

The Skills Requirements to Be an Effective Humanitarian Logistician in Pakistan

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Abstract

The threats posed due to natural disasters are intensifying in Pakistan. As a result Pakistan's approach towards Disaster management has much improved after the deadliest Earthquake of 2005. One sign is the formulation of NDMA (National Disaster Management Authority) and its subsidiaries like PDMA's (Provincial Disaster Management Authority) in all of its provinces. The volume of efforts in the area of risk mitigation & reduction and managing disasters has accelerated. But it is also a fact that much is needed in order to improve the situation. This research is about disaster management specific skills sets and practices required to be an effective humanitarian logistician in developing countries like Pakistan. Literature review reveals that knowledge management in the field of humanitarian supply chain is evolving as new conception and is getting grounds in Pakistani environment. This paper endeavors to analyze the disaster management practices in Pakistan and review the literature about it. A brief description of skill sets and expertise required in managing disasters is the focus of this research. Information related to proficiency required for disaster recovery and management was gathered through literature search, websites, library documents, journals and research articles. This study will be useful for organizational management & literary researchers who are associated with disasters management research and practices in developing countries like Pakistan.

Keywords: knowledge, skills, humanitarian logistician, disasters, Pakistan.

Introduction

Disaster is derived from two French words 'Dis' and 'aster'. The word 'Dis' means bad and 'aster' denotes star. So resultantly the two words combined and form a single word disaster which means Evil or bad star (Himayatullah, Laura & Khan, 2008). United Nations office ((UNISDR, 2009) for disaster Risk reduction also gives the definition for the disasters as "A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources."

Thus apart from its etymological meaning disasters are the means of disrupting not only the human population at large for its hazardous effects but also for fauna and flora. It outstrips the human skills to handle it with all available resources at hand. The intensity of the disasters and their frequency to occur has been increased many fold during the last few decades. According to (EMDAT, 2016) disaster affected 518 million people worldwide. In 2017, the total

natural disasters that were recorded comprised a figure of 335 causing an economical loss of about 334.99 billion US dollars (EMDAT, 2017). If we rely on the available data contents then it will show that, average numbers of disasters in 1970 were about 69 disasters per year around the world but now it has increased to the figure of 350 per year in 2017. And if we talk about the economic losses then the figures generated are also alarming. These were of about \$ 12 billion per year in 1970 which was increase to figure of \$ 334.99 billion per year in 2017 (The World Bank: GFDRR, 2017).

If we deeply analyze the disaster pattern of the year 2016 it will reveal that among the top ten countries suffering from the plethora of disasters seven countries are present in Continent Asia and comprise the 31 % of the 2016 disaster. When considering the statistics about the level of income of disaster effected countries, it will establish that among these countries one country is low income i.e. Haiti, five are lower middle income countries i.e. Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Pakistan and India. Among these two are upper-middle income countries i.e. China and Mexico. The two countries belong to high incomes group countries. These are USA and Japan (EMDAT, 2016). From these statistics it has been revealed that although disasters affect almost all the world but major victim is lower middle income and low income group countries. The more they are vulnerable for disaster more preparation they have required for the disasters. Tens of millions of women, men and children affected by conflicts and natural disasters rely on life-saving assistance and protection. Yet, too often obstacles have hampered humanitarian organizations' ability to reach the most vulnerable. According to United Nations Annual report for 2016-2017 only 65% of their targets were fully achieved and only 25% of their targets related to humanitarian assistance were achieved in 2016-2017.

Disaster Risk Profile of Pakistan

Pakistan is the 36th largest country in the world and covers an area of 796096 km² extending from the snow-covered Himalayan heights to the deserts of Cholistan (Geography of Pakistan, 2018). Pakistan is geographically situated in the region which is bestowed with unique geo climatic conditions and environmental extremes as Pakistan is surrounded by mountains in west and north a great sea in south while desserts of Cholistan in east. Thus, the region is prone to all type of natural disasters and hardly manages extreme environmental conditions.

