



## humanitarian aid

**Like individuals, companies mobilise their resources to contribute to large-scale emergencies as quickly as they can. Corporate donations may be in the form of cash, goods and services in-kind like technical expertise or capacity. Many companies will work through their local staff and offices to provide support to international aid teams. This type of local support can be very valuable for aid workers facing a long list of bottlenecks when arriving in a new country to deliver assistance. Having a local partner with operational capacity helps them to pursue their tasks faster, without having to waste time looking for office space, housing, and many other essentials.**

As the example of Haiti has shown, one of the main bottlenecks at the onset of an operation is the coordination of the large number of actors that participate in the logistics functions. Very often, as was the case in the capital city of Port-au-Prince, the local infrastructure is unable to cope with the sudden increase in traffic that comes after a disaster. In some cases, the demand for aid is significantly higher than the maximum capacity of the local infrastructure. Frequently, the disaster itself destroys existing infrastructure, limiting even more the local capacity to receive aid.

One of the main problems contributing to the logistics bottlenecks is the competition among the different parties involved in the relief efforts for the limited resources and capacity. This includes humanitarian agencies, military, media, companies, and VIPs alike. In past years, several initiatives have emerged to coordinate and prioritise the use of resources during disaster relief operations. In the transport and logistics sector, the Logistics Emergency Teams (LETs) initiative brings together three industry leaders to combine their forces

towards a common goal. TNT, UPS and Agility, with the support of the World Economic Forum, have agreed on a set of guidelines and an activation process to respond as one team in emergencies where logistics is a major requirement. LETs companies work closely with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the humanitarian Logistics Cluster to define how they can contribute to each relief operation as the needs evolve on the ground. Olivia Bessat from the World Economic Forum explains that “the real strength of LETs lies in engaging, in advance, all the private and humanitarian members in the design of the entire mechanism behind their partnership. The result is a set of pre-arrangements and an effective contingency plan ready to be triggered to support the relief effort to large-scale natural disasters.”

Kimmo Laine, who is responsible for Emergency Response operations at TNT, explains that “the LET activation process is simple. Once there’s an emergency large enough for the WFP-led Logistics Cluster to be activated, the WFP’s head office in Rome sends an official request for resources to the

LETs companies and coordinates their efforts through their representatives. As our agreement outlines, the LETs companies wait for a specific request from the WFP before reacting, to avoid duplication of efforts.”

Speed is crucial in relief efforts, especially for search and rescue operations after an earthquake. However, speed and high impact are only possible when the operations are well planned. Having everyone arrive at the same time can only block airports, clog the pipeline and create delays. LETs companies have learned from previous deployments that arriving too soon may lead to confusion, which is why, under the current guidelines, they wait for the request before mobilising. Laine explains that their goal “is not to try have our own relief operation, but to support the ongoing humanitarian effort in coordination with the WFP”. For this to be the case, it is important that humanitarians take the lead in describing the needs.

Another important factor contributing to an efficient response is the ability to plan, ahead of time, the type of contribution that will be provided. All companies agree that, through LETs, they manage to communicate what each can provide, under what conditions, and the request process. Frank Clary, responsible at Agility for liaising with LETs, explains that a “request from WFP/Logistics Cluster may come at any point and time to us. As we receive them, all three companies immediately discuss the request and mutually agree on who is best placed to meet the requirements. For example, in the case of Haiti, WFP gave a specific request for Spanish-speaking logisticians, so each company had to look into their rosters carefully for this additional requirement.”

Clary reiterates the importance of having a local presence, “since your country offices are the ones who know best how to conduct business, the market constraints, and how to find resources.” Joe Ruiz from the UPS Foundation agrees, explaining that “when the LETs Cluster base of operations was established in Santo Domingo, we were able to leverage our local presence and knowledge to contribute to the relief operations for Haiti. For example, we have a plane that flies daily to the Dominican Republic which we upsized immediately to include humanitarian cargo. We also provided warehouse storage to WFP in Miami for high-energy biscuits, and assisted in incorporating them into the humanitarian pipeline with the different partners.”

Measuring the success of a contribution is difficult in these types of operations. The needs on the ground are usually complex and of great magnitude. Efforts get lost in the midst of fatigue, stress, and confusion. Laine explains that for TNT and the rest of the LETs companies “there are no set performance indicators

to monitor and calculate impact in this type of operation. It’s about being able to contribute to fulfil the needs of the WFP/Logistics Cluster and prove our commitment to our partners.”

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