

Main Types of In-Kind Commodities

Because of the different treatment and care required, it is common to talk about two main categories of distributed commodities.

- **Food** - Perishable products for the human consumption - most commonly food.
- **Non-Food Items (NFIs)** - Items that the affected population need to maintain their health and welfare.

Food

Food commodities are one of the most commonly distributed items in emergency contexts. Not only is food universally required, its consumption is constant and cyclical. Agencies involved in food distribution should develop a plan for distribution based on the types and quantities of food to be distributed.

Repackaging

Food is often handled in bulky units, either in the form of large sacks of grain weighing up to 50 kilograms, oil contained in plastic jugs or in metal tins, or sometimes supplemental feeding items in smaller containers. Food may also be distributed fresh – such as whole vegetables - depending on programmatic requirements.

Due to the oversized nature of some food handling units, packaging is often broken down and food manually sorted and distributed in smaller portions. Grains from larger sacks can be proportionally weighed or measured and repackaged in smaller sacks matching programmatic targets, while oil tins may be handed out directly or possibly distributed in smaller quantities. The theory behind repackaging:

- No one person will receive excessive bulk or weight.
- Food rations will be evenly distributed among beneficiary populations.
- Limited storage conditions in beneficiary homes/sites of residence might prevent storage of large volumes of perishable goods.

Repackaging food items requires:

- Pre-planning of the size of the new package to match programmatic requirements.
- Sourcing and identification of appropriate containers and materials for repackaging.
- A strategy for how items are repackaged before they reach the beneficiary.

Items that are repackaged should be placed into new containers that are sanitary, rugged enough to survive transport, free from holes and/or prevent spillage, and be made of food grade safe materials. Repackaged items may not need to be specifically labelled, but clearly marked containers may make distribution easier. Labels should be clearly legible, and written in at least the language of the beneficiary population.

Due to the size of most food handling units, it is typically easier to bring the larger containers/sacks of grain or oil to a distribution site directly, and conduct repackaging directly before the distribution occurs. To ensure that distribution is not slowed down, persons tasked with repackaging foodstuffs should:

- Be knowledgeable of exactly what the packaging requirements are.
- Have all the necessary tools to complete the job (weighing scales, sanitary food handling gloves, packaging materials).

- Be adequate in numbers to prevent delays in the delivery of repackaged food.

Depending on the context, some agencies may wish to repackage rations before transporting them to distribution sites, which may work for either smaller distributions or distributions that are planned well in advance. Agencies may also wish to develop repackaging requirements directly into their vendor contracts so that items show up with the appropriate packaging directly to the distribution site.

Food Items with Dependent Demand

Food items are often distributed with dependent demand – this means they are paired together with different types of food items to complete the full nutritional requirements of the beneficiary population. If items are to be distributed together in complementary fashion, a delay to the proper availability or repackaging of one item may be a delay to the whole process. Distribution planners should accommodate for all food items with dependent demand accordingly, ensuring that all items will be ready at the time and location of distribution in the quantities required by the programme.

If one or more item is not ready or not available at any time, either the entire distribution should be delayed, or those delayed items will be removed from the entire distribution to be distributed at a later day. Delays or omissions should be avoided if possible. Setting up a secondary distribution doubles the logistical requirements, while delaying distribution can directly impact a population’s health, and/or cause serious security incidents. If items are missing or delayed at any time, it must be communicated early and frequently to the community through all available channels to avoid confusion or anger on the day of distribution.

All decisions on portion size should be informed by the sectoral expert in each agency. It is not up to the logistics team to determine what portions members of a beneficiary community will receive. The following is a general guide to ration sizes recommended by different agencies:

Commodity gm/Person/Day	UNICEF	MSF	WFP	UNHCR	Oxfam	ICRC
Cereals	350–400	400	400 (450)	400 (450)	350–400	433
Pulses	50	60	20	60	50–100	133
Oil	20–40	25	25	25	20–40	50
Blended food		100	30			
Sugar		15	20	15		
Salt		5	5	5		
kcal	1,600– 1,970	2,260	1,930 (2,100)	1,930 (2,100)	1,510– 2,360	2,450

Non-Food Items

Non-Food Items (NFIs) occupy a broad subset of emergency relief goods, including any essential goods to protect the beneficiaries from the climate and maintain their health, privacy and dignity. Non-food items are closely connected to all sectors; food, shelter, water and hygiene, health and even the education sector can be supported by NFIs.