If we look at a glance on history pages statistics exhibits a disaster profile of Pakistan since 1947 to date. There came almost 172 natural disasters causing human loss of 1100000 lives economic loss of 2.6 billion US dollars and making 9.5 million people vagrant (Pakistan Balochistan Economic Report, 2008). The reason behind such heavy losses is lagging behind in preparedness, lack of planning and forecasting for disasters limited organizational capacity and institutional limitations for mitigation of disasters. In order to cope with disasters provision of robust preparedness, better response planning, strengthening of institutional capacity, classification and clarification of stakeholder's roles and responsibilities is required. Moreover, sheer need for proper mechanism of generation and communication of early warning signs for hazards, emergency preparedness and agile response and recovery is recommended by the humanitarian practitioners.

But to our sorrow disaster management in Pakistan does not address all these prerequisites. After each vulnerable disastrous episode government engages in incurring a great expenditure on rescue, relief and rehabilitation and do not pay any attention on the preparedness which has to be done at first place. In Pakistan within the management authorities addressing disasters there is a sheer dearth of information and knowledge management, risk identification & mitigation, disaster preparedness and need assessment. There is no long term planning practices

to address the upcoming disasters and hence resulted in the form of low performance of the humanitarian logisticians in Pakistan (Himayatullah, Laura & Khan, 2008; Amna, 2013).

The repeated incidences of disasters and the existence of our country in the Disaster prone area increase the demand for the humanitarian logisticians' preparedness in Pakistan. But there is a very little understanding which skill sets are required in this context. The basic flow in humanitarian supply chain consists of finance, material, information, people knowledge and skills. Rather it is justified to claim what affect the humanitarian sector the most and the greater extent is the flow of information, knowledge and skills (Mather, 2009). The importance of these flows is due to the reason that in each disaster struck region, logisticians have to build a new supply chain right from the scratch which is very different from the previous one and requires extremely different expertise (Tomasani and Wassenhove, 2006). So it is justified to claim that in order to guaranteeing an agile and quick response the skills and knowledge of humanitarian supply chain actor is very important. Any logistics deficiency can cause tremendous results for the effectees of disaster and can be a source of deciding factor between life and death.

Problem Statement

Increase in the number and complexities and simultaneous occurrences of the natural disasters can be considered as an alarming situation in Pakistan. The situation become more vulnerable when we analyses the circumstances in the scenario of sheer scarcity of resources that also cause hindrance in the performance of humanitarian actors in order to respond to these disaster events. The main objective of humanitarian supply chain actors is to provide aid shelter food, water medicine security in any disaster situation. In these situations logisticians play a crucial role in the relief efforts as 80 % of the activities regarding relief efforts consist of logistics. But according to (Richard, 2003; Tomasani and Wassenhove; 2006 and Mather, 2009) Humanitarian supply chain agencies are lagging behind 15 years as compared to commercial supply chain organizations. The agile and effective relief provision is totally dependent upon coordination and successful execution of supply chain activities. But to our sorrow lack of knowledge expertise and experience humanitarian actors hinder in their performance in any disaster. So the question of the day which skill sets and expertise are required by humanitarian actors to be equipped in order to be successful in any disastrous situation especially in the developing countries like Pakistan where there is a sheer scarcity of resources.

Objectives of Research

Objectives of this research is to provide the summarized possible skill sets and expertise required by the humanitarian logisticians for the successful execution of humanitarian relief missions especially in the scenario of developing countries like Pakistan which faces sheer scarcity of resources.

Humanitarian Logisticians skills and competencies Review

The following section will review the past literature published in respect of skills and competencies required for humanitarian logistics.

