional, WASH⁸,...). This is why a humanitarian logistician is usually (and thankfully) not responsible for the identification of humanitarian needs, the definition of the type and quality of relief products to be ordered (except for orders for support activities), neither for the clarification of the final destination and timing of delivery.

The international supply of emergency operations is generally based on push strategies with air shipments of emergency kits from pre-positioned stockpiles to a delivery point near the disaster area, or to a staging area. An emergency kit brings together articles and modules that are necessary to rapidly support a certain number of victims who are facing a specific crisis situation (e.g. Ebola kit, vaccination kit, hospital kit).

2- FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The author’s aims is to analyze EHL using a different approach from that currently adopted in conferences on the subject, in recent literature or by think tanks related to humanitarian operations. More oriented by the results of humanitarian responses in the field, he takes a ten year retrospective and critical look at the realities of logistics support devoted to international relief actions in emergency situations during this period. This analysis has been formulated in the aftermath of the humanitarian assistance interventions he has been following over the last decade, including:

- **Natural disasters** in Pakistan (earthquake - 2005), Myanmar (Cyclone - 2008), Haiti (earthquake in 2010);
- **Epidemic situations**, whether hemorrhagic fever (Marburg, Angola – 2005, Ebola outbreak, Western Africa - 2014) or cholera (Haiti from 2010);
- **Food crises** (Ethiopia - 2008, horn of Africa - 2010);
- **Conflicts settings**, temporary (Lebanon, 2006 – Gaza 2009 and 2014 – Libya, 2011) as well as more chronic such as Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, DRC, and now also including the Syrian conflict.

This paper is also based on discussions with representatives from more than a hundred humanitarian organizations, whether they are independent NGOs (Save the Children, Oxfam, Concern, ACF, etc.), mandated organizations (UN agencies, IOM, ICRC, IFRC, etc.), academic groups (INSEAD, Bioforce, Humlog, etc.), government agencies (French Crisis Centre, B-Fast, MSB, THW, etc.), or private companies involved in relief action (DHL, UPS, K & N, Maersk, etc.). Some of

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⁷See definition Thomas and Mizushima (2005)
⁸Water, Hygiene and Sanitation
These exchanges have also been fueled by sharing points of view with institutional donors such as ECHO, DFID, and USAID.

This paper’s ultimate aim is to highlight the **main challenges and needs** of this unique and misunderstood field of activity, the importance of which warrants greater investment moving forward. High priority investments are also proposed with a view to facilitating the process of professionalization of humanitarian logistics by placing the unique characteristics of the domain and its most experienced field practitioners at the heart of the process.

### 3- CRITICAL LOOK AT HUMANITARIAN LOGISTICS

#### 3.1 START OF A LARGE UPEVAL

Anyone analyzing the matter from an historical perspective will notice that the tsunami in the Indian Ocean ten years ago caused an upheaval that went beyond its destructive effects on the affected populations. One of the indirect but nonetheless tangible consequences of this disaster was undoubtedly the wave of criticism that was subsequently aimed at international humanitarian action: the delay in the relief operations, the lack of humanitarian coordination, the mobilization of inappropriate donations, the use of unskilled aid workers and the misuse of relief goods, just to name a few of the commonly vocalized criticisms. These formed what has since been referred to by the people in the sector as the “second wave” in the wake of the tsunami. This failure of humanitarian efforts also shocked public opinion causing an ensuing climate of distrust from donors.

Whether true or not (it remains moot whether any humanitarian efforts, however efficient and effective, could have adequately limited the devastating effect of such a sudden, violent and widespread catastrophe as the 2004 tsunami), the a posteriori analysis of ‘where it all went wrong’ has concluded that the weakness of humanitarian logistics was the **main contributor to this chaos** given its role as the driving force of any emergency operation conducted in this type of situation. Being, as it is, responsible for the deployment, installation, maintenance and supply of emergency programs, humanitarian logistics services must be able to respond to the need for agility, efficiency and safety in any situation, however complex and changeable the context of the intervention.

This wave of criticism and the subsequent questions that were asked would be at the heart of a profound transformation of humanitarian logistics that was suddenly cast in a new light following this disaster, with a whole new set of objectives and requirements. As one of the **heaviest financial components** of humanitarian operations - sometimes over 80 percent of its expenditure - humanitarian logistics was told to promptly change in order **to be more professional**. It was generally accepted that this professionalization process must necessarily come about (i) by mimicking logistical models from the private sector which were perceived as far more efficient and effective than their humanitarian counterparts, and (ii) by subscribing and implementing the **global movement for coordination** driven by the Humanitarian Reform in 2005, under United Nations leadership.

Ten years have passed since the Indian Ocean tsunami occurred. So where are we? Can we say today that the forced transformation of humanitarian logistics initiated in 2004 has contributed to an improved response to humanitarian crises? Where the actual assistance provided to populations in danger has become more relevant, more effective and/or more efficient than before 2004? Sadly, the answer to this question is not at all certain, even if the path that the reform process has taken was paved with good intentions.

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10. Long & Wood – 1995 - about food logistics
3.2 THE NEW FACE OF HUMANITARIAN LOGISTICS

The period of profound questioning born after the 2004 tsunami was the trigger for a large remodeling process for humanitarian logistics divided into three distinct stages: clusterization, privatization, and the theorization of a new and high performance logistics solution.

