

Distribution

“ A distribution is the hand-over of commodities to intended beneficiaries, fairly and according to specified rations, selection criteria and priorities. A distribution is the process during which control over the commodity passes from the organisation holding the stock to the intended beneficiary.

Adapted from [UNHCR, Commodity Distribution](#)

The objective of every distribution is to mitigate the impact on individuals after or during a crisis by providing the means to preserve their health and ensure their welfare, safety and dignity.

Physical distribution is the final step of a product before reaching the final user, however the process depends entirely on previous activities. This might include decisions about what to procure and how much, transportation, storage and even packaging. It is essential to know as much detail as possible on how any given distribution is going to run to anticipate the possible constraints and challenges and establish corrective measures to mitigate them.

For the purposes of this guide the term distribution does NOT include the process by which commodities are procured, nor the process of transportation, storage and handling, though these are often in some way connected to the distribution process. This guide refers to the physical distribution of commodities at the final handover point.

Common Terms in Distribution

NFI

Short for Non-Food Items: Any non-food article, tool, utensil or other item which contributes to the physical and/or psychological health of populations.

PSN

Short for People with Specific Needs: People that we can expect could have special needs are particularly older people, small children, those with impaired mobility or breastfeeding mothers among others that could require any other special assistance or at risk.

Kit

A set of items used for a particular purpose or activity, generally packaged and/or distributed together.

Commodity

A term applied to food and non-food items given in mass distribution.

HF

Short for "Heads of Family", defined as a member of a household that represents it.

Household A social unit composed of individuals, with genetic or social relations among themselves, under one head or leader, living under the same roof, eating from the same pot and sharing a common resource base.

EDP Short for "Extended Delivery Point".

IDPs Short for Internal Displaced Population.

Principles

Although every distribution should willy according to the context and local specifics, there are certain principles that apply to all distributions.

- All distribution should be fair, equitable, regular, accountable, and transparent. Beneficiaries should know the rations they are entitled to, the method of distribution, and the distribution schedule. The more transparent the system, the fewer the opportunities for abuse leading to unfair distribution practices. Those who distribute should be accountable to the beneficiaries as well as to the donors.
- All distributions involve coordination, logistics, monitoring, and reporting, which are carried out by a range of [actors](#); including the government, UN agencies, NGOs, local partners and the beneficiaries. Good management therefore requires appropriate allocation of responsibilities between the different actors, and authority and decision-making must be clearly defined.
- A single controlling authority should be responsible for policy matters, determining overall priorities. Mechanisms for information exchange and coordination between all actors must be well planned. Coordination committees composed of all major actors are necessary both at national level for policy and planning, and in major operational areas for operational decisions.
- There are common elements in the implementation, which include the estimation of beneficiary numbers, selecting the type of recipients, type of beneficiary documents, determining the physical organisation of food distribution, as well as monitoring.
- Information on the beneficiary population is essential for designing a distribution system. No distribution can start without an estimate of the size of the population. The size of the population also influences the choice of recipient and the physical organisation of the distribution, such as the number of distribution points. Knowledge of the sociopolitical context is crucial in deciding [who manages](#) the distribution, or [who should be the recipient](#) of aid, and whether registration by beneficiaries is adequate.
- Beneficiary participation should be encouraged, which can be especially varied depending on if the community manages the entire program or parts of it. [Committees](#) are often recommended to provide a forum for discussion or information on the distribution.
- Access and protection matters must be considered at every stage of the distribution process, from the design of the intervention to the actual handover to beneficiaries, allocating resources and means to these matters. They should be part of the evaluation and reports.