It is impossible to make an exhaustive list of NFIs as their nature depends on context, the

seasons, type of needs, affected population culture, and other factors. A typical list of NFI items might include:

Shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ready-made shelter (<i>tents</i>) • Material to build a shelter (<i>ex. plastic sheeting, rope</i>) • Material to rehabilitate existing shelters (<i>ex. saw, nails, hammer</i>) • Cleaning-up kit (<i>material to clean/clear existing shelters</i>)
Bedding equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mosquito nets • Bed linen and blanket • Mats or mattress • Beds
Kitchen utensils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stove for cooking • Jerrycan to carry/stock water • Pots • Plates and cutlery • Glasses and cups • Plastic basin
Hygiene material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soap and shampoo • Toothbrush and toothpaste • Hand towel • Soap for laundry • Razor and shaving cream • Comb, brush • Sanitary towels and baby diapers • Toilet paper • Anal cleansing recipient (<i>in countries where toilet paper is not used</i>) • Children's toilets
Clothes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gloves • Winter hats • Scarves • Shoes • Coats
Heating and lighting equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stove for heating • Fuel • Oil lamp

Adapted from [Pocket guide NFI Distribution, MSF](#)

The overall distribution process of NFI's vary greatly depending on the need, the context and the type of NFI. Much like food distribution:

- NFIs may be distributed as a couple or groups of items that have dependent demand, and all consideration should be made to ensure groups of NFIs should be distributed at the

same time.

- NFIs should be a reasonable size and quantity for beneficiaries to safely handle and carry.
- NFIs should be culturally acceptable and in no way increase protection risks for recipients.

Some NFIs, such as plastic tarpaulin, may come in excessively large packaging. In the event NFIs are repackaged or broken down into smaller units, distributing agencies must plan accordingly. Due to the relatively labour intense process of repacking NFIs, and due to the durable nature of NFIs, most agencies may wish to repackage NFIs prior to transporting them to distribution sites. NFIs are typically distributed along programmatic lines, meaning specific sizes are known well in advance. Agencies may wish to conduct a large scale repackaging at once, and keep smaller units within storage for ease of future planning.

Kits

Agencies may wish to combine multiple different NFIs into a consolidated package or set of packages to enable easy and rapid distribution of multiple items covering a variety of beneficiary needs along predetermined lines through a process is known as "kitting". To facilitate the forecasting and final handover activities, (among other parts in the supply chain process) items subject to mass distribution are generally in the form of kits, as for example:

- Shelter Kit for 100 families (*material to build 100 shelters for 100 families*)
- Cooking set (*kitchen utensils for 1 family*)
- Hygiene kit (*Hygiene products for 1 family for 1 month*)

Depending on the time frame, the type of emergency, or the logistical capacities on the ground kits might be built following two different strategies:

Built as...	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Standard Kits</p>	<p>Carefully designed and prepared in advance, standard kits are typically developed based on past experience. A quantity of these kits are sometimes available in large emergency prepositioned stocks, and occasionally large international NFI vendors sell pre-made kits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick response: • Ready to use, no assembly needed • Pre-positioned (locally, regionally or international) • Quality guarantee: the items have been subjected to a strict procedure including market survey, tender. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not always adapted to local customs. People may find themselves with material they do not know how to use, and therefore the reason for distributing the articles is not covered • Some articles may turn out to be culturally inappropriate. • Some items are not essential, so people will sell them on the local market.

Built as...	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Kits locally assembled</p>	<p>Locally manufactured - agencies must identify the appropriate local suppliers, assemble and pack kits as needed. The main advantage is that they can better meet the needs of the population taking into account current requirements and cultural habits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly customisable in terms of items included, packaging and labelling. • More economical: limited or no transportation costs. • Adapted to local customs. • Beneficiaries are more likely used to the core component products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming: Search for suppliers for the various items (market survey, tender) • Assemblage of the kits. • No guarantee of quality. • No guarantee of quick supply in case of emergency. • Often not possible to find all the items locally.

Adapted from [Pocket guide NFI Distribution, MSF](#)

Sometimes there are circumstances that make it necessary to distribute items in addition to kits. This can be done:

- To meet an urgent need before the kits are available (e.g., blankets in a cold country).
- To meet a specific need (e.g., mosquito nets during a malaria outbreak, soap during cholera outbreaks).
- To meet the needs of vulnerable groups (disabled, elderly).
- To complete a standard kit distribution.

Kitted and NFI items are often linked to the central emergency pre-positioning strategy utilised by aid agencies, and both kits and smaller unit NFIs can be developed in conjunction with a procurement plan. Ideally, vendors will be able to pre-kit items before they arrive at an organisation's warehouse or distribution site, however all or part of the process can be completed prior to arrival, making the overall supply chain process easier.

If vendors are unwilling or unable to meet kitting requirements, then kitting will need to be conducted on the premise of the organisation or its partners. The act of an organisation conducting its own kitting can be very time consuming and require attention to detail. Kitting will need to be formalised well in advance to distribution, but not so far in advance that items inside the kit may expire. Organisations should also account for their own storage capabilities - will they be able to safely store kits matching distribution needs? At what point are they storing too many kits?

Any kit or repackaged item must be transported and packed in durable overpacking capable of withstanding not only the movement in a warehouse or transport to a distribution site, but also transport back to the home of the recipient and potentially even last for weeks or

longer inside a beneficiary place of residence. Overpacking should be able to withstand rips and tears, and even be resistant to water damage. Solutions might include packing kits in:

- Durable cardboard boxes.
- Plastic or woven jute bags.
- Inside of other durable distributed items. Example: items can be packed into standard "Oxfam" style buckets that are not only durable carrying cases, but also part of the kit itself.