3.2.1 Clusterization of humanitarian logistics This reform was aimed primarily at "building an efficient and predictable humanitarian system", based on the improved identification of needs in emergency situations. Among the main pillars supporting the reform, the establishment of sectorial clusters (health, nutrition, shelter, logistics, etc.), and the strengthening of global partnerships between humanitarian stakeholders were identified as a priority. For the logistics cluster, two additional, more specific objectives were included in the initial cluster mandate: in addition to the usual coordination work, the logistics cluster was deemed responsible for providing logistics services to humanitarian actors in case of common needs for transportation and storage. The World Food Programme (WFP), as the Logistics Cluster leader, was made responsible for providing these services as a last resort. In addition, the work initiated in 2002 by the UN Joint Logistics Coordination (also within WFP) to develop interagency synergies and partnerships, was used as a trampoline by the Global Logistics Cluster to further draw common strategies with stakeholders from the private and academic sectors. WFP’s logistics – often regarded as the logistics reference in the humanitarian world – has meanwhile continued to provide air transport services (UNHAS) and later warehousing capacity (UNHRD)\(^ {12} \) to the humanitarian community.

3.2.2 Privatization of humanitarian logistics In addition to essential coordination issues, a general lack of professionalism within humanitarian logistics operations was also blamed for the failing of 2004. A few months after the tsunami, Lynn C. Fritz - former president of one of the largest logistics companies in the world - decided for the first time to gather together logistics directors from major humanitarian agencies, donors, academics and professionals from the private sector at a conference in Geneva. This led to the creation of a network of logistics practitioners involved in humanitarian action (the Humanitarian Logistics Association - HLA). The creation of this network was used as a springboard for other similar types of initiatives pursuing the same objectives\(^ {13} \), i.e. to adapt best practices from the private sector to the context of humanitarian assistance in order to render it more efficient. This is also the period when major private companies involved in the logistics business were consolidating their Corporate Social Responsibility policies (CSR) in the area of international solidarity (Maersk, DHL, Kuhne & Nagel, etc.), leading to some humanitarian organizations deciding to develop a higher level of cooperation with these private companies, subcontracting all or part of their supply services to private groups (WFP with TNT, Care with UPS, etc.).

3.2.3 Theorization of humanitarian logistics EHL is a field that is only 30-years in the making. It was designed in the 1980s to support emergency operations, focusing primarily on assistance to displaced and refugee populations. In reaction to increasing tensions and proxy confrontations generated by the Cold War, many humanitarian organizations decided to provide large-scale assistance to people fleeing mass repression from socialist or communist regimes\(^ {14} \). During this mobilization, we witnessed a remarkable increase of volunteers who wanted to engage in humanitarian action\(^ {15} \), in addition to rising demands for medication, relief equipment and other essential items dedicated to emergency operations conducted in remote areas. Logistics suddenly became an indispensable part of humanitarian action and ‘grew up’ in a period of three decades, trying to adapt to the increasing complexity of operations aiming at assisting victims of acute crises. However, despite its strong growth, humanitarian logistics had - until 2004 - received little attention from the academic world.

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\(^ {12} \)UNHAS (United Nations Humanitarian Air Service): air transport services (passenger + cargo) for humanitarian community (350.000 pax in 2010).

\(^ {13} \)\(^ {14} \)Kühne Logistics Conference in Hamburg, Aidex in Brussels, DIHAD in Dubai, etc.

\(^ {15} \)Since the end of 80s', the refugee population in the world has raised to about 15 Mo, while UNHCR only recorded 2.8 Mo in 1975 (See ‘50 years of humanitarian action – UNHCR – 2000)

\(^ {15} \)E.g. ICRC international staff has switched from 340 collaborators in 1971 to 5.200 in the late 1980s
To cope with this gap some NGOs developed short training courses and published guidelines on EHL good practices in order to provide basic and multi-skilled knowledge to logisticians leaving for the field\textsuperscript{16}. The above-mentioned movement of professionalization became an opportunity to develop shared reflections on humanitarian logistics: the EHL identity, its role, the related limitations, etc. Many discussion platforms and literature then emerged under the direction of research centers that were interested in that topic (Georgia Tech, Humlog, INSEAD, Rensselaer, etc.). In parallel to existing training programs offered since 1983 by the Bioforce Institute in Lyon, new academic courses in humanitarian logistics management emerged (for example Master HLM\textsuperscript{17} of the University of Lugano, MIT Zaragoza). This movement towards increased theorization gave birth to logistic certifications aiming at facilitating career developments for humanitarian logisticians, as well as a wider recognition of their skills (e.g. Humanitarian Logistics Certification - CHL - created in September 2006 by the Fritz Institute).

3.3 THE LIMITATIONS OF SIMPLIFIED, ONE-WAY LOGISTICS

Despite all these efforts, the movement towards the professionalization of humanitarian logistics that was foreseen ten years ago looks today more like a missed opportunity than the anticipated creation of an overhauled and radically improved support mechanism for international relief efforts. It is clear today that the logistics efforts developed in response to the major post-2004 humanitarian crises - natural or man-made - have not shown the expected improvements. Several concomitant factors, described below, help contribute to an understanding of the reasons for this disappointing outcome:

3.3.1 A common pattern under United Nations influence

When listening to many actors involved in this domain, the clusterization of humanitarian logistics would seem to have been a success. Transport and warehousing services provided by the Logistics Cluster - mostly free of charge in an emergency - have helped a multitude of organizations achieve an operational capacity they did not have before 2005. The implementation of this inter-agency coordination was supported in its early years by donors, who – in looking for a simplification of their funding mechanisms – reduced the number of interlocutors that had to deal with (as well as the number of contracts to manage). Despite the satisfaction displayed by many protagonists and a number of users however, the logistics coordination - launched in the aftermath of the earthquake in Kashmir in October 2005 - raises a number of questions:

