"Oxfam believes in the essential dignity of people and their capacity to overcome the problems and pressures which can crush and exploit them. These may be rooted in climate and geography, or in the complex areas of economics, politics, and social conditions.

Oxfam believes that, if shared equitably, there are sufficient material resources in the world to enable all)eople to find fulfilment and to meet basic needs.

Oxfam is a partnership of people who share these beliefs — people who, regardless of race, sex, religion or politics, work together for the basic rights of food, shelter and reasonable conditions of life.

Oxfam provides people with the opportunity of playing a small part in a much larger struggle to eliminate poverty and to help hurnanity develop in a spirit of love, co-operation and soliclarity."

taken from 'Oxfann — An Interpretation'

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Working in Emergencies
Practical guidance from the field

9

Registration and Distribution

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Preface

This is the ninth in a series of short books which are the result of a year-long process of reflection and learning by Oxfam's staff in East Africa. The series aims to fill a gap identified by those staff, that of practical guidance presented in a simple style for those working in the field on operational emergency projects.

Given the circumstances in which the books have developed, they reflect only those areas of work with which staff in East Africa have been involved — primarily support to refugees, to internally displaced people and to pastoralists, all of whom have suffered the consequences of conflict or drought. However, the extent of this experience has been broad and imaginative, and therefore it is hoped that the lessons from it will have relevance beyond East Africa.

In several places there are references to Oxfam's internal procedures and resources. Efforts have been made to limit these to a reasonable minimum, in the hope that fieldworkers from other organisations may also find the books useful.

The books assume little prior knowledge or experience, since one of their uses will be as a basis for the induction and training of staff. However they also include reading lists which suggest sources of more detailed technical information and guidance.

The complete series is as follows:

Book 1	Introduction: Policies and Principles
Book 2	Preparing for Emergencies
Book 3	Assessment and Planning
Book 4	Monitoring, Evaluation and Phase Out
Book 5	Operational Project Management Systems: Logistics
Book 6	Operational Project Management Systems: Managing People
Book 7	Operational Project Management Systems: Managing Finances
Book 8	Working with Displaced People
Book 9	Registration and Distribution
Book 10	Communications Work in Emergencies

There is also an accompanying disc with a selection of resource material and sample documentation commonly required in any emergency operation.

Contents

Introduction

Distribution is the process of delivering relief supplies to those who need and are entitled to receive them. Registration in this context is the process of recording the names of these people, and it is therefore a central part of any distribution.

The approach to distribution described in the following pages is based not on fixed procedures or systems but on a particular way of working which can be applied in different situations.

At its heart is a set of simple principles which should guide all our actions. These include the standards of behaviour which beneficiaries are entitled to expect from any relief agency involved in distribution activities and from their own representatives:

- that the particular system of distribution should be built around the beneficiaries' lifestyle and culture.
- that there should be as much transparency as possible in the sharing of information and in project activities.
- that the beneficiaries should be treated with dignity and respect, and should be assisted to play as active a part as possible in the running of the distribution.
- that women should be encouraged and supported to take a central role, given their traditional authority over household management and their responsibility for family welfare.
- that each beneficiary has an individual right to receive the entitlement which they have been promised, and therefore that relief agencies must be accountable to them in supplying this.

This approach to distribution can be used with different communities in different circumstances. It has worked successfully with settled populations, with nomadic pastoralists, and with refugees and internally displaced people living in transit camps and longer-term settlements. It has been used to distribute both food and non-food items, either on one site (centralised) or spread over a large area (decentralised).

The purpose of this book is to give a general introduction to the principles and practicalities of registration and distribution. It describes the principles of effective distribution and the practical steps involved and then looks in more detail at the distribution of both food and non-food items.

Principles of Effective Distribution

The effectiveness of any distribution will be determined by five key factors. These are:

1. Registration

The registration process defines those who are eligible to benefit from the distribution and those who will directly receive the items. If the registration is accurate, the distribution will be accurate.

2. Transparency

Firstly, openness with information and in your behaviour is an important way of building trust. Beneficiaries must have confidence both in you as a person and in the distribution system being used.

Secondly, people who are well informed about what they are entitled to receive, and who understand the system, are far less likely to be cheated. Any distribution system should be as simple as possible, so that the maxlmum number of people will understand it and have confidence in it.

3. Coordination

In large-scale emergencies there may be several organisations carrying out distributions of different items or in different areas. Representatives of donors, suppliers, government and local authorities will also be involved in various ways. It is possible that these organisations may not share the same objectives or approaches to their work.

All these efforts must be closely coordinated if the beneficiaries' needs are to be effectively met. Checks and balances within the system, which divide responsibilities between different people and organisations, will strengthen the project's accountability, both to its donors and to its beneficiaries.

4. Flexibility

The practical arrangements for the distribution - its timing, frequency, location and method -should be built around the normal pattern of people's lives, recognising the different roles of women and men within this. The items to be distributed should also be acceptable to and appropriate for the community concerned.

5. Participation

Building systems of participation is an important way of building cornmitment. Through active participation in meetings and discussions, beneficiaries can come to understand and support the project's objectives and find valuable roles to play within it. Regular dialogue, particularly with women, will help to ensure that the distribution remains relevant as people's needs change.

Community Managed Distribution

The last of these five principles, that of participation, is an important part of community managed distribution. The extent to which any group of people is in practice able to distribute resources effectively amongst them depends on several things:

- the degree to which there is a common understanding about who is vulnerable and how they might best be supported.
- the extent to which other people - either relief agencies, government officials or powerful individuals within their own communities - allow them to do so.
- the capacity of the beneficiaries to take on this role.

This capacity, even if low early on when the situation is often confusing and stressful, can be actively developed through training and support. There have been cases where beneficiaries have been less active at the beginning but have gradually taken on more responsibility as distributions continue. The greater the responsibilities which are accepted by the beneficiaries, the more limited is the role for an external agency such as Oxfam. Tasks can be shared between the two, so that for example Oxfam takes responsibility for planning, logistics support and monitoring, and the community for the operation of the actual distribution itselL

The ideal of community management, although not possible in every sitnation, is an important guiding principle behind this approach to distribution. It is obviously more difficult - but not impossible - to put it into practice in situations where community structures are weak, such as within displaced populations. However, this then underlines the importance of supporting displaced people as they reorganise themselves and establish new systems of representation. These systems will in turn provide a framework within which distributions, and other activities, can more easily take place.

A Realistic Approach

One key lesson to learn is to be realistic and to accept that there are bound to be problems. Any distribution of resources in a poor area is a political issue, and will provoke different interests, tensions and alliances. The first step is to accept that these tensions are inevitable, and the second is to find ways of managing them.

Relief agencies and donors often think that a distribution can be controlled to such an extent that everyone will receive their 'fair share" and that nothing will go astray. This is unrealistic. It places unreasonable expectations on those carrying out the distribution, and it requires a much more interventionist approach to ensure that things are done "their way," It also ignores the fact that there is always a certain amount of redistribution after the formal distribution is over, as resources are shared and reallocated according to the customs and priorities of the community concerned.

However, these priorities and values may not be the same as those of an agency such as Oxfam, and this contradiction must also be clearly understood from the beginning. Opinions may differ about the role played by women, for example, or about the relative merits of supporting the weak and the strong.

in this way, distribution then involves a process of negotiation between competing priorities in which the beneficiaries play a more active role according to their own analysis and values, rather than simply a system of handouts in which they are entirely passive. A genuinely community managed distribution challenges the centralised decision-making of most emergency operations.

The most valuable asset which will guide you through these inevitable problems and tensions is **clarity,** at every stage of the project. (Box 1)

Box 1
The Need for Clarity

The less doubt or confusion there is about **any of the following, the** easier any tensions and pressures will be to manage:

- the objectives of the distribution
- the assumptions upon which these are based
- the roles and responsibilities of all those involved
- the criteria by which people are eligible to receive items
- the physical process of distribution
- the procedures followed, such as for recruitment or for stock control
- the information which is given out
- the criteria for ending the distribution

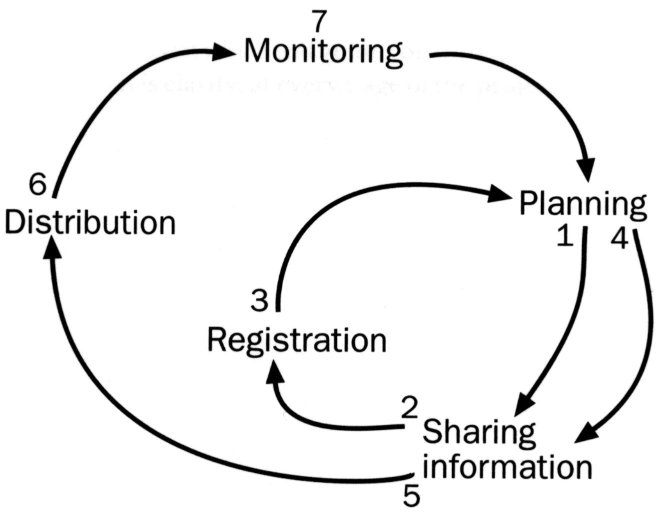
Key Stages in Distribution

The process of distribution involves several stages:

- Planning
- Sharing Information
- Registration of Beneficiaries
- Planning
- Sharing Information
- Distribution
- Monitoring

Sometimes a distribution takes place only once. An example of this would be the distribution of blankets to each newly-arrived refugee family. But sometimes it needs to be repeated over a period of several months or years, as is the case with food distribution. The different stages of the distribution cycle are then repeated, as shown in Fig. 1, with the information gathered during monitoring fed back into the planning for the next month's distribution.