Past researches has observed logistics skills from different perspectives including education, that is, which skills and knowledge areas should be accentuated in trainings knowledge areas and logistics masters skills. Myers et al. (2004) distinguished the logistic knowledge which is gained through education logistics competencies and work experience acquired through practice and experience. Likewise, Gammelgaard and Larson (2001) discussed clearly in their research the differences between context dependent and context independent skills. They further stressed that both the skills are mandatory for the logistics and humanitarian supply chain management. Dischinger et al. (2006) presented three types of skill sets in their studies necessary for the excellent execution of relief missions. These are functional skills technical skills and leader ship

skills. On the other hand, Gibson & Cook (2001) suggested that interpersonal skills, logistic specific competences and general management capabilities are mandatory for the successful disaster relief operations.

Vereecke et al. (2008) stated in his studies that soft skills are mandatory besides the technical skills in order to succeed in the complex situations like disasters. Hoek et al. (2002) suggested that “emotional” skills are required and must be mastered to be a successful logistician.

Murphy & Poist (2007) referred the three skill sets mandatory for the disaster relief mission. These were Business skills which covered all the business functions, Logistic skills representing technical and functional skills and most important of all management skills.

Other authors like Molley et al. (2011) Ramsay (2001), Coff & Kryscynski (2011) preferred education and experience to embed in skills of humanitarian logisticians. Another well know researcher in the field of humanitarian supply chain i.e. Swords (2007) added pressure bearing and change management among teams as a necessary ingredient for this type of complex situation.

Walker and Russ (2010) discussed the need of monitoring and evaluation for the smooth progress of humanitarian supply chain. Moreover they also called security and safety management necessary for the relief operations. But the relevance of these suggestions had not been tested yet. CILT (2008) added few more things in the list like custom clearance, donor compliance coordination and base management.

In addition, the study findings of Myers et al. (2004) only exhibit positive nature relationship among logistics skills and employee performance. Their findings did not consider any relation between education or experience and humanitarian supply chain performance. Great researchers Gammelgaard and Larson (2001) stated in their study that interpersonal skills, core supply chain management skills and technical skills like quantitative analysis is a must for humanitarian logistics success. By combining all these skill sets Mangan and Christopher’s (2005) presented an idea of T shaped skill profile which stresses in depth knowledge of general management skills, functional skills related to logistics and interpersonal skills. We can say in other words that there should be a combination of technical skills and managerial skills in order to be logistician.

Murphy and Poist (1991, 2007) also agreed with this point of view by stating that “it is more important to be a manager at first place and a logistician in second place”.

But these studies stressed on the need of disaster management certification programs specially designed need based training, and other similar type of education in humanitarian supply chain discipline. The survey conducted by Gibson and Cook (2001) and Mangan et al. (2001) also confirmed the findings of Murphy. (Walker & Russ, 2010; Rahman et al. 2009; Sohal & D’Netto, 2004; Okongwu, 2007) studied the logistics in context of geographical areas and diversity issues. (Keller & Ozment, 2009; Cooper et al., 2010) studied and researched the gender difference in the field of logistics skills. Gammelgaard & Larson (2001) explained the differences of working approach between students working voluntarily in disasters versus practitioners operating in disastrous situation. Gibson and Cook (2001) explained the effect of position and firm types on disastrous situations while Kovács and Tatham (2010) explained the difference between commercial supply chain and humanitarian logistics.

Literature Gap

Literature review shows that most of the researchers describe the skill set according to the countries of the researchers and according to their own environment. It is also considered as worth mentioning that most of the studies are conducted elsewhere in the developed and developing countries and the researchers did not consider the underdeveloped countries like Pakistan. In addition, Myers et al. (2004) only exhibits in his studies that a positive nature relationship exists between employee performance and logistics skills but he did not explain any relationship between practical experience and education and their effect on employee performance. Their findings did not consider any relation between education or experience and humanitarian supply chain performance. If we consider the advanced countries, they have their own proper mechanisms to address different types of disasters but these scenarios cannot be same for the developing or under developed countries. So, for the sake of improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of the disaster relief assistance and its successful execution; the need of the day is to highlight those special expertise and skill sets which are mandatory to masters in order to being a successful humanitarian logistician in developing countries like Pakistan.