- The free services and the re-allocation of funds to the cluster initially dedicated to NGOs' logistics have greatly increased these NGO's degree of dependence – which was already high - on UN agencies. The negative consequences of this dependence are particularly measurable in certain conflict zones where UN agencies operations are sometimes limited because of their mandate and / or internal security restrictions. By losing access to all logistics services provided by the Cluster – as was the case in 2011 with civilian wars in Libya and Syria – we observe a reduced presence of international humanitarian actors and a very slow deployment of their intervention. As a result organizations that are logistically independent are often left alone to operate in these sensitive areas. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and MSF’s decision to stand as observers, and not users, of the cluster system has ultimately proved to not only be a position of principle but a fundamental strategic choice as well. By way of example, during the relief mobilization in Pakistan in 2010 following flooding in the north of the country, integrated missions of the United Nations - combining political, military and humanitarian responses in some contexts – put NGOs in a difficult situation as they wished to distance themselves from the Logistics Cluster but no longer had the capacity to quickly set up parallel and independent logistics services.

- The Logistics Cluster under WFP's logistics influence is focusing on transport and storage for a limited number of products that are - for the most part - thermo-resistant. The growing part of the “Cash and Vouchers” activities that correspond to bank transfers organized by WFP may further accentuate this reality\textsuperscript{18}. As a consequence, logistics services provided by the Cluster are often adapted to food programs but are not really appropriate for other types of emergency operations. The limited support capacity of the Logistics Cluster is one of the main explanations behind the

\textsuperscript{16}E.g. Creation of MSF training centers in 1999 in France and 2008 in Belgium
\textsuperscript{17}Humanitarian & Logistics Management
\textsuperscript{18}By 2015, WFP expects almost a third of its assistance programmes to be delivered in the form of cash, vouchers and new kinds of “digital food”.

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lack of actors involved in the cholera epidemic in Haiti during the peak period of the outbreak from October 2010 and March 2011 and the Ebola outbreak in West-Africa (spring/summer 2014) despite a massive presence of international organizations in the affected countries at the time of the crises. Understandably, international humanitarian agencies are tending to focus their operational priorities on programs that will be logistically supportable by the United Nations. This tendency for developing relief programs that are more easily implementable is even more obvious in some aid agencies with strong financial dependence to institutional donors who are increasingly demanding in terms of achieved objectives. To meet this demand, relief organizations will naturally be reluctant to engage in emergency programs that are more sophisticated and logistically more complicated to support such as emergency health programs. Even if the deficit of medical aid emanating from this reluctance is not a new process, it is clear that it has accelerated since 2005 with little investment dedicated to healthcare provision to wounded and sick people in emergency situation.

- Finally, in order to respond to large-scale natural disasters generally requiring rapid and massive fund raising efforts, the logistics cluster will focus on coordination and support of hundreds of aid agencies that are mostly devoid of logistics capacity. The response to the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 showed the limits of the too-inclusive approach of the Cluster system, resulting in a reportedly minimal operational impact. Some experts believe that 80 percent of the aid that was provided in the first months after the seis was generated by the most important humanitarian organizations (representing about 20 percent of the actors) who did not need the Logistics Cluster to operate. When the affected State is still in control of the situation, as was the case in Myanmar (Cyclone Nargis), China (Sichuan earthquake) in 2008, and especially in Syria in regime held areas, we often observe a State-forced inter-agency coordination. This forced coordination certainly facilitates the inter-agency logistics organization, but also creates a real impediment to independent humanitarian action with some past evidence of diversion of the humanitarian assistance (targeted/limited choice of beneficiary populations, blocked access to certain areas, some emergency products not authorized for distribution, etc.). When this aid manipulation is perpetrated by a member State of the United Nations, it is understandably very difficult for the UN agencies - as mandated intergovernmental organizations - to publically denounce such abuses.

3.3.2 Non adapted commercial models

Whatever the motivations of private companies in humanitarian action - re-positioning of branding through non-commercial action, willingness to 'boost employee motivation', looking for short term profits - their commitment to the cause is not something new. However, the pressure to professionalize humanitarian logistics gave the private sector - mainly large international forwarding companies - an opportunity to move from a puntual pro bono or at-cost support level of involvement, to a higher level of involvement in humanitarian logistics through a provision of expertise and long-term partnerships. However, this development of adapting private models to humanitarian logistics has left out – whether voluntarily or not - two essential elements:

- The first element is the multidisciplinary aspect of EHL that goes far beyond simple transport and storage of goods. To ensure a high level of responsiveness and operational agility, logistics services from independent humanitarian agencies are usually organized on the army’s models. This integrated logistics support (ILS) model includes the transport management of relief teams and their materiel, installation / maintenance of working stations and team-life accommodation, its supply system, and the definition of networks and telecommunication settings to guarantee safer operations. It also ensures technical solutions to support hospital activities, EHA programs, assistance to displaced/homeless populations, outbreak response, etc. in remote areas that are deprived of reliable infrastructures and suppliers. With the exception of humanitarian and military organizations, there is a very limited number of private companies able to provide this form of integrated logistics support. During their increasing contribution to humanitarian efforts, large private groups have logically applied their usual business models based on flow management without realizing there were not compatible with the majority of humanitarian realities.