Figure 1 The Distribution Cycle



Planning 1

There are two main elements to planning:

- planning with the community and with other organisations, to agree the nature and details of the distribution.
- planning with the project team, to agree the kind of management and logistics systems which the project will require.

Some decisions will already have been made, either during the initial assessment or as the funding proposal was being prepared. During an assessment, for example, a rough count of the population is usually carried out in order to indicate the scale of the problem. This might have been done by looking at existing records held by government or church leaders, or by counting homesteads and multiplying the total by an average family size for that area. However, detailed planning and investigation will still be needed. And some decisions already taken may need reviewing and developing in the light of further thinking. The early population count may turn out to have been an over- or an under-estimation, for example. Plans can and should change, as our understanding about people and their needs also changes and deepens. Beneficiaries and local leaders should be involved as much as possible at this stage, in order to ensure that the proposals are both appropriate and relevant. One way of doing this is to work through structures of representation at community level.

Community Representation

There are different ways in which the views of beneficiaries can be represented, and different kinds of structures which might be used, such as:

- traditional organisations, such as nomadic herding groups
- administrative structures, such as local government leaders
- distribution committees, whose members are openly elected by the beneficiaries specifically for the purposes of the distribution

By working closely with people at this level:

- you send a signal to them that you value their experience and ideas and respect their systems of leadership. This helps to build trust and confidence.
- you have greater access to people and to information, which will improve the design of the distribution system.

- you identify a system through which people can be field accountable.
- you simplify communications by singling out a flew individuals within the population as representatives of the whole.
- you strengthen skills and experience within the community which may, be of value in future emergencies.

However, this way of working is not a simple one:

- any leadership system can be unrepresentative and domination by the powerful, who are usually men.
- in some cultures it is difficult for women to hold positions of authority or to meet together with men.
- committees elected for the purposes of a distribution project can run into difficulties if government officials feel that their authority, is being undermined.
- any system of representation is only, as good as the character oft he individuals involved, who may. be arrogant or self-centred, interested more in building personal power than in meeting the needs of their community.
- effective working relationships will only be built up through regular contact and support. This will take considerable staff time in the early stages, but in the long term will prove worthwhile.

Distribution Committees

If your choice is to work through specially-elected distribution committees, then there are some additional points to consider.

Elections to the committees should be carefully planned and monitored to ensure that those elected are people in whom the beneficiaries have confidence. Elections are usually, organised by local leaders and witnessed by Oxfam staff. There is a balance to find between giving people the space to elect whom they wish, and ensuring that this has been done in a fair manner. Always make it clear that re-elections can be requested at any time if people are dissatisfied with the actions of those they have chosen.

Sometimes there can be tensions with existing local leaders, who may resent the newly-formed committee and feel that their authority is being undermined. This can be handled in different ways:

- keep government officers, chiefs and elders well informed about the distribution, and seek out their views.
- clarity the different roles and responsibilities of everyone involved as well as the reasons for them.

- agree together a written record of the various tasks required with the names oft hose responsible. An example is given in Box 2.
- encourage the distribution committee to draw up its own guidelines which would govern its actions in different scenarios, such as disruptions at the distribution point or the theft of food.

Those people who manage the distribution of food within a displaced population can assume considerable power if this is not adequately checked. Again, monitoring the election process and clarifying the relationship of the distribution committees to the overall camp committee may help to case tensions and resolve problems.

Box 2
Roles and Responsibilities in Distribution

Calling public meetings	Chief or Assistant Chief Block Leader
Transportation to the distribution point	Oxfam
Offloading trucks	Beneficiaries
Maintaining order at the distribution point	Distribution Committee/Elders
Calling names from the register	Committee member/Oxfam staff
Scooping food	Committee members/beneficiaries
Deciding what to do with small surpluses	Committee members

Representation and Gender

Any system of representation must ensure that the needs of the whole community are being met, particularly those who are more vulnerable because of their age, sex, disability or ethnic or religious identity, or because they have less access to power and fewer networks of social support.

More men than women are likely to put themselves forward as representatives. In some cases women are also more likely to vote for men than for other women. Therefore the system must ensure that both women's and men's views can be heard. This is because women customarily have authority for household management and for family welfare, and are therefore best placed to suggest solutions to problems which affect the family. It is also because women are often intimidated from speaking out in larger group meetings and may need other ways in which to make their views known.

Achieving a better balance of male/female representation in some cultures may not be possible, and in others it will need sensitive negotiation and good judgment as to how much can realistically be achieved. There can be a real dilemma for staff in situations where their obligations to implement organisational policy (such as a gender policy) are constrained by a different set of values and priorities held within a certain community.

In situations where change is possible, the following should be considered:

- Use community meetings to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of women acting as community representatives.
- Support women's efforts to stand for election, perhaps through training sessions or by discussing potential barriers with men.
- If traditional or administrative structures are being used, try and identify key women within them and work through them.
- In displaced populations, re-elections of committees after a short period of time may allow more women to take part, once the pressures of setting up new homes and protecting family health become less severe.
- If women are unable to play any active formal role in the distribution, make sure that there are informal systems for finding out their opinions and ideas. This might be in meetings with women's groups or women leaders, or through informal conversations at water points, in the market, and in women's homes.

Once an effective system of community representation has been established, it will be easier to gather the information you need to plan both the registration and the distribution.

Registration and Distribution Planning

Registration is the basis of distribution, and therefore the two need to be planned at the same time. The close links between them are illustrated by these examples:

- ***where will the distribution points be?***

  Centralised projects have one central distribution point. But in decentralised projects there maybe very many distribution or dropping points. Each of these points will have its own register which lists the names of the people who will collect their supplies from that point. Therefore decisions about the number and location of the distribution points will determine the number and location of the registration points.

- ***Who will receive which items?***

  The registration form must be designed in such a way that it tells you all the information you need to carry out the distribution. For example:
  - if food or household items are to be distributed to each adult woman, each wife in polygamous societies should be registered as a household in her own right.
  - if agricultural tools are to be distributed to adults and to productively active children (for example, those over 15), the register should indicate the ages of all children, not just those under five years (as normally happens).

Some sample questions to guide both registration and distribution planning are given in Boxes 3 and 4.

Box 3
Registration Planning - Sample Questions

• *How do people define a household? How do they stay together?*

This will help you decide the most appropriate registration groupings. Households are often defined by those who cat together. People also fall into one or other of the following groups. By far the most common at any distribution is the first:

- married women with dependents
- married women without dependents
- single adult women or men, with dependents
- single adult women or men, without dependents, but cooking on their own

In polygamous societies each wife should be registered as a household in her own right, because she will be running a separate household.

• *What is the geographical pattern of houses and homesteads?*

This will help you decide the easiest method of registration, and how long it will take.

• *What is the pattern of daily life, particularly women's work?*

Use this to decide the best time of day for registration interviews.

• *What are the customs for naming children?*

This information will help to avoid the double registration of children. For example, if children are customarily given three names, always ask the mother for all three. If you record only two, the third may be given later and assumed to be for another child.

• *What skills and experience are there within the community?*

Identify key people who can help with the registration process, perhaps teachers, or those who have worked as census enumerators in the past.

• *Have there been previous registrations or census exercises?*

If these were done badly, or for no apparent purpose, then they may have affected people's confidence and their attitude towards population counts.

Box 4
Distribution Planning — Sample Questions

• ***Who normally has responsibility for the items to be distributed?***

This will help you decide to whom they should be given:

- most food, household and agricultural items are normally a ' women's responsibility, except tools for clearing land. Seeds of food crops are usually controlled by women, cash crops by men.
- if items are distributed directly to women, this will help to ensure that they benefit all members of the household.

