Chapter 2
Humanitarian Partnerships- Drivers, Facilitators, and Components:
The Case of Non-Food Item Distribution in Sudan

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ABSTRACT

Through the use of a case study, this chapter discusses the design of a partnership between humanitarian organizations to understand what the drivers, facilitators, and components of the partnership are. This research has been designed using a topical literature review and a case study. The practical implications include a discussion and guidelines for designing partnerships under high uncertainty and limited resources.

INTRODUCTION

Delivering aid in an emergency situation is a complex process given the high levels of uncertainty, capacity and resources that characterize the needs. Humanitarian agencies work hard to fulfill their specific mandates and ensure that beneficiary needs are met in the quickest and most efficient way. Doing so requires in many circumstances joint efforts (partnerships) between different agencies to achieve the common goal. Partnerships between humanitarian agencies can take many forms ranging from informal agreements, to memorandum of understanding, or formal contracts.

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The literature on partnerships between corporations is rather extensive. However, little has been written about partnerships in the supply chain among humanitarian organizations to respond to emergencies. Studies in commercial supply chains have explained the benefits of partnerships to mitigate uncertainty or foster collaboration. However, these differ from the focus of this research in that the final recipient is not the only customer. In the humanitarian supply chain there are two customers: donors and beneficiaries at opposite ends of the supply chain. They each bring high levels of uncertainty for the humanitarian organization at the onset of the operations. In other words, it can take days, if not weeks, until a good picture of how much will be donated from which donors for an inaccurate number of beneficiaries.

Researchers have begun to look into inter-organizational collaboration in the humanitarian supply chain (Samii, 2009; and Schulz, 2009) though a lot of questions remain unaddressed regarding formalized multiparty partnership agreements among humanitarian agencies. Formal partnership agreements from humanitarian organizations have been more the subject of researchers looking at cross-sectoral partnerships (i.e., humanitarian-private, humanitarian-military, humanitarian-governments), still a greater understanding of why these partnerships emerge between humanitarian agencies in logistics remains to be discussed.

The focus of this chapter is on the initial phase of Darfur crisis in 2004 when the humanitarian organizations made the decision to partner for the delivery of aid and the steps and decisions taken to create this partnership. In the case presented here this phase corresponds to a ten-months (February-November 2004) period during which humanitarian agencies present in Sudan became aware of the rising needs of large numbers of people in the Darfur regions. Unable to access the region, yet aware of the logistical challenges they would encounter in responding to such a massive operation, managers from different humanitarian agencies worked together to plan and decide which tasks would be addressed collectively and under what conditions. The result was a set of inter-agency initiatives meant to create cost savings and efficiency. This chapter focuses specifically on the partnership designed to deliver non-food items through a common pipeline.

The arguments are developed as follows: Section 1 explains the context of humanitarian logistics and partnerships. Section 2, describes the methodology used to design and analyze the case study presented in section 3. Section 4 combines the literature to analyze the case and discuss the drivers, facilitators and components for the partnership between the different humanitarian agencies focusing on Darfur. Section 5 lists limitations and recommendations from this research. In closing, section 6 provides some recommendations for future research, and section 7 provides a set of concluding remarks about the application and relevance of this research to the evolving field of humanitarian logistics.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Humanitarian logistics is a relatively new academic field of study and emerging research (Kovacs and Spens 2007) with evolving definitions and concepts. The main difference with commercial supply logistics is that companies aim their "logistics at increasing profits whereas humanitarian logistics aims to alleviate the suffering of vulnerable people" (Thomas and Kopczak, 2005). Unlike actors in a commercial supply chain, humanitarian actors are required to go beyond the profit logic (Ernst, 2003), as this logic is actually absent and replaced by the concepts of speed and cost (Tomasini and Van Wassenhove, 2009). Moreover, humanitarian actors are driven by efficiency given the limited resources as long as performance does not compromise their legitimacy or license to operate as neutral and impartial organizations.