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19Nepalese battalion from peace keeping troops in Haiti has been recognized at the origin of the cholera outbreak in the beginning of Oct. 2010, causing the contamination of 685,000 pers. and the death of 7,550.
20Since 2005, the ECHO annual budget for health programs has hardly expended over 17%.
21Inter-agency Real-Time Evaluation in Haiti – 2010 – GPPI/URD
22Humanitarian working from Damascus are forced to collaborate with the SARC (Syrian Arabic Red Crescent) and have little input in the final allocation of the relief distribution
23During the 2004 tsunami, some air transporters multiplied their shipping cost by six
- The second element – essential but often forgotten in the professional logistics process – is linked to the unique characteristic of EHL and humanitarian operations which are generally undertaken in isolated environments, with:

- volatile, sudden and unpredictable demand;
- an exceptionally high level of criticality (e.g. with possible dramatic consequences in case of a stock shortage or any other failure);
- uncertain (lack of reliable infrastructures, prevailing insecurity, etc.) and short-term deployment (usually one to three months);
- limited resources (high HR turnover, low subcontracting capacity, technological deficiencies, etc.);
- important levels of risk-taking (highly insecure environment, some actions developed on the fringe of legality\(^24\), potential of high financial loss, etc.);
- the necessity to operate according to a non-business driven approach\(^25\).

In contexts similar to those described above, emergency responses require a significant expenditure on the mobilization of material resources (emergency stocks) and human resources (emergency teams) that private companies are generally not willing to support. For this reason, many experts have agreed over the past few years that forecast and supply chain models that are very efficient for industry, or large distribution markets, rarely apply to the reality of humanitarian emergencies. For reasons of media-visibility and security constraints, the contribution of the private sector to humanitarian efforts generally focuses on short-term interventions, usually dedicated to natural disasters, even though these represent only a small part of humanitarian crises\(^26\) with relatively limited impact on affected populations.

### 3.3.3 The incestuous circle of logistics academia

The academic world is a window onto current trends. Regarding the process of simplification and the search for profitability in the humanitarian milieu, research centers and other academic institutes that are interested in EHL have on the whole all followed the trend, at the risk of fuelling it sometimes. Since 2004, intense discussions have been conducted in several academic forums by professors, PhD students, academic researchers, etc. setting out in great detail the failures of humanitarian logistics and urging humanitarian organizations to apply private models that they themselves have been teaching and advocating for a long time. This sudden interest in the field demonstrated by academic institutions was of course expected but also genuinely desired by EHL practitioners in order to improve understanding of a domain that remained largely misunderstood and unappreciated from the outside and often neglected by the management teams of humanitarian organizations themselves. Unfortunately, many of the publications that have been produced in this context (articles, books, theses, etc.) are too far removed in their application from EHL as it is actually lived and organized in the field. Several factors may explain this failure:

- Probably due to a lack of resources, most of the studies on humanitarian logistics have been conducted by people who have little or no experience in the humanitarian field, causing there to be recurrent mistakes in how EHL is represented.

- Certainly because of time constraints, these studies usually refer to one or two types of organizations generating significant logistical volumes (e.g. WFP and/or the Federation of the Red Cross). The more complex reality of the humanitarian landscape means that this restriction in the scope of these analyses generally results in sometimes biased perceptions of humanitarian logistics with often partial conclusions on this matter.

- Due to a noticeable lack of feedback sought by theorists from field practitioners, the academic world of research has a tendency to feed on its own conclusions, creating the feeling within the discipline, of an almost universal and unanimous set of thoughts and conclusions. This incestuous circle of thought also causes there to be often outdated or incorrect information in circulation – conclusions set out in writing, however erroneous or outdated, remain in circulation and continue to be relied upon by actors who come across them.

\(^{24}\)E.g. Cross border operations organized from neighboring countries into Syria from March 2011

\(^{25}\)E.g. For instance, It would be difficult for DHL to operate in opposition held areas without jeopardizing its commercial activities in regime controlled areas during the Syrian conflict

\(^{26}\)Only 3 % of crises have a natural origin, the others being linked to political reasons, conflicts, epidemics and pandemics (Luk van Wassenhove, 2006)
These digressions in the development of logistics theorization are also visible in dedicated conferences that seek to consider the logistics of tomorrow; best practices, best performing models, winning synergies. These meetings often gather the same audience and speakers from the UN agencies, the private sector, academia and donors but give little voice to independent humanitarian logistics operators, with the inevitable drift toward a polarized future: ‘join in’ or ‘disappear’.

### 3.3.4 High-risk humanitarian-military rapprochement

Following the 2004 tsunami, a final element of criticism (not necessarily a neutral one) that was brought to bear on the humanitarian response underlined the weakness of humanitarian organizations’ logistics operations as compared to the deployment power of armies. Nobody would deny the fact that armies and civil protection services have greater capacity, not to mentioned legitimacy, for rapid response in remote emergency contexts such as situations of natural disaster. Apart from the expertise developed over centuries in the field of EHL, an army enjoys far more substantial budgets than a humanitarian organization does, even compared to large size NGOs. In positioning themselves as essential humanitarian actors, armies were able to find a new justification for their high budgets that were increasingly coming in for criticism by taxpayers in times of financial stress. Certain military-humanitarian interventions – such as the one launched in Afghanistan by troops involved in the “Enduring Freedom” operation in the wake of 11 September 2001 – go further in that they are intended to give a more human face to the conflict at hand despite the disastrous damages done in the process to the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality.