• ***Who will be eligible to receive the items, and why?***

The criteria for eligibility must be made very clear. Defining them can be a very difficult and divisive process, and should be done in close cooperation with community representatives. The key questions to ask are, who is at risk? and why?

Participatory methods, such as social mapping and ranking, have been successfully used both at the beginning and end of distributions to identify those most in need. The information gathered can be cross-checked with other records, such as those kept by chiefs or church leaders. However, the scope for this depends very much on the level of stress people are under, and on the strength of the relationship between the community and the staff concerned. its difficulties should not be under-estimated.

• ***Where will the distribution points be?***

This will depend on:

- **the ways in which people already live together.** For example, the registers may be drawn up to match the villages of settled communities, the block structures of refugee settlements, or the herding groups of pastoralists.
- **the distances people will have to walk to the distribution point** These should be as short as possible, preferably no more than 3 or 4 kilometres, bearing in mind that it is normally women and children who carry goods home. The nearer the distribution points are to people's homes, the less disruption there will be to their way of life.
- **the numbers of people at each point.** The maximum number of people at each distribution point should be 5,000 (or 1,000 households). Ideally the distribution should be completed within one day.

Planning with Other Organisations

It is rare for one organisation to have complete responsibility for any distribution. Usually there are many different people and agencies involved. Discussing ideas and sharing plans will help to improve the coordination of all these efforts.

- Keep the local government authorities well-informed about your plans. The senior representative of government in the area usually has responsibility for arranging coordination meetings. These should be requested, if they are not already taking place, and supported regularly.
- Encourage a consistent approach between different agencies to practical issues, such as the size and frequency of rations, the transportation rates, and the amounts paid to the loaders at the stores.
- Consider the benefits of joint assessments and registrations, which may help to provide more authoritative analysis and figures. However, they will only work if there is clear agreement about the overall aims of the registration and the distribution and the principles which underpin them.
  For example, one agency may wish to take a broad, preventive approach, giving support to those at risk as well as to those already suffering. Alternatively, another may prefer to target resources to those people, households or areas which they consider to be more seriously affected than others. Without some consensus on these key issues, different agencies may use different criteria to determine who should be eligible for inclusion in the distribution.

Team Planning

The two most time-consuming tasks at this stage of the project will be logistics and staffing. Further guidance on both these subjects can be found in Books 5 and 6 of this series (Operational Project Management Systems).

Logistics

You will need to:

- order the items for distribution and arrange secure storage, if needed.
- order equipment for the registration. This should include counter books, pens, rulers, calculators, bags to keep the books dry, and bicycles.
- order equipment for the distribution, such as scoops and weighing scales.
- find transporters and trucks to deliver the items, unless you have your own.

Staffing

Decide how many staff you need, with which skills, and then recruit and train them. The number of staff will depend on the size of the project, and on the distances between distribution points.

Recruitment

Three groups of staff are usually needed:

- distribution monitors, who carry out the registration and monitor the distributions.
- field supervisors, whose role is to manage the monitors and to ensure that the distributions in their area are working well.
- administrative and support staff, such as storekeepers, logisticians, drivers, and a bookkeeper.

In smaller projects field supervisors may not be necessary, and the monitors could report directly to the manager.

One monitor may be responsible for distributions in two, three or four centres, depending on the size of their populations and the distances between them.

Whenever possible, try and recruit women to these posts, because the majority of people interviewed during the registration and attending the distribution will be women.

Recruitment is bound to be a sensitive issue:

- distributions usually take place in areas where paid jobs are few.
- field staff may be under considerable pressure, from their relatives or from local leaders, given the value of the resources in their care.

Field staff must have the strength of character and honesty to withstand this pressure. Recruitment procedures which are open and fair, and are seen to be so, will help. Fair employment conditions, adequate salaries and supportive management may help to keep staff motivated and committed. The level of salaries is particularly important, in order to reduce the temptation of theft. The criteria for recruitment of distribution monitors might include:

- personal integrity, maturity and common sense
- knowledge and understanding of the community
- ability to speak the local language
- ability to record information accurately
- confidence with numbers and simple addition

You may have to weigh up the relative benefits of these criteria. In some cases, those who have been to school, and who can therefore manage the administrative side of the work, may have lost touch with traditional culture and may perhaps be less sympathetic to their elders and to those whom they, think are following an outdated way of life..

Deciding which criteria are the most important to you skills depend on the circumstances. However, remember that it is usually easier to develop a person s technical and administrative skills than to influence their character or values.

Once field staff have been recruited, make sure that they, are formally introduced to the community, partly out *of* courtesy and partly so that the beneficiaries can get to know their most direct contact with the organisation.

Training

Training should be planned both for staff and for, community leaders and representatives.

Staff training should cover:

- **the project's objectives**
  This will help people to understand not only what they have to do but why they have to do it. Often the staff recruited to implement a pro' themselves involved in its initial assessment. Assumptions and decisions made in the course of the assessment need therefore to be passed on to them so that they understand the reasons behind their work.
- **the systems of registration and distribution and the procedures involved**
  Distribution projects usually involve a lot of paperwork. Mistakes can be costly and undermine accountability. Ensure that everyone knows which forms to sign, which paperwork to return to the store, which problems to look out for, and so on.
- **ways of working with people**
  Distribution monitors are front-fine staff and often have the most direct contact with beneficiaries. This means that their behaviour and their communication skills are very important, especially when working with people to whom particular respect is due, such as elders and married women. Remind staff about the importance of basic good behaviour, such as never disagreeing with elders in public or making promises which can't be kept.
- **understanding of gender**
  Women will be playing a central role in the distribution, and it is important that all staff understand the reason for this, particularly if it contradicts their own cultural assumptions and background.

- **the organisation employing them**
  For many staff, this may be their first contact with an NGO. They will need to understand:
  - the kind of an organisation they are working for and its values
  - their role within the project
  - the opportunity and responsibility they have, through their direct contact with the community, to transfer field knowledge back into the organisation.

Training sessions for committee members and community leaders could also cover much of the above. In addition, use these meetings to clarify, roles and responsibilities, particularly if there are an), local difficulties with government or agency officials. Invite government representatives to attend training sessions as well.

Ideally, training should be completed before the project begins, but this is rarely possible. Allow time later on for community leadership and staff training, and for follow-tip meetings to refresh memories and to monitor progress.

Box 5
Summary of Key Planning Questions

These are the kind of questions you will need to ask yourself and others in the course of planning the distribution.

- Who is going to be registered, and why?
- What kind of information do we need to know about them, and why?
- flow will we find out this information, and with whom should we share it?
- What is the most appropriate method of distribution for this community?
- How can we make best use of women's skills and ideas?
- How can we make sure that the needs and concerns of the most vulnerable people are being taken care of?
- What resources do we need staff, equipment, training?

Remember that however critical the situation may be, **never make any commitments or begin registration until you are sure that funds for the project have been approved.** Failure to keep promises is a major cause of poor relationships between relief agencies and beneficiaries.

Sharing Information 1

Throughout the planning discussions there will have been a lot of contact with other people government officials, other agency staff and in particular the beneficiaries. Many people may already have a fairly clear idea of how the distribution is going to work.

However, it is important not to take this for granted. Before the registration takes place there needs to be a more formal process in which all those who will be involved in the registration can be told what is going to happen. The more that people know what is going on and why, the more confident they will feel in the process and the more they will support it.

A series of open meetings is the easiest way of explaining your plans. These can be arranged by asking the elders or local leaders to gather people together.

If you have decided that special distribution committees elected by the beneficiaries are a more appropriate option than working through existing structures, these kind of meetings are also an appropriate place for the elections to be held. Ideally this should be done as early on in the life of the project as possible.

The main purpose of the meeting is to give formal notification to people about:

• why the registration is necessary
• when and where it will take place
• how it will take place
• what they will be asked to do
• who is eligible to be registered, and why

In arranging these meetings:

• Always respect the authority of the community's legitimate representatives. For example, even if the local chief is not part of the distribution committee make sure that he or she has been consulted about your plans. Ask them formally to call the meeting.
• Before any meeting brief the community leaders well, so that you all agree the main points to cover and so that they can share in announcing information.
• Make sure that meetings are held at times which are as convenient for most people as possible. Think about whether women might be absent fetching water, or men away with their livestock.

• Think about whether there should also be separate meetings with women, to ensure that they are fully informed.
• Give people chance to ask questions and to make comments.