Commentary on Humanitarian Logisticians skills and competencies

To be a successful humanitarian logistician a combination of different types soft management skills are required along with functional logistics skills. Under the umbrella of these two major skill sets further four skill sets can be eminent. These are functional logistics skills, problem solving skills, general management skills and interpersonal skills.

Functional logistics skills comprise of forecasting procurement, warehousing, inventory management, import and export knowledge, port/airport management logistics information system. Colonel Aaron divisional chief Joint Logistics Operation Centre USA (2018) explained that during disaster situation it is utmost necessary to analyze what things are needed and how can we deliver these items in such a challenging environment. In this scenario the need assessment forecasting and procurement of the necessary items are of significant importance for making a humanitarian response successful and for this reason preparedness, forecasting skills emergency procurement rules, inventory management techniques and warehousing skills are a must to practice and excel in order to be a good and skillful humanitarian relief actor.

In 2005 the earthquake of 7.6 moment magnitude causes a huge damage to human life in Kashmir valley in Pakistan. Such a disastrous situation warranted an immediate response from the humanitarian relief agencies. In order to provide relief items to the victims of disaster in that hilly areas where infrastructure like roads were badly damaged was really a challenge. Several aid activities were to perform like evacuating the wounded persons, providing the medical aid supplying medicines and first aid products and food items. The great hindrance in the way of relief actors was transport capacity. In order to cope with this challenge air transport was utilized. A large fleet of helicopters made it possible to deliver the relief goods to the more than 200 hilly points where disaster had made its damages. In this situation the help of army and foreign aid actors were taken as local agencies do not have such facilities. So for being successful relief actor knowledge of fleet management is essential as it helps in every kind of situation to provide relief aid.

The knowledge of port /airport management, custom clearance and export and import is also necessary to gain as it helps an individual work for relief effort to clear the consignment which has come from the foreign donors to help the effectees of the disaster.

General management skills comprises of planning skills, strategic management techniques, finance and accounting knowledge, information technology, risk management and

customer and supplier management. The need of these knowledge is necessary because being an effective humanitarian logistician, he must know what is need requirement, how much foreign aid came and in what form how to handle the foreign aid, how to respond to the donors, how to distribute this aid so need of planning techniques, strategic management methods and accounting and finance knowledge is always there. Moreover to handle such a chaotic situation no one can ignore the importance of information technology. Risk assessment and mitigation techniques are also necessary to mater in order to be prepared as a relief actor in the disastrous events.

There should be great emphasize on lessoning the complexities in the logistic support during disaster. In order to do so there should be great check on communications. Moreover team involved in the disastrous situation must be well informed and without any ambiguities. Moreover the task force involved in relief efforts must to be expert in problem solving techniques in order to resolve the issues there and the and thus smoothing the relief actions. So problem solving skills like problem identification, problem analysis, information gathering can be an asset for disaster relief agent. Moreover humanitarian logistician have to deal a lot of individuals which are the effectees of disaster moreover he has to coordinate with different relief teams so interpersonal skills like communications stress management people management is an asset for the humanitarian logistician.

Conclusion

The review and commentary given above is just a preliminary study for the successful logistics approach in the disastrous situations in Pakistan. The different skill sets are presented with the justification and keeping in mind the different disastrous situations happened in Pakistan. This study shows that logistic skills, general management skills, interpersonal skills, and problem solving techniques are very much essential to be an effective logistician working in the humanitarian sector. This study was a literary effort to propose different skill sets required to become effective humanitarian logisticians. However the analytical assessment of these skills sets with the performance of the humanitarian logisticians has not been addressed. The main objective was to open the door in this filed. However this study presumed that future works will address the rest and the details.

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