Considering this legitimacy, some experts have been, since 2004, advocating a necessary rapprochement between military and humanitarian logistics, while consistently overlooking two important elements:

- The likelihood that this association will endanger humanitarian organizations that are operating in conflict zones, especially in contexts of jihad or war against terrorism. Negotiating humanitarian space in areas controlled by the Syrian opposition for example is currently not possible - or carries extreme risks – unless there is a clear distance between the humanitarian organizations in question and governments in all respects including logistics and financial resources. Even when a relief agency is operating with independent logistics and private funding, it will still be difficult to claim neutrality when it is operating in other contexts alongside governments, especially in the case of combined humanitarian-military operations. This problem is exacerbated by the instant access to information and globalization which has further augmented the capacity of fighting factions to screen a humanitarian organization’s level of independence.

- The military intervention deployed in response to natural disasters is, as mentioned before, largely justified as the army’s response is more adapted to this type of situation. However, this legitimacy could create a possible political/economical conflict of interest in cases where the disaster affected State is directly involved in a war like Pakistan in 2005 (earthquake in Kashmir area disputed with India) and in 2010 (flooding in the context of war against Taliban). Following Cyclone Nargis, the blockade of the international aid deployment by the military junta of Myanmar in 2008 is a good illustration of this conflict of interest.

### 3.3.5 Harmful consequences of a jammed system

Pursuant to the above-mentioned EHL developments, the operational choices taken by certain relief agencies and donors seems today no longer to be based on humanitarian needs, but are rather taken with a view to reducing the risks related to logistical constraints. This simplified logistics approach is struggling to support (i) operations deployed in conflict zones (unless protected by an international military presence), and/or (ii) complex and costly interventions such as in medical emergencies. It is reasonable to assume that the recent disengagement of humanitarian action in medical operations is largely down to logistical constraints (pharmaceutical constraints regarding validation of sources of production/distribution, import restrictions, permanent control of temperature, respect of expiry dates/batch number monitoring, etc.). It is important to note that the issues faced by these new logistics models correspond to a period when many humanitarian organizations have been facing

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27. E.g. in 2012, the annual budget of the French army was estimated at 41.230 Billions of Euros, while ACTED budget – one of the largest French NGO – represented only 117 million

28. Yves Pimor, Michel Fender – Logistique – DUNOD – 5ème édition

29. This reality is more applicable to independent humanitarian organizations than mandated agencies such as ICRC
great difficulties investing in emergency responses. Even today, significant differences still exist between the emergency ambitions claimed by some agencies and the concrete realization of these ambitions in the field.

These difficulties are largely explained by the absence of dedicated emergency unit within many humanitarian organizations - unit that is running independently from regular programs, with a large capacity to quickly mobilize significant human, material and financial resources 24/7. Supported by powerful logistics, rapid response teams usually take the lead in emergency situations, including when the organization is already active in the disaster-affected country. In order to guarantee operating reflexes and optimal physical/mental availability in an emergency, teams from emergency units are usually sent from the organization headquarters or from decentralized regional positions. They will usually not augment but replace the existing teams from regular programs that will suddenly play a supporting role that is no longer decisional\textsuperscript{10}. Without relying on these two pillars - independent emergency units combined with powerful and strategic logistics - relief agencies are usually punished with a minimum of three to four week delays in their emergency responses. The lack of immediate availability for extra funds will further extend these delays.

In a much broader perspective that goes beyond logistics, there are grounds for questioning whether the ongoing difficulties that aid agencies are experiencing in operating effectively in emergency situations have not fueled recent enthusiasm from the humanitarian community regarding the affected populations’ resilience\textsuperscript{31}, sounding somewhat like a confession of failure. Even with the best preparation in the world, it is difficult to understand what level of resilience could be developed by the victims of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, by those of the Haitian earthquake, or by the population still suffering from the Syrian war.

4- NEW CHALLENGES

Notwithstanding, the difficulties encountered in this trend of multi-sectoral cohabitation/collaboration (humanitarian, private, academic) should not disguise the real EHL issues. Over recent years, new major challenges have emerged that the humanitarian community must overcome through various coping mechanisms. Today there are four major challenges.

4.1 ADAPTATION TO HIGHER STANDARDS

First, and perhaps most dramatically, there has been a change in the type and complexity of relief materiel requested by intervention fields. There has been an increase in the variety, volume and suddenness, but also in the sophistication and required customization of the orders from the field users. Because of this changing demand, logistics services of humanitarian organizations face a double challenge:

\textbf{- For short-span demands:} How to mobilize massive amounts of human, material and financial resources for large-scale operations in a very short delay – mainly in response to natural disasters\textsuperscript{32} - without compromising the quality of services provided in other post-emergency or more stable programs (rehabilitation, development or chronic)?

\textbf{- For long-span demands:} How to provide tailor made (ad-hoc) solutions that are context-dependent and technically more advanced (modern structures and sanitation equipment, new extraction techniques / water purification, combined communication, etc.) whilst maintaining standard operating models and products required for emergency responses?

With the growing complexity of emergency operations on one side and a gradual specialization of stable programs on the other, humanitarian logistics must now reconcile two dynamics that are sometimes conflicting. The first one - emergency based - requires a very impulsive and automatic logistics activities pushed toward fields of operation (PUSH

\textsuperscript{30}Following the earthquake in Haiti, some organizations have decided to remove all regular teams to be replaced by emergency teams – including the Country Director – in order to avoid aid workers to be both in position of victims and rescuer.