The criteria for registration, which will determine who is eligible to benefit from the distribution, should be publicised in the local languages as widely as possible, both during these meetings and outside them. Some ideas for doing this are:

• read them out in the local language during public meetings
• circulate them to teachers, church and community leaders
• pin them on trees
• distribute them through government structures

Remember that some people may not be able to read, so make sure that the information is passed verbally as well as in writing. Do not assume that everyone will read and understand a written notice. Experience shows that women are often much less well-informed than men about their entitlemerits and about how the distribution is going to work.

Registration

Registration is a systematic method of collecting and recording information about people. It helps you understand the way a community is organised, and in distribution it is used to identify those people who are eligible to be included as beneficiaries in the project.

This section looks at registration only in the context of distribution. There is a much broader issue concerning the registration of refugees, which provides information for the purposes of asylum and protection. Refugee registration must always be the responsibility of the host government and of UNHCR. However, the system explained here may also be used with displaced people if it is only for the purposes of localised distribution.

Accurate registration information is important because it will be used:

• to make detailed plans for the distribution
• to identify those people who are particularly vulnerable
• as a basis for resolving problems and claims during the distribution

The beneficiaries of the distribution must understand why the registration is necessary. If they do, then they, will feel more commitment to its Success and will be able to play all active role in helping that happen.

Registration can be carried out by, community leaders, by. local government representatives, or by the staff of NGOs working ill cooperation with local leaders. This decision depends on the circumstances and on the capacity of' each group to carry out the registration effectively.

However, when registration is tied to material assistance, it is unreasonable to expect those who hope to gain from that assistance to produce accurate figures working alone. Experience shows that Oxfam's field staff should always be involved, working in collaboration with community representatives..

In general, registration figures for non-food distributions do not need updating because the distribution is completed within a short space of time. Registrations for longer-term distributions need updating as the population changes, perhaps every six months. Population changes among displaced populations can usually, be found through the systems of camp management.

Distribution without registration is possible but not advisable. Ill some cases it may be necessary to carry, out a quick distribution of immediate relief supplies while the plans for the formal registration are being made. This is more likely to be successful when staff know the area well and have access to relevant information from local elders, such as average family sizes and the areas of greatest vulnerability. However, this should only, be a temporary measure, and accurate registers should be drawn up as soon as possible.

The Registration Format

The registration system must be able to give you all the information soil need to plan and carry out an accurate distribution. For example, you may, want to know the total population, the total number of households, the number of girls and boys under five, the number of people with a disability, the number of female-headed households, and so on.

A simple counter book with columns ruled in it is sufficient to record the details of each household. An example of the registration format is given ill Fig.2. It can give different pieces of informatiori:

- the total registered population — by adding column 7
- the total number of households the final figure in column 1
- the total number of women households by adding column 3
- children under five years selected from columns 5 and 6
- those eligible for certain non-food items for example, if hoes are being

H/h no.	Name of man/ husband	Name of woman/ wife	Names of dependents	Ages (M)	Ages (F)	Total in h/hold	Comments
	Hamisi Juma	Asia Meza	Asha Iddi		12	5	
			Ahmad Juma	8			
			Mwanaidi Juma		5		
2	Edward Mangi	Stela Sheba	Ana Mangi	-	3	3	
3		Mary Katesi	Evaule Mangi	9		3	
			Rephael Mangi	4			
4	Widow	Sarah Kapipi	Teresa Vita		18	4	
			Samson Vita	10			
			Patty Vita	4			
5	Daniel Kalabo		Peter Kalabo	12		3	
			Festo Kalabo	8			

H/h No.	Name of wife/ woman	Name of husband/ man	Children and dependents	Ages (M)	Ages (F)	Total in H/hold	Comments
	Ebei	Longole	Apuu Longole	6		4	
			Akai Longole	3			
2	Amuron	Kidewa	Ajikon Kidewa		10		
			Atir Kidewa		7		
			Napei Kidewa		3		
3	Midong	Kidewa	Mukoo Kidewa	5		2	
4	Lochom	Ekata	Losike Ekata	5		3	
5	Adirkingol		Asekon Nate		7	2	

Fig.2: Sample Registration Formats

given to those over 15 years, add columns 2 and 3 and select from columns 5 and 6.

The final column gives space for recording any additional information, such as people with special needs, unaccompanied children, and so on.

The second of the two examples in Fig.2 reverses the columns for men and women, so that the woman is seen more easily as a household head. Since items are normally distributed to women, and it is their name which is called out at the distribution, it makes sense for the woman's name to be listed first.

In this example the women in households 2 and 3 are co-wives, with the husband listed in both households but counted only in the first.

Common Problems in Registration

These are some of the problems often faced during registration. Many of them can usually be resolved with the help of local leaders, although this is obviously more difficult when leadership structures are weak or newly-established.

- registration of newly-married women, who may be duplicated in their mother's homes and in the homes to which they are married.
- registration of single people, who are often more mobile than those with families.
- registration by mistake of people temporarily visiting a household.
- the limited time within which registration takes place may leave out some people who would otherwise be eligible to register. An illustration of this is pastoralists who at times of drought or conflict might have moved further away in search of pasture or security.
- the impact of traditional beliefs, such as reluctance within some cultures to be counted, or fears that the registration may in some way be harmful (for example, a belief that children will then be taken away to school and therefore no longer able to help in supporting the household).
- the impact of past unsuccessful registrations, which may have destroyed confidence in the process.

One problem which should always be expected is that **everyone** will want to be registered and to benefit, regardless of their eligibility or level of need. This emphasises the importance of taking time to explain to people the objectives of the distribution, and to help them understand the reasons why not everyone may be able to be included.

Registration of Displaced People

It is usually very difficult to complete an accurate registration of a displaced population, for several reasons:

- people are often living in conditions of greater confusion and change, with weak systems of leadership and representation. This will make it harder to find good guidance and to cross-check information.
- the levels of insecurity and tension mean that people may not trust you and may give you false information. However, remember that sometimes people will give the wrong information not because they intend to cheat, but because they don't understand the system and fear losing their entitlements.
- population figures are politically sensitive in situations where people may be competing for power and control. Different parties, either within the displaced community or outside it, may have their own reasons for determining what the correct figure should be.

The following suggestions may help:

- Always explain carefully the purpose of the registration and what will happen.
- Try using teams of staff to cross-check each other's information, such as one to interview and one to record.
- Ensure that the registration team understands the objectives and plans of the relief project as a whole, in order to answer people's questions satisfactorily. Registration can be the first contact a displaced person has with an organisation, and this can leave strong impressions.
- Develop good systems of coordination so that the information needed to update population figures, such as births, deaths, new families, new arrivals, and departures, can be quickly obtained.

Registration Groundrules

- Register people in their homes whenever possible. This avoids the confusion of crowds and is a more familiar environment.
- If there are several registration points, begin the registration in all of them at the same time. If this is not possible, at least start it in neighbouring points at the same time. This avoids double registration as people move from place to place.
- Always invite local leaders to accompany you. They will help identify the right people to be interviewed, and will often know if someone is away or visiting the area.

- Ask women for information about their family. Take time for common courtesies and greetings, and to explain what inforrmation you need and why you need it. Encourage them to relax, and avoid asking leading or obvious questions.
- Only write a name in the register once you are sure of the persons eligibility, because once someone sees his or her name written down, they mav assume that their status has been accepted.
- In general, register only those people whom you can physically, see. However, there are bound to be people away from the home, so use the local leaders to confirm information about absences and then register them in their usual homes.
- Register all children and record all their names. To check that these are correct, ask their mother to list all their names and ages at different stages during the interview, or use follow-up questions later on (such as "what did you say was the name of your second born?")
- Cross-check information with other sources — such as neighbours, health centres, elders and use your eyes.
- Complete the registration as quickly as possible. This will reduce the chances of people moving from one place to another and registering twice over.
- Keep the beneficiaries well informed, particularly if there is going to be any delay after registration. If people can see some practical benefit following quickly after the registration, such as an early distribution, this will maintain their confidence in the process.

Planning 2

Once the registration is complete, a second stage of planning is necessary in order to work out the logistical details of the distribution. Most of the Information given here is more relevant for decentralised distributions, in which supplies are delivered to several different distribution points.

Compiling Figures and Calculating Rations

Simple mistakes made at this stage can cause problems later on. Box 6 gives an example of the kind of calculations which might be required.

Box 6

Sample Calculations for Food Distribution

Food distributions are based on allocations to each individual rather than to each household. The total amount of food needed at each distribution point is therefore based upon the total number of people registered at that point.

Distribution point A has 1,000 registered people
Ration per person: 12kg maize
Distribution point A therefore needs 12,000kg maize

Remember that the logistician or storekeeper will calculate the requirements for each distribution point based on the total population registered. If there have been mistakes made in the addition of the register, the quantity of goods despatched will be incorrect.

