MSF logistics: the right place at the right time

Logistics are vital to MSF's lifesaving work. Without communications, transport, medical supplies and a safe place to sleep, MSF doctors and nurses can't do their jobs. Thousands of logisticians work for MSF at headquarters and in the field. For them, getting medical teams and supplies to where they're needed, when they're needed, is all in a day's work.

MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES
DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS

1

In 1979, pharmacist Jacques Pinel was working for MSF in a refugee camp in Thailand. Appalled by the muddle of medicines he found stacked under tarpaulins, he declared MSF "an organisation without organisation", and set about establishing order.

2

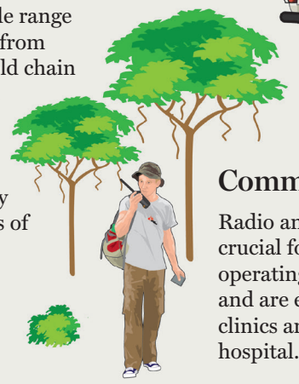
Pinel organised lists of essential medicines and established MSF's first pre-prepared medical kits, as well as guidelines for their use. These kits and guidelines rapidly became the cornerstone of logistics at MSF, and are the foundation of our lifesaving work around the world.

3

Today, MSF logistics are organised jointly by MSF teams in the field, at headquarters and at its warehouses located in Brussels, Bordeaux and Dubai. When a disaster strikes, emergency kits and equipment can be dispatched to the field within 24 hours.

Logistics in the field

With support from staff at MSF's warehouses and headquarters, logisticians in the field have a wide range of responsibilities, from maintaining the cold chain during vaccination campaigns to servicing vehicles and setting up hospital tents. They have six main areas of responsibility:



Transport

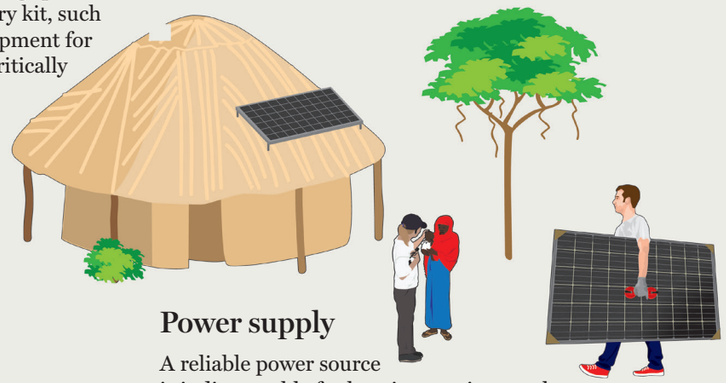
From dug-out canoes to Land Cruisers and motorbikes, effective and reliable transport is essential to MSF's ability to reach people cut off from medical care.

Communications

Radio and satellite equipment are crucial for the security of teams operating in dangerous environments, and are essential when running mobile clinics and transferring patients to hospital.

Biomedical

Supplying and maintaining specialised equipment and laboratory kit, such as microscopes and equipment for diagnosing diseases, is critically important work.



Power supply

A reliable power source is indispensable for keeping vaccines cool, running medical equipment and providing lighting. In the field, logisticians are tasked with maintaining generators and, increasingly, operating mobile solar units for use in emergencies as well as larger solar panels in established projects.

Water and sanitation

Clean water and latrines are vital for all MSF operations. During a cholera outbreak, in a refugee camp, or when carrying out surgery, a safe and reliable water source is essential.

Kits and items

Logisticians are responsible for the supply and storage of medical and non-medical items used throughout MSF projects. A key part of this is maintaining the cold chain, whereby vaccines are kept refrigerated for the whole of their journey, from MSF warehouse through arrival in-country to the moment when they are put to use in vaccination campaigns.

Graphic: Jenny Ridley

MSF on the move

Every day, on land, on sea and in the air, MSF uses different modes of transport to ensure that supplies, equipment and medical staff are where they are needed. It's complex, challenging and often dangerous work, in some of the world's most extreme and remote environments.

Find out more about MSF transport and download more cards to print and play at msf.org.uk/transport

Vaccines are unloaded from a plane and transferred to a Land Cruiser in the Democratic Rebublic of Congo. *Photograph © Pim Ras*

Land Cruiser

Mobility	8
Capacity	6
Range	7

The iconic MSF Toyota Land Cruiser 70 series is the backbone of every MSF mission. Rugged and dependable, MSF operates more than 800 of these go-anywhere vehicles across the globe. Many have been customised to function as top-of-the-range ambulances, while others are used to transport people, goods and equipment.

Motorbike

Mobility	9
Capacity	4
Range	5

Some terrain is too tough even for 4x4s. In Democratic Republic of Congo, MSF runs mobile clinics by motorbike. Known as the 'bikers without borders', these brave riders provide a lifeline to tens of thousands of people who would otherwise be deprived of healthcare, in a country which has less than one hospital bed per 1,000 inhabitants and fewer than two doctors per 10,000 people.

Plane

Mobility	7
Capacity	9
Range	10

In the aftermath of a natural disaster or in the middle of a conflict, roads are often destroyed or dangerous. We use cargo planes to quickly transport large quantities of medical supplies and aid to where they are needed, and we use light aircraft to help our teams reach the most remote communities, and to transfer patients to hospital.

Helicopter

Mobility	9
Capacity	7
Range	8

The helicopter's unique ability to take off and land vertically ensures they are often used by MSF to reach stranded communities in areas where runways are non-existent or have been destroyed by conflict or natural disasters such as earthquakes.

Truck

Mobility	6
Capacity	8
Range	8

As well as carrying goods, MSF uses converted trucks as mobile clinics and laboratories. In Uganda and Zimbabwe, staff in MSF's mobile HIV units are able to diagnose patients within 15 minutes and start them on treatment on the spot. In a world where more than half the 35 million people with HIV are unaware they are carrying the virus, these mobile clinics help prevent people from getting sick, and reduce the chances of them infecting others.

Boat

Mobility	8
Capacity	6
Range	7

Boats and ships of all kinds are vital to the work that MSF does, whether rescuing refugees from the Mediterranean using a 66-metre offshore supply vessel (the Bourbon Argos), or delivering vital supplies such as shelter materials, hygiene kits, cooking utensils, blankets and mosquito nets to islands in the Philippines devastated by Typhoon Haiyan.

UAV

Mobility	10
Capacity	1
Range	6

In Papua New Guinea, MSF is running an innovative Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) programme to help fight tuberculosis (TB). MSF teams travel to isolated villages to collect sputum samples, which are then flown back by UAV for testing. In the future, we hope that the UAVs will also be used to transport anti-TB medicines back to the patient.

Horse

Mobility	9
Capacity	4
Range	5

In areas such as the Sidama hills of Ethiopia and parts of Colombia, horses and ponies provide the easiest way of travelling through difficult jungle terrain to reach isolated communities and people cut off from healthcare.

Canoe

Mobility	9
Capacity	4
Range	4

In many parts of the world where MSF works, large inland rivers operate like modern highways and the canoe is comparable to the car. These canoes range in style from fast and sleek motorised canoes to traditional wooden dugouts.

Feet

Mobility	10
Capacity	2
Range	2

When the mountain is too high or the terrain too rough, or when there are no cars, trucks, boats or planes to hand, sometimes the only option is to go by foot. Each year, MSF teams walk millions of miles to provide healthcare to people in desperate need.

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