\textsuperscript{31}In 2005, the United Nations released the Hyogo Framework to build the resilience of nations to reduce the impact of disasters

\textsuperscript{32}According to a report published by Oxfam in 2007, the number of natural disasters linked to climate has multiplied by four in 20 years with a massive increase of affected population
logistics strategy). The other one – dedicated to more stable programs – focusing on preparing orders, implementing stockpile strategies and managing the flows of goods in a manner that is more considered and directed to a great extent by the final users (PULL logistics strategy). In contexts with frequent operational status changes, a **decoupling point** must be predefined at which the same program moves rapidly from emergency to post-emergency situation, and vice versa (e.g. succession of emergencies in nine month time following the Haitian earthquake and cholera outbreak).

Moreover, logistics departments that are predominantly relying on in-kind donations or emergency standard kits are often struggling to satisfy specific or sophisticated orders that would require substantial investment in procurement services. Up to now, there are still very few humanitarian procurement centers (HPC) or donation centers (HDC) able to propose **tailor-made solutions** to humanitarian organizations as well as to provide a transversal support across all their supply chains (international, regional, national and local supply).

### 4.2 MAINTAINING A RAPID DEPLOYMENT CAPACITY

The other major challenge is related to a gradual reduction of the mobility of aid agencies in the field. Several factors have probably led to this loss of operational agility:

- **Increasing import restrictions** in more protective countries (e.g. India, Pakistan, Thailand, Ethiopia, etc.). These restrictions are forcing international agencies to identify/define locally emergency kits with an inevitable loss of time that often goes together with a loss of quality in emergency products and sometimes generates prohibitive expenses despite transport costs that are significantly reduced.

- **A humanitarian space that is more difficult to negotiate** since September 11, 2001, as we observe a shift towards a **new type of conflict** justified on the grounds of the war against terror. The polarization generated by this new kind of conflict (to be with or against the war) - still relevant in Afghanistan, in northern Iraq or Gaza, for example - makes any negotiations for safe humanitarian access more complicated and more limited in scope, with restricted conditions for logistics deployment. This humanitarian access is just as much difficult to preserve when a conflict spillovers into inter-ethnic clashes as it occurred in Republic of Central Africa in autumn 2013.

- **Restrictions of movement** in areas of high insecurity (Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Darfur, Syria, etc.) with a more systematic targeting of humanitarian aid. Although some agencies have decided over the past few years to **operate in the heart of armed violence zones** with the unavoidable exposure to greater danger, most of them prefer to intervene in the periphery of the conflicts. They are consequently opting for in-kind donation programs, some of which may be inappropriate, particularly if they have not been solicited. This is why the vast majority of the international aid organized in the wake of the Syrian uprising or during the Israeli-Palestinian wars occurred through remote support to local organizations (also called *proxy-assistance*). Finally, these restrictions of movement are also a reality in emergency responses after a major natural disaster with partially damaged or completely destroyed infrastructure that delay access to victims as well as the rapid assessment of needs.

- **Proliferation of actors** in response to so-called ‘spectacular’ crises with high media coverage also represents an obstacle to operational deployment. Beyond the confusion created by the sudden proliferation of humanitarian actors sometimes improvised for the occasion, reliable local or - in some extent - international markets will be quickly saturated. The lack of international regulation regarding humanitarian agencies’ status (official accreditation, validated certification, etc.) facilitates both the presence of non-solicited actors but also the **massive convergence of unnecessary material**, creating a real obstacle to the deployment of assistance into entry points of the affected country. This type of

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33 In 2012, some independent NGOs have estimated 25 to 30% of operating countries where it is difficult or impossible to import relief items

34 During the Syrian crisis, the cost of certain items purchased in Turkey was five to six time higher than on the European market

35 Some international agencies started their first aid actions to Typhoon victims (Philippines) on D+5 while their international teams arrived in the country on D+1.

36 E.g. Saturation of the production lines for perfusion pockets during the cholera outbreak in Haiti in 2010 and for the personal protective equipment (PPE) of the health workers during the Ebola crisis in 2014

37 Cf. Materiel Convergence and its Determinants: the Case of Hurricane Katrina - José Holguin Veras, Lisa Destro – Nov. 2010
practices raises also important ethical concerns regarding the quality of the humanitarian assistance in emergency situation38.

In short, one of the main EHL challenges is, from one hand to manage to supply emergency programs with limited availability from local resources rapidly saturated or, from the other hand once the emergency state is no longer valid, to provide quality relief goods to stable humanitarian programs with high import restrictions imposed by the affected country.

4.3 FROM EFFECTIVENESS TO EFFICIENCY

Budget cuts related to the 2008 financial crisis certainly forced the most affected aid agencies to rethink their deployment practices in order to become more efficient. However, due to several reasons, most agencies have not been able to create efficiency when it comes to logistics:

- Most of the major humanitarian agencies were founded in the aftermath of WW2 with programs based on developmental priorities39 that did not require HQ piloted emergency units or strategic logistics, i.e. a logistical process involved in operational decisions from the needs assessment phase onwards. Urged by funding and media coverage that is increasingly focused on emergency crises, many of these organizations are now seeking to allocate sufficient resources to ensure rapid and effective deployment in case of acute crisis. For many of them, this transformation is still too young to be based on strategic logistics - something that would ensure a better cost control of the support activities. It is interesting to note that this strategic optimization could also reduce their ecological footprint.

- The objective of efficiency for humanitarian action should be automatically associated to significant investment in humanitarian logistics skills. To meet this essential requirement, and with few academic institutions able to provide multi-skilled logistics practitioners40, logistics services of the largest humanitarian agencies have developed dedicated in-house training for this purpose. Today, the financial crisis combined with the chronic reluctance from institutional donors to finance costs that are not directly related to operations, are the two main deterrent factors for such investment. It is interesting to note that this reluctance of donors to help humanitarian organizations to better prepare their emergency response is not limited to financing professional training. It also applies when it comes to financing emergency stockpiles (anticipated procurement + prepositioning) in such a way that, when a crisis is striking, many logistics departments are often not in position to negotiate the purchase conditions (price, delivery time, etc.) with suppliers. Nor are they in a position to properly control the quality of the emergency materiel that will be bought in rush.