Remember that items can be packed in different weights. Maize usually comes in 50kg or 90kg bags.
Distribution point A will need 240 bags of 50kg maize
" " " " " 134 bags of 90kg maize

Remember to round up the number of bags, to avoid a shortfall. It is better to take a small surplus to a distribution point than too little.
As far as possible, arrange with the suppliers for the packaging to remain the same weight from month to month. This is because beneficiaries should be informed not only of their individual entitlement but also of the number of bags and their weight expected at their own dropping point or distribution centre. If the unit weight of the bags changes, then the numbers of bags due to that centre also has to change.

Planning the Distribution Schedule

By this stage you will know which distribution points require which amounts of which items.

You now need to plan a timetable for delivering them. There are several factors which you might consider. You may want to prioritise:

• those places which seem in greatest need
• the distribution points which are furthest away
• areas of particular tension or difficulty
• if rains are imminent, places which may become difficult to reach

If your distribution is continuing over several months, you may also want to prioritise distribution points which were served first during the previous month, so that the time they have to wait for their next delivery is not too long.

Other options might be:

• to distribute to all the points in one geographical area at a time
• to distribute to the centres for which one monitor is responsible on different dates, so that s/he can attend each distribution.

Once the distribution plan has been drawn up, make sure that it is explained to and discussed with the storekeeper, who will be responsible for loading items according to the priorities set out in the plan.

Remember that good logistics are crucial to success. The whole approach is built upon trust, and the beneficiaries must have confidence that the system will deliver what has been promised to them. Irregular intervals between distributions will only undermine this confidence and may increase people's need to cheat the system.

Hiring Trucks

Setting up your own trucking fleet is usually only practical in long-term projects which have adequate specialist support. In most cases the best option is to hire transport from local businessmen.

Private trucking operations are often small, and so a reasonably-sized fleet will have to be put together from different sources.

The most important lesson is to draw up clear contracts setting out the different responsibilities of the two parties:

• Make sure that the truck operators conform to any local legislation. Some governments fix freight rates, and there can be restrictions on the movements of certain goods.
• Insist on proper safety procedures, such as forbidding passengers to travel on top of the lorries.
• Insist that only your goods are carried. If you are distributing food, other items (such as fuel) can contaminate it. There may also be government regulations controlling the movement of certain goods.

• Insist that your goods are properly protected with tarpaulins.
• Clarify who will be held responsible for losses in transit and for insurance. The transporter is usually liable for damage or loss caused by factors within their control (such as poor driving or using insecure routes), and for arranging third-party insurance.
• Payment is usually based on a flat rate per kilometre, one-way only:
  • avoid paying for the truck's time, which may tempt transporters to take longer than necessary.
  • avoid paying per trip, which may tempt transporters not to load fully, or to carry other goods.
• Clarify payment terms, for example on production of a correctly signed delivery note. Include a penalty clause for late delivery. Make sure that the transporters understand that it is their drivers' responsibility to ensure that the documents are returned correctly signed.

If several agencies are operating in the same area, try and standardise payment rates, to avoid transporters negotiating with one agency against another.

Fuel consumption will vary depending on the condition of the truck and the roads. Poor roads can increase fuel consumption by as much as 35%. On average, a truck of 10mt and above will consume between 35 and 50 litres per 100km.

Before the distribution begins calculate the distances to each distribution point, so that there is then an agreed basis from which to work with the transporters.

Small transporters may have limited cash available. Think about supporting them by providing fuel in advance if needed, and then deducting this from their payment. Good transporters are invaluable and should be treated as such.

Truck drivers will need to be told the exact location of the dropping points. These may vary, particularly when distributing to nomadic people.

Sharing Information 2

The second stage at which information should formally be given to the beneficiaries is immediately before distribution. Through their leaders, they should be told:

• the place and date of distribution
• the level of entitlement due to each person
• the way in which the distribution will work

The same methods that were used to publicise the registration criteria can be used again. Distribution guidelines must be written down, distributed and publicly announced, so that there is no confusion about what will happen.

These guidelines might cover things like:

- the categories of people to whom the items will be given, and that only those registered will be entitled to receive them.
- that the trucks should be offloaded by the beneficiaries.
- the names of the people who should be present at the distribution.
- that there will be no payments in kind, for example to committee members, offloaders or scoopers. This is because the amounts despatched to each distribution point are calculated according to the exact population, with nothing to spare.
- the procedures for dealing with absences, such as a nominated family member collecting on someone's behalf, verified by the committee.
- the procedures for dealing with continuous absences, such as names being deleted from the register if someone fails to attend three distributions in a row, on the grounds that they are probably collecting items from another point.

This public meeting should be held before every distribution. In a long-term project people will soon become familiar with the overall system, and therefore the only information they will need each month is of any changes to the system, plus the formal announcement of the monthly entitlement.

In some situations the quantity for distribution will differ from month to month. This happens, for example, in long-term food distributions which have unreliable supply lines, or when distributions are coming to an end and rations are being reduced. In these circumstances it is particularly important that the monthly entitlement is always announced before each distribution.

Distribution

Once the items have been received and signed for by the community's representatives they become their responsibility. Offloading should be done by groups of beneficiaries.

The distribution itself is usually held immediately after receipt, or at a day's notice. Community leaders are responsible for arranging the storage and security of items during the night before distribution, and for alerting people that the distribution is about to begin.

Oxfam staff should ensure that they respect the goods as other people's property, not handling them unless asked to do so, for example, and not stepping over them while they are on the ground.

Non-food items, such as blankets, tools and household goods, are given directly to people. Food and seeds are "scooped":

- each distribution point has a set of scoops which are the equivalent weight of one person's ration.
- metal scoops should be made specifically for the project. If this is not possible, improvise with cut-down plastic jerry cans or with everyday household containers, but remember that jerry cans will lose their shape with use.
- beneficiaries must trust the measure. **Always** demonstrate it to them first by weighing its contents.
- scooping is usually done by community members, preferably women, under the supervision of community leaders and the Oxfam monitor.

The **distribution procedure follows** a series of six simple steps:

1. An open meeting is held with the beneficiaries and community leaders, at which either a community representative or the Oxfam monitor reads out the entitlements and the distribution guidelines, and explains any changes to the system. At this meeting, people must be given the chance to ask questions and to raise concerns.
2. The items to be distributed are arranged on open ground so that everyone can see them, and nothing can be taken without being noticed. The number of items is counted and checked by the community leaders with the Oxfam monitor.
3. If scoops are needed, and if this is the first distribution, or if the monthly entitlement has changed, the weight of the scoop should be demonstrated to the beneficiaries by publicly weighing the food or seeds.
4. The Oxfam monitor or a community leader reads each name in turn from the register. Each woman (items are distributed directly to women) comes forward when she hears her name and is given the items due to her:
   - if these are household items she will be given the quantity which was specified in the distribution guidelines and announced in the public meetings.
   - if these are food or seeds she will be given one scoop for each registered and entitled beneficiary in her household. Every woman should be asked to repeat the names of her children, in order to cross-check them with what is written in the register.

In this way, rather than having to calculate the total weight which is due to her, a woman only has to count the number of scoops, check that these are being measured fairly, and check that the number corresponds with the number of people registered in her household.

5. The monitor marks the register to indicate which people have received which items. If any items are left over at the end of the distribution, the community's representatives will decide to whom they should be given. These might be widows, disabled people, or others who are felt to be in particular need.
6. Throughout the distribution the leaders or committee members are watching to ensure that things run smoothly. If there are any problems or concerns these are discussed with the Oxfam monitor at a meeting after the distribution, from which any problems can be reported to the central Oxfam office.

At the end of a food distribution the beneficiaries should be allowed to take away any gunny bags (the jute or nylon bags which contain the food). This is often an area of disagreement with the World Food Programme and the government, because the bags are valuable when sold. But the beneficiaries can also sell them, or put them to a variety of uses, such as for roofing or for carrying food home.

Monitoring

In longer-term projects there should be a monthly check on progress, which should consider three different aspects:

- **the efficiency of the project**
  for example:
  - is the registration information accurate?
  - are those registered actually receiving their entitlement?
  - is the logistics system running smoothly?
  - are the staff confident and capable?

- **the context within which it is operating**
  for example:
  - are conditions changing?
  - are people's needs changing?
  - does the programme need to adjust to reflect these changes?

- **the impact of the project**
  for example:
  - are the distributions having the impact that was intended?
  - are they having any impact which was not foreseen?
  - is this beneficial?

The third of these, on the project's impact, may be harder to judge from month to month and could be assessed every three or six months.

The information needed for monitoring can be gathered from a variety of sources:

- reports from field staff
- conversations with beneficiaries
- conversations with community leaders
- discussions with government staff
- feedback from other agencies
- changes in early warning indicators

Cross-check all these information sources as much as possible. In particular, make sure to ask women at random:

- whether they know what their entitlement is
- whether they have been receiving it

The key point in monitoring is to change your plans and activities to take the new information into account, and therefore to ensure that the project remains relevant and effective. For example, if a certain distribution point keeps reporting difficulties then there may be a more serious problem which needs attention, perhaps to do with the behaviour of the committee or the monitor.

Close monitoring is particularly important as a distribution draws towards the end. This is because many people will have been supported in various ways by it, such as transporters, suppliers and staff, and a few may try to get some last benefit through cheating. It may be necessary to allocate more resources to monitoring and follow-up, and to increase the frequency of physical checks at the store.

Food Distribution

Purpose of Food Distribution

Food distribution usually has two main purposes:

- to support people nutritionally
- to support people economically

The first of these is clear, because food distribution is one way of helping vulnerable people during a food crisis. A distribution project may begin with the aim of providing nutritional support, but as conditions improve it may place increasing emphasis on the idea of economic support.

This is because the food crisis may have come about for two different reasons:

- if food was not available within the area.
- if food was available within the area, but people were unable to buy it.

The first of these is to do with **availability,** and the second is to do with **access.** People lose access to food when they become economically weak — when they lose the means to purchase food or to obtain it in exchange for other goods. They may also lose access through production failures, such as poor rains, bad harvests or the loss of livestock.

As a food crisis deepens, people begin to sell off valuable assets in order to sustain themselves. These may be tools, household goods, land, livestock, or personal savings. Once they lose these assets, they become more vulnerable and less able to protect themselves from future difficulties.

In this context food becomes a form of asset, and the purpose of food distribution might be to support people's livelihoods as well as their physical wellbeing. Food aid becomes an economic resource with which the food security and longer-term livelihoods of communities can be strengthened. This kind of approach reflects the priority of communities, which is often to avoid long-term destitution than to avoid short-term hunger.

However, this approach has several implications for project planning and design:

- it may change the definition of who is vulnerable, to include all those whose resource base is at risk.

- the range of indicators needed to monitor the project's effectiveness will be wider and will include information about people's economic health as well as the environment and their physical condition.
- distributions may need to continue at some level until the subsistence economy recovers - for example until farmers reach the next harvest, or until livestock herds multiply and produce sufficient milk. However, people's nutritional situation is likely to have improved well before this point, and therefore there may be some pressure for distributions to end. But if this happens there is a risk that any nutritional gains will be lost, because the underlying problem will still not have been solved.
- once the nutritional situation has stabilised, rations may be reduced so that the distribution serves only as a supplement to household food supplies and income. The criteria for determining ration levels at this point will then have less to do with nutrition and more to do with providing a reasonable level of economic support.

Methods of Food Distribution

There are three main methods of food distribution:
- general ration distribution
- supplementary feeding
- therapeutic feeding.

In addition, the general ration may be distributed in different ways:

- it may be given freely, with no conditions attached, or it may be given in exchange for labour. The latter is known as **food for work.**
- it may be given to a broad range of people, or it may be targeted to particular kinds of people or to particular areas. This is known as **targeting.**

The next few pages focus on the general ration, and then within that look at the role of food for work. There are also brief descriptions of supplementary and therapeutic feeding, and of ways of using food aid to support the destocking and restocking processes used by pastoralists.

General Ration

Ration Sizes

The approach set out in this book applies to the distribution of the general ration, the purpose of which is to ensure that people's general nutritional requirements are being adequately met.

The size of the ration and its coverage will depend on circumstances. For example:

- refugees and internally displaced people are often totally dependent on external aid for their food supply, unless they are living in settlements and/or have some means to support themselves. A full general ration should therefore be given to everybody.
- settled communities and pastoralists may need their complete food needs met or they may only need a supplement. Moreover, some areas may be more seriously affected than others and could be prioritised to receive food. This is known as **geographical targeting.**

The general ration traditionally includes three main types of food:

- a staple food, such as a cereal, to provide protein and energy.
- a fat, usually oil, to provide energy and make the food palatable.
- a pulse, such as beans or lentils, to provide protein.

However, this can be adapted to suit the particular situation. For example, if the distribution is to people still living in their home areas, a single commodity ration of a staple food may be preferable. Again, if the situation is one in which food is likely to be bartered, then a high value commodity such as salt or oil may be more useful.

The key point to remember is that the quality and quantity of the general ration is a crucial factor in protecting people's health. Improvements in the general ration will do much to minimise the need for supplementary feeding programmes.

The minimum ration recommended by UNHCR and WFP is 1900 kilocalories per person per day. Some agencies use higher planning figures of 2100 or 2400 kcal. However, this means that if they are distributing on behalf of WFP they are likely to have to make up the shortfall themselves.

The conventional 1900 kcal ration is usually translated into the following quantities:

- cereals 400 gms per person per day (12kg per month)
- pulses 60gmsper person per day (3kg per month)
- oil 25gms per person per day (0.75kg per month)

It must be remembered that this is an **absolute minimum:**

- in the early stages of a food crisis, and if people do not have alternative sources of food, the largest nutritionally-balanced ration possible should be given (2400 kcal).
- rations should be increased if there is widespread malnutrition, if people are doing considerable manual work, or in cold weather.
- if people are completely dependent on food aid, other items such as salt, sugar and tea should be added.
- in camps of displaced people, every effort should be made to provide pieces of land for growing vegetables.
- care should be taken to ensure that people's vitamin and mineral requiremerits are being adequately met. If people have no other sources of food then they will be at risk of diseases caused by the lack of key vitamins and minerals **(micro-nutrient deficiencies).** One strategy which WFP is investigating is the possible use of blended food, more commonly used in supplementary feeding programmes, as a part of the general ration. A list of health problems caused by inadequate diet is given in Box 7.
- in the later stages of a food crisis the ration can be changed according to the other sources of food which people might by then have available to them.

The important factor is less the specified ration size and more the amount which people actually receive. Logistical problems and delays can often mean that beneficiaries do not receive the amounts to which they are entitled, and shortfalls are rarely made up at a later stage. Moreover, ration sizes are sometimes in practice determined by available food stocks rather than by what is nutritionally correct.

Whenever possible select foods for distribution which are familiar to the beneficiaries, so that they know how to prepare them, and which are economical in terms of their preparation and cooking. However, large donors such as the World Food Programme can have little flexibilty in the foods they supply.

People may want to sell part of their food ration to buy other items. This is perfectly acceptable:

- the food being distributed provides only part of what people need for a balanced diet.
- if the provision of economic support is accepted as a legitimate objective of distribution, then people are entitled to cash in this asset (the food) when they need to do so.
- the food distributed may not be people's preferred or familiar diet.
- once food has been distributed it belongs to the beneficiaries and it is theirs to do with as they wish.

Box 7
Common Vitamin and Mineral Deficiencies

- **Anaemia (iron deficiency)**

  Anaemia is a low level of haemoglobin in the blood which affects a person's ability to make sustained physical effort. It is common among children and women, particular those pregnant or recently delivered. Diets low in Vitamin C and/or high in fibre reduce the absorption of iron, which is found in dark green leaves and in meat. Folic acid is also found in dark green leaves, liver and kidney, and is destroyed by prolonged cooking.
- **Xerophthalmia (Vitamin A deficiency)**

  If not treated this can lead to permanent blindness and can increase the incidence, severity and duration of infectious diseases. It can be prevented by a one-off distribution of vitamin A capsules to all under-five children every six months.
- **Iodine deficiency**

  This can cause enlargement of the thyroid gland (goitre) and reproductive failure. Iodine is found in animal products and marine fish. If the soil lacks iodine, the food grown will be deficient in iodine.

  The following three diseases are less widespread but often occur in populations dependent on food rations:
- **Scurvy (Vitamin C deficiency)**

  This is caused by lack of vitamin C, which is found in fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **Beriberi (Thiamine deficiency)**

  This is found when people are dependent on starchy staple foods (such as cassava) or highly refined cereals (such as white polished rice). Thiamine is present in dried peas and beans, whole grain cereals, groundnuts and oil seeds.
- **Pellagra (Niacin deficiency)**

  This is common when people are eating a maize-based diet with little protein rich food. Niacin is present in whole grain cereals, groundnuts, dried peas and beans and milk, but is destroyed by long cooking.

However, food sales can become a problem:

- if they are happening on a large scale, which may indicate that there is too much food being distributed within the system.
- if there is evidence that traders are putting pressure on people to sell their food, which will then often be at a price which is too low.