- Finally, the steady growth of resources in recent years has contributed in making some humanitarian organizations invest in IT systems through the costly acquisition of integrated ERP software. The inherent rigidity of most of these systems to adapt to changing realities coupled with the limited resources available to support them in the field, together are one of the major reasons that explain humanitarian logistics services are still struggling to adequately respond to the growing demand for accountability and transparency in a domain that has become highly competitive. Few humanitarian agencies - for example – can boast an efficient tracking system of used equipment or the ability to efficiently value their field inventories.

4.4 OFFERING MORE DARING SOLUTIONS

Some interventions require a logistical agility that goes beyond a rapid and efficient deployment of emergency operations. Whilst increasingly faced with highly constraining contexts, humanitarian responses should be able to consider non-traditional working methods and increased risk-taking in order to be able to provide assistance to

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38See Strategic plan to better channel unsolicited items and other inappropriate humanitarian goods – May 2013 - OCHA
39In 1975, 88% of WFP humanitarian action was dedicated to development aid. This support only represented 14% of the agency activities in 2005 (‘40 Years of Fighting Against Hunger’ – WFP – 2005)
40The Bioforce Institute is one of the rare centers able to provide EHL trainings with official diplomas.
populations that are affected by these complex crises. In this respect, the Syrian crisis is undoubtedly the context that has most challenged the international relief organisations’s ability to think ‘out of the box’ and propose innovating logistical solutions over the last decade.

Similar to the misappropriation of the humanitarian relief during the famine that occurred in the late 90s’ in North Korea, the Syrian regime has been accused to have diverted the aid supplies, provided mainly by the UN agencies in governmental held areas, in order to possibly use it as a war weapon. In the face of this humanitarian assistance on a tight leash and hence unable to organize the impartial distribution of food and essential drugs, the vast majority of international NGOs have opted to operate from Turkey or – to a lesser extent – from Lebanon. However, by keeping a conservative operational approach, most of these agencies have been staying outside Syrian boundaries, far from the most war-affected populations.

Following the refusal by Damascus to let humanitarian assistance come into Syria without prior control by the regime, illegal cross-border operations have been organized from neighboring countries requiring very specific logistical set-ups in order to adapt to regular last minute changes of entry points, unexpected blockades of the supply routes, or sudden destruction / looting of warehouses and transit depots. In some tragic circumstances, logistical efforts have been suspended following arbitrary arrests, executions and violence perpetrated on aid workers. Considering the higher occurrence of security incidents during movements, humanitarian logisticians have been logically more exposed to this type of risks.

Paradoxically, the main obstacles to the deployment of international NGOs in northern Syria did not originate from security constraints but from internal blockages and – for most of them – from the incapacity to propose innovating solutions. Some of these organizations have been more concerned with satisfying the financial requirements of the institutional donors, aiming to empty warehouses from unused material before the close of the budget year, rather than working on logistics strategies adapted to the Syrian context. Though the UN agencies have faced severe criticisms for their silent contribution to the political twisting of humanitarian assistance that has consequently been made asymmetric by the regime, the operational feebleness of international NGOs has also been pointed out after choosing to act as financial donors rather than operating beside Syrian organisations. This embarrassing situation could explain why the humanitarian response in Syria has not been audited over three years of conflict, while it took only three months for the IASC (Inter-Agency Steering Committee) to release the first real-time evaluation of the humanitarian assistance that has been provided to the victims of the Haitian earthquake.

Without a more audacious approach that will address the issues related to humanitarian access and risky logistics operations, one can foresee that international aid agencies will regularly be kept aside from future complex humanitarian crisis as has been the case over the past three years in Syria.

5- FUTURE INVESTMENTS

5.1 PROFESSIONALIZATION IN PROGRESS

In order to take up the four major challenges listed in paragraph 4, humanitarian agencies know they have no choice but to further professionalize their logistics services. However, to avoid repeating past mistakes, this professionalization should not stem from models and principles coming from the private sector, quite the opposite should be the case. It is vital that any future professionalization keeps the unique characteristics of, and challenges facing, humanitarian logistics deployed in emergency situations at the heart of this process.

Addressing the professionalization of humanitarian logistics from a new angle cannot be conceived through a dogmatic and systematic exclusion of potentialities offered by commercial actors or a rejection of the research capacity and

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42 It took three years for the first UN convoy to cross the Turkish border and deliver humanitarian goods in some areas held by the Syrian opposition
teaching methods offered by the academic world. It requires above all the bringing together of all humanitarian actors - independent, private and governmental - around a common informed understanding of the unique characteristics of this domain which has no equivalent in the private world. This pooling of strategic considerations should also include military representatives whose logistical models such as the integrated support logistics (ISL) can inspire humanitarian logisticians in many respects.

Beyond a common understanding, it is a question of the internal and external recognition of the work done in emergency situations by multi-functional teams that try to ensure high reliability of tailor-made logistics services through flexible and temporary organizational structures (see concept of adhocracy in extreme environments).