Issues to Consider

There are several issues to consider when adopting this approach to food distribution. These are just five.

1. Household Size

Each individual listed in the register is entitled to receive the same amount of food. This means that **large households will receive more food than** small households, because the total household ration is determined by the number of people registered.

In this way the system makes allowances for the different needs of differcut sized households. It avoids the main problem with standard allocations to households whereby, for example, one group of eight people and another of two people are expected to manage with the same amount of food.

But the main problem with this is that **it tempts people to claim that they have more children than they really do,** in order to increase the size of their total household ration.

This is less of a problem in settled communities, where staff, villagers and their leaders know each other well. In these cases experience shows that people will monitor each other, reluctant to see someone else "getting away with it".

But when this local knowledge is not there, such as when people have been displaced and moved into new areas with new leaders, there can be problems. In these circumstances, much more work is required in monitoring distributions and cross-checking registration records, and in building up strong structures of representation.

2. Women's Role and Needs

By tradition, women are responsible for managing food within the household. Distributing food directly to women, and involving them in decisions about the project, recognises this responsibility.

Women may also be more vulnerable during times of food crisis than other family members because of..

- the toll taken by the physical demands of pregnancy and motherhood.

• the fact that in many cultures women are the last in the household to eat and therefore at greater risk when food is short.

This reinforces the importance of an adequate ration which is large enough to cover the needs of all family members.

3. Project Context

Food distribution will need different approaches, and have a different impact, in different settings, as this comparison between an agricultural and a pastoral economy shows.

- **Impact on the local economy**

  In agricultural economies the effect of food aid on the value of local crops should be monitored, but this will be a less significant problem in pastoralist areas. In a livestock economy food aid can actually strengthen local production because the additional food within the system increases the value of livestock products relative to cereals.
- **Recovery period**

  In agricultural areas production may recover sufficiently after one good season. In pastoralist areas the period of recovery is much longer. It can be several calving seasons until milk is available and livestock numbers have risen. These factors should be taken into account when planning the project's phase-out.
- **Ways of life**

  In settled communities monthly dropping points are likely to remain the same. But in nomadic communities they may change, so that the food can be taken as close as possible to where the herding groups are. The logistics system must be sufficiently flexible and reliable to cope with this.

4. Project Focus

The focus of many food distributions tends to be on nutrition. Although this is obviously an important element, particularly in the early stages, a broader approach is often more relevant to the practice and long-term needs of a community:

• nutrition surveys are sometimes used to target food to particular areas or households. But this overlooks the widespread cultural practice of sharing and loans, and fails to see each household as part of a wider community with its own systems of social and family support.
  A certain amount of redistribution after distribution will always occur,

often to reinforce these traditional systems of exchanges, and this should be supported.

• for many people the long-term viability of their community and household is of greater concern than enduring a short-term period of hunger. For some, going hungry is a conscious way of coping with the stress.

However, this strategy becomes a problem if assets are so reduced that recovery becomes progressively harder. But it reinforces the point that agencies should take a broad view of the purpose of food distribution.

5. Food Purchase and Quality Control

Food for distribution may be purchased from the local area, from within the country or from outside it. The choice will depend on factors such as the extent of food insecurity, the capacity of the suppliers, and the relative price and delivery times.

In the first few months of any programme local purchase can help to get things moving quickly, while more formal arrangements for tender are being set up.

A major problem is that of sub-contracting, when the company which wins the tender then contracts a second company to make the supply, which in turn may also sub-contract. This makes it very difficult for staff to know with whom they are dealing, and it may also mean that the price is unnecessarily high.

It is very important that any food distributed meets the correct standards of quality control. The only way to be sure of this is to arrange for professional inspections.

Inspections are normally the responsibility of the relief agency and are done at their expense. This ensures that the inspection company is acting in the agency's interests.

Ensure that there is a clear letter of agreement with the inspection company which covers issues such as where the inspection will take place, what the product specification is, what the sample will be, and what the procedures will be in the event of food found to be unacceptable.

Problems can occur if there are delays at the laboratory while the test results are coming through, during which time the trucks may be waiting to load. Inspections need good coordination with delivery plans and transporters.

Also, food should be inspected at the final destination. If it is being inspected at the supplier's warehouse, there is still the possibility of it being damaged on the way. In this case make sure that the contract with the suppliers makes clear your right to refuse poor quality food even after inspection.

Food for Work (FFW)

A food for work project is one in which people are given food in exchange for their labour. The work is usually physical labour on some kind of community project or public works scheme, such as constructing roads, schools or granaries.

Some governments (such as Ethiopia) have a policy that food aid should only be distributed through food for work schemes.

The arguments used in favour of food for work schemes are:

- that they are **self-selecting,** ie that they target those people who are most in need, on the grounds that only those who need the food will come forward to do the work.
- that they provide a way for people to become actively involved in helping themselves, and so restore a sense of purpose, avoiding the problems of dependency sometimes associated with free food distribution.
- that they are an opportunity to develop the infrastructure and facilities of an area at the same time as meeting people's food needs.

These arguments are based on various assumptions:

- that there is surplus labour within the community, particularly within its poorest groups.
- that free distributions make people idle and lazy and dependent on external assistance.
- that the priorities of the poorest groups (those targeted by FFW activities) and the priorities of those concerned with the development of an area (its leaders, and those likely to benefit from improved infrastructure) are the same.

But these assumptions are not necessarily correct:

- the poorest groups within a community are those **least** likely to have spare time available for extra work.
- there is evidence from Zambia and Kenya that FFW programmes themselves can destroy community motivation and self-help, as people lose interest in any activity for which they don't receive some payment.
- the priorities of different groups within a community are rarely the same.

An illustration of this is road building, a common activity in FFW programmes, which may be a high priority for traders and local leaders in the area but less of a priority for pastoralists, for example.

- the belief that free distribution creates dependency stems more from donor attitudes that people should not be given "something for nothing". In practice, dependency is caused not by what we do but by the way in which we do it.

Distribution systems which keep people linked to their normal patterns of social and economic life will help to preserve their *independence.*

Several problems have been identified with UW programmes:

1. Approximately 90% of those who take part in them are women. This raises several concerns:
   - women already have a far greater burden of physical work than men in sustaining the family and the household. FFW activities are usually an addition to this, not a replacement for it. In contrast, research from Ethiopia shows that men tend to substitute FFW for their normal work.
   - women are often nutritionally more vulnerable than men, due to pregnancy, breast-feeding, and by custom being the last in the household to eat and therefore the first to go without if food is scarce.
   - women sometimes offload household work onto older children, particularly girls, so that they can take part in FFW programmes. This work may be too demanding for the children's age and may take them out of school, thus damaging their long-term opportunities.
2. External agencies or government officials often assume that "work" is something defined in ways which are easily recognisable to them, such as paid labour, forgetting that a lot of hidden work goes on in normal everyday life.
3. Some vulnerable people, such as the elderly and the disabled, are unable to do physical work and are therefore prevented from taking part.
4. Physical labour will increase calorie requirements at a time when food shortages are already making them difficult to meet.
5. Those targeted by the projects are the poorest people within a community and often the most undernourished. Adding to their physical burdens at a time of stress is damaging to their health and questionable on ethical grounds.

FFW programmes are likely only to be appropriate and effective under the following conditions:

- if those taking part in them understand their purpose and have been involved in their design, so that their own priorities and needs are met.
- if women are involved in deciding which activities are appropriate for them.
- if the food shortages affect only a small area. FFW schemes are not suitable for large areas, or for situations in which many people are in need, because:
  - they are difficult to manage and supervise on a large scale
  - they can only employ limited numbers of people
  - they need an efficient supply of food so that people are paid immediately. The complexity of this is difficult to manage over a large area.
- if they are begun in the early stages of a food crisis, when people are not yet too weak.
- if they are carried out in people's home areas, so that family ties remain intact and normal methods of subsistence are not disrupted.
- if the logistics system is efficient, so that there is no delay in payments.
- if the work which is done is consistent with the lifestyle of the population, and if normal community tasks can be considered as contributions towards the project.

Supplementary and Therapeutic Feeding Programmes

Supplementary Feeding

These programmes provide nutritious supplements to children who are already malnourished, or who are at risk of becoming malnourished, in order to help them regain weight.

They should only be carried out when a basic general ration is already in place. If not, the supplementary foods will be shared within the household and will become a substitute for, rather than a supplement to, the normal diet.

Supplementary foods are either:

- wet rations — cooked food eaten at a feeding centre, or:
- dry rations — uncooked foods given to the mother to prepare at home.

The foods are usually a form of porridge, such as Corn Soya Milk (CSM), which is a blend of cereal flour, beans and dried skimmed milk with added

vitamins and minerals supplied through the American food aid programme. Local recipes can also be used.

Supplementary foods are usually given to moderately malnourished children, between 70% and 80% WM. They can also be given to other vulnerable people, such as pregnant and lactating women, the elderly, and sick adults.

Supplementary feeding programmes should be planned and supervised by staff qualified in health and nutrition.

Therapeutic feeding

These programmes, to help the most severely malnourished children, provide both intensive feeding and medical care. They are carried out in special feeding centres by skilled and experienced staff and require a high level of resources.

Further information about supplementary and therapeutic feeding can be found in:

- **Selective Feeding Programmes (Oxfam** Practical Health Guide No. 1)
- **Food Scarcity and Famine: Assessment and Response (Oxfam** Practical Health Guide No. 7)

Destocking and Restocking

One other way of using food aid to support people and their livelihoods is through destocking. As a drought worsens, pastoralists will begin selling off livestock, which then flood the market and bring their value down still further.

At the same time the price of cereals may be rising, which weakens the purchasing power of pastoralists (the relative prices of meat and grain) and therefore their access to food.

One response to this is a grain for livestock exchange through which:

- pastoralists can gain some income from weak animals, by exchanging them for cereals, which would otherwise have been slaughtered or sold for a low price.
- the meat from the livestock can be redistributed back to the owners.

It can be a complicated process, and therefore difficult to carry out on a large scale. It depends on agreeing a fair rate of exchange between cereals and livestock, and then setting up the systems to make the exchange, slaughter the animals and redistribute the meat.

One problem is that in times of stress the main herd may be far away, leaving only some milking stock at home. If exchanges take place solely at the homestead, more female stock will be exchanged and the reproductive capacity of the herd will be reduced.

One benefit is that it recognises the cultural as much as the economic value of livestock to pastoralists, and therefore provides psychological as well as material support at times of stress.

Restocking is the opposite process by which pastoralists try to rebuild their herds. Food aid can also support restocking, in that people may use any surplus food to exchange it for animals. However there are limitations to this strategy, because the amounts people need to accumulate can be quite large. The more likely option is that continued distribution of food aid will allow pastoralists to preserve their existing herds and let them reproduce. Cash can also in some situations be used as an incentive to restock.

In most formal restocking programmes, where individual households are given a certain number of animals to help them return to a pastoralist way of life, food aid is also given as an additional form of income support, again so that pastoralists can refrain from unnecessary slaughter or sale of livestock while the herd is being rebuilt.

Non-Food Distribution

In some ways non-food distribution is more straightforward than food distribution, largely because it takes place only once, whereas food distribution can continue for several months.

However, a one-off distribution has its own difficulties. People may miss the registration and therefore be excluded from the distribution, but they may still expect to be added in at a later date. Those who marry after the distribution may also expect to receive household items in their own right.

The most common problems are deciding the specification and quantity of items to supply.

Specification

Always check carefully with beneficiaries exactly what kind of items are needed. Specifications need to be precise. For example:

- are they used to using buckets with tops or without?
- heavy-weight or light-weight blankets?
- what kind of tomato seed?
- what kind of hoes?

Items bought locally are more likely to be familiar to the beneficiaries.

Quantity

The quantity of items for distribution will depend on the circumstances. Often non-food distributions are planned as a supplement to what people may already have. They will rarely meet a household's full needs.

However, in situations where people have left their homes with almost nothing, lobby for additional funds to increase the entitlements, particularly for those items which will have a direct impact on people's health and welfare, such as blankets.

Some of the recommended entitlements for commonly-distributed items are given in Box 8. Specifications for purchase are included on the accompanying disc.

Box 8
Recommended Entitlements for Non-Food Items

Jerry Cans	One per woman, or single male. These are normally used for carrying water from the well or tapstand. Women need different containers for carrying and for storing water.
Buckets	One per woman, or single male. These are normally used for storing water in the house, or for carrying goods to and from the market. Include lids for water storage. Avoid handles on the buckets, because the weight will lead to them cracking.
Blankets	Normally two per household, to supplement what people already have. Think about social limitations, for example that sons above a certain age must sleep separately from their mother. Remember that the quality will deteriorate after a year, so consider whether another distribution is necessary. This will depend on the circumstances — for example, if refugees have remained in a transit site and not moved to settlement, and have few opportunities to earn income.
Knitted Tops	Normally two or three pieces for each household with children. Oxfam keeps stocks of these woollen tops for children in its Emergency Stores in the U K.
Soap	One piece of 200-250g per person per month.
Saucepans	Two pieces per household.
Plastic Sheeting	One piece of 7A metres per household. Plastic sheeting supplied through UNHCR normally comes ready-cut. Rolls purchased from other suppliers need to be cut to the appropriate size.

Seeds and Tools Distribution

Distributions of agricultural seeds and tools are a common response at times of crisis, or for the purposes of rehabilitation, but one where mistakes are often made.

Some of the main lessons learnt have been:

- Think carefully about whether this is the most appropriate response for the particular situation, or one which seems attractive because it is easy to raise funds for it.
- Seed may be eaten at times of food shortage. Think about whether food aid should also be made available either before or during the seeds/tools distribution, and whether any health warnings need to be given.
- Most planting is managed by women. Seed storage is also traditionally a woman's role. Make sure that women are actively involved in both the planning and the implementation of the programme.
- Older children will also often help out in the fields. Think about whether including them in the distribution of tools may help strengthen production.
- Displaced people will often be sharing resources with villagers already living in the area. Think about whether support should also be given to the host communities.
- In the short-term, when people have been newly-displaced and have few alternative food sources, quick-growing vegetables are a good choice to provide additional supplements to the diet and a means of sale or exchange. In longer-term situations, or with people still living in their home areas, seeds of staple crops are more appropriate.
- Think about whether the distribution may be more effective if assistance is also given in other related areas, such as providing agricultural advice, supporting the marketing infrastructure, providing pesticides, and so on.
- Poor timing is a common weakness. Maintaining updated registers of suppliers and their quotations can save time. Drawing up draft contracts in advance, which clearly state the specifications required and protect Oxfam's position if these are not met, can also prevent delays.
- Think about the benefits of local or external purchase. Bringing in seeds from outside may weaken indigenous seed-saving practices. Farmers may prefer locally-made tools: investigate what the constraints to their production are.
- Technical advice must be sought, from government agricultural departments or research stations, or from other organisations, on a range of issues, such as:
  - the types of soil, seed and tools

- the quantity of items to be distributed
- the most appropriate time for planting
- the requirements for storage and transportation

Also ask people which varieties they prefer and are used to growing.

Summary of Key Lessons Registration and Distribution

- The more that people are aware of what is happening and why, the more confident they will feel in the distribution process and the more they will support it. Be as clear and as open as possible at every stage of the distribution.

- Women are best placed to suggest solutions to problems which affect the family. Make special efforts to consult and discuss plans and progress with them.

- Dependency is caused when people lose access to their normal systems of social and economic support. Design systems of registration and distribution which cause as little disruption possible to ple's normal patterns of life.

- Broken promises destroy the trust between beneficiaries and relief agencies. Never make any commitments until funds have been approved, and ensure that the logistics systems are as effective as they can be in delivering people's entitlements on

- Problems are inevitable. Be realistic, and be open to the fact that the beneficiaries may well have priorities and values which are different to your own.

Appendix

Further Reading

Food Scarcity and Famine: Assessment and Response, Oxfam Practical Health Guide No. 7 (1992)

Selective Feeding Programmes, Oxfam Practical Health Guide No. 1.

General Food Distribution in Emergencies: from Nutritional Needs to Political Priorities, Relief and Rehabilitation Network, ODI (1995), Good Practice Review No.3, S.Jaspars and H.Young.

Food Aid in Emergencies, WFP, 1991/1993
(Volume 1. Policies and Procedures. Volume 2. Operational Procedures)

Memorandum of Understanding, WFP/UNHCR, 1995
This sets out the division of responsibilities of both agencies in relation to the food needs of refugees, and covers needs assessment, resource mobilisation, logistics implementation, distribution, monitoring and reporting, and food aid coordination mechanisms and procedures.

Guidelines on Commodity Distribution, UNHCR, 1995

Supplies and Food Aid Handbook, UNHCR

Food Aid Manual, SCF 1994

Food Storage Manual, WFP/NRI, 1994

Nutrition Guidelines, MSF, 1995

Material Available on Disc

- Job Descriptions: Distribution and Logistics Staff
- Sample Distribution Schedule
- Standard Specifications for Relief Items
- Sample Specification for Maize Purchase
- Sample Letter of Agreement concerning Food Inspection