5.2 A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE OPERATING CONTEXT

This understanding of EHL specificities must be accompanied by an analysis of the different humanitarian actors, their particular mandates and the type of assistance provided. This will certainly help to improve understanding of why logistics services from organizations like Care International, World Vision and Oxfam initially oriented toward development activities have little in common with those of Médecins Sans Frontières and the ICRC and will not, as a consequence, adopt the same strategies to improve their performance. This analysis should also clarify why comparing UN agencies' supply chains which do not usually operate directly with beneficiaries (proxy support model) with other non-mandated agencies makes little sense. This should clarify why humanitarian projects that are fully funded by one or more international donors will not be able to develop the same logistics as agencies operating with private funding only.

Last, but certainly not least, the virtual absence of a process for the global sharing of returns on logistics experience after each major humanitarian crisis is by far the element that is most lacking within strategic discussions that are initiated by Cluster coordination platforms, through inter-agency conferences, or in the scope of academic studies. The difficulties the latter are facing in trying to establish a common definition of humanitarian logistics are not ultimately due to the immaturity of a booming sector but rather related to the complexity of dynamic and organic organizations that are modeled according to change management adhocracy in extreme environments.

The lack of logistical referents within institutional donors combined with the absence of consideration of their strategic role in the process of financing humanitarian organizations does not facilitate the development of strategies in terms of logistics investment.

5.3 DEVELOPING THE NECESSARY KNOW-HOW (before acting)

The world of humanitarian logistics suffers from a significant lack of training, research and innovation centers that could be used as a reference in the field. To do so, it is essential that the grey matter that will feed these centers should be formed by high-level practitioners able to address all the technical aspects of the jobs that make up humanitarian logistics, the main ones being:

- Supply management (order management, purchasing, warehousing, kit production, import / export, etc.);
- Transport management (fleet management and air operations);
- Asset management (working stations, housing, equipment, etc.);
- Information and communication technologies (IT, telecommunications, combined systems).

These centers should also articulate their training around program logistics, based on sectorial humanitarian approaches, namely:

- Health logistics (hospital logistics, ambulance services, logistics applied to epidemics);
- Logistical assistance to displaced / homeless populations (shelter, food, non-food item distribution...);

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43 See organizational configurations - Mintzberg (1982)
44 See Mémoire de recherche – Loïc Cohen – 2012 – Pilotage des chaînes logistique par le 4PL : le mode Plug & Play/Unplug
45 Until recently, Logistics Coordinators operating for ECHO in the field were mainly in charge of the delegations’ offices than analyzing the performance of supply chain performances of the partners who are funded by the European Commission
• **Food logistics** (support to feeding centers, food distribution programs, etc.);
• **EHA logistics** (technical aspects related to water, hygiene and sanitation).

Finally and most importantly, the services provided by these centers must be in direct connection with the reality of emergency operations whose characteristics are different from one intervention to another. Based on requests expressed by aid agencies, this essential interface can be built through field support with professional recommendations, guidance or evaluation regarding their logistics performance.

### 5.4 HUMANITARIAN CENTERS AS BACKBONE

The other area critically requiring investment is undoubtedly the development of humanitarian procurement centers (HPC) with - again - an important need for technical guidance regarding the type of requested equipment (medical, food and non-food items), packaging (article, module or emergency kit) and information related to usage (catalogs, manuals, etc.), which must be purchased and delivered in the fields of emergency response. Paradoxically, while procurement represents 80 to 90 percent of logistics costs during a humanitarian intervention, the efforts of inter-agency coordination and support from the private world are primarily focusing on warehousing and transport of relief items that usually cover only 10 to 15 percent of global logistics costs. Taking into consideration the lack of institutional funding for any centralized procurement, the private sector can bring a lot in HPC development efforts on the condition that it agrees to get out of its traditional area of expertise in order to go for an innovative and (genuinely) non-profit operating model.

As regards the increase in import constraints in countries of intervention and ensuring an end-to-end supply chain, it is also important that the support provided by HPCs integrates the three levels of supply management usually covered by humanitarian actors: **local, national and international supply chain**. This support could help independent organizations better control import/export and clearance constraints that today represent one of the most significant obstacles in their operational responsiveness.

Finally, more and more initiatives aiming at strengthening in-kind donations of humanitarian products have emerged in recent years with the help of humanitarian donation centers (HDCs). Some of these centers are combining donation with procurement services and can offer interesting supply options in a period of financial stress. In addition, some of these HDCs are facilitating a process of regulation for unsolicited donations, always difficult to channel during emergency responses to large-scale disasters as was the case in Haiti in 2010 and to a lesser extent the Philippines in late 2013.

### 6- CONCLUSION

Humanitarian actors specialized in emergencies are accustomed to frequent and **in-depth questioning**. They generally operate in a culture of attention to failure rather than success in order to stimulate a process of improvement and adapt their assistance to victims of disasters.

This critical review of EHL brings an admittedly negative overview of a situation that calls for major changes. Nevertheless, the purpose of this review is not to discourage those who have contributed to the improvement attempts over the last ten years. On the contrary, although there is a feeling already expressed that an opportunity has been missed in the last decade, this is by no means the end of the road. This review is a **call for a re-positioning** of all parties with a view to redirecting their efforts and making sure the next opportunity is taken and acted on to full effect.

Finally, it should be noted that any attempt to take a snapshot of a situation that is moving fast, with varying rhythms and different realities, is always a perilous exercise, and some readers may not agree with some points when absorbing what this review has to say. If that is the case, they should not hesitate to share their comments and remarks on the blog: [http://emergency-log.weebly.com](http://emergency-log.weebly.com)
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Please note: Views expressed in this review are those of the author alone and do not reflect the official position of Doctors Without Borders.