Honduras

REMOTE GAPS AND NEEDS EXERCISE REPORT

July 2020
## Table of Contents

1. **BACKGROUND** .............................................................................................................. 5  
   1.1. HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT ......................................................................................... 5  
   1.2. HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONAL RESPONSE ............................................................ 6  
   1.3. EXISTING IN-COUNTRIES CAPACITIES ....................................................................... 7  
2. **PARTNERS LOGISTICS CAPACITIES, GAPS AND BOTTLENECKS** ...................................... 10  
3. **RECOMMENDATIONS** ................................................................................................... 13
Methodology

In the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Global Logistics Cluster performed a remote Gaps and Needs Analysis (GNA) for Honduras to assess the current logistics constraints faced by in-country’s humanitarian responders. This initiative was the product of a decision between the Global Logistics Cluster, the WFP Regional Bureau of Panama and the WFP Honduras Country Office following the strong impact of COVID-19 on humanitarian activities and upcoming operational needs. The detailed methodology of the GNA was shared in the Concept Note of the exercise.

Due to the exceptional international measures affecting movements of staff and the time constraint, the GNA was conducted remotely in 3 weeks (14 June – 5 July).

An email invitation was sent to 34 humanitarian actors: the members of the Logistics Working Group, representatives of the ACI Alliance and key actors participating in the Red Humanitaria facilitated through OCHA. A total of 22 expressions of interest were received and 20 online meetings were held in 10 days. It is worth noting that the overall response rate, interest and participation from actors was extremely high.

Based on the feedback from the interviews, key information on humanitarian activities in-country and extended research on private sector capacities, the analysis formulates recommendations on the way forward to continue strengthening humanitarian logistics responses in Honduras.

The exercise was conducted in Spanish, but the final analysis is produced in English to facilitate information sharing at national, regional and global levels. The key findings of the GNA will be translated into Spanish.

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1 Annex I
1. BACKGROUND

1.1. HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT

Honduras, the second poorest country in Central America, suffers from extraordinarily unequal distribution of income, as well as high underemployment. More than half of the total population of 9.235 million lives in poverty and per capita income is one of the lowest in the region. The economy registered modest economic growth of 3.1%-4.0% from 2010 to 2017, insufficient to improve living standards for the nearly 65% of the population in poverty.

Poverty rates are higher among rural and indigenous people and in the south, west, and along the eastern border than in the north and central areas where most of Honduras' industries and infrastructure are concentrated.

Most residents live in the mountainous western half of the country while the largely low-lying eastern part is sparsely populated. Honduras has an urban population of 58.4% principally distributed between 2 large centres - the capital of Tegucigalpa and the northern city of San Pedro Sula.

Population growth rate has slowed since the 1990s but continues at a rate of approximately 1.7% per year. Current predictions are that the young adult population - ages 15 to 29 - will continue to rise for the next 2 or 3 decades before stabilising. Population growth and limited job prospects outside of agriculture continue to drive emigration. The national economy depends heavily on trade with the US and remittances from the diaspora which alone represent about a fifth of GDP.

In recent years, Honduras has experienced very high levels of violence and criminality and the country has one of the world’s highest murder rates. It is estimated that violence has forced some 247,000 people to flee their homes, as of the end of last year.

Food insecurity and malnutrition among the most vulnerable populations have worsened because of droughts in the southern and western regions of the country, known as the “Dry Corridor”. In the latest analysis of food insecurity by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), there was an increase in the population ‘in crisis’ in all departments included in the study (13 of the 18 departments). 1.65 million people were estimated to be in high acute food crisis and 1.6 million in stress food security.

Natural hazards include frequent, if generally mild, earthquakes. The country is also extremely susceptible to damaging hurricanes and floods along the Caribbean coast. In 1998, Hurricane Mitch, one of the worst storms to strike the Western Hemisphere in recorded history, devastated large portions of Honduran agriculture and transportation infrastructure, requiring major reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts which occupied Honduras for the next several years.
The COVID-19 pandemic has affected Honduras during one of the most severe dengue emergencies on record, ongoing since 2019. The first cases of coronavirus were confirmed on 11 March and since then the country has reported over 25,000 cases. The pandemic has put pressure on the health system underlining the lack of adequate health infrastructure and large gaps in access to basic health care. The strict lockdown, restrictions on movement and other stringent measures taken by the Government, as well as municipal and local measures induced by fear in the communities, have exacerbated many of the difficulties already encountered by the population. Impacts have been noted on food security and nutrition, protection, socio-economic activity, education and health.

1.2. HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

The government of Honduras declared an emergency for Dengue and Coronavirus on 10 February 2020 and activated the National Risk Management System of Honduras (SINAGER) to support the Ministry of Health in the preparation of the response to the impending public health crisis. The Permanent Contingency Commission of Honduras (COPECO) is the entity created to coordinate public and private disaster relief efforts in the framework of the SINAGER.

The first confirmed cases of coronavirus in Honduras were reported on the 10 March, on the same day WHO declared that COVID-19 was to be characterized as a pandemic. Confinement measures were taken (closing of schools, etc.) and on 14 March all the departments were put under red alert by SINAGER.

On 17 March, the Humanitarian Country Team (known as Red Humanitaria in Honduras) was activated in order to complement the actions undertaken by COPECO and coordinate humanitarian assistance. The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is a strategic and operational decision-making and oversight forum comprised of the main humanitarian organisations, national and international, present in the country. The logistics sector within the HCT is spearheaded by WFP and COPECO.

Partners who participated in the GNA exercise are implementing activities through a wide range of sectors focusing mainly on protection and capacity building. The logistics component of their activities is very limited as organisations rely directly on the private sector or private implementers for their logistics needs as illustrated by the profiles of the interviewees: the majority were programme orientated or general managers rather than logistics officers.
1.3. EXISTING IN-COUNTRY CAPACITIES

Road Transport
Honduras’ road density (0.13 km/km²) is the lowest in the Mesoamerican region, a situation that is, in part, conditioned by the country’s extensive forest cover. The country does not have an established and regular road planning system that optimizes the transportation system in an integral way, so the road network has not evolved in accordance with changing demographics and the productive growth of Honduras. All this gives rise to an unbalanced territorial development and inequities in the connectivity of the different departments of the country.

The Honduran road network presents deficiencies in its design and capacity and is highly vulnerable to natural phenomena. Weaknesses in the maintenance management system (mostly routine maintenance, limited rehabilitation) due to budget constraints, explain the poor conditions of the network. The country does not have truck scales installed on trunk roads, which leads to significant overloading, road accidents and damage to the carriageway. High vulnerability of the network to natural phenomena (climatic, geological, others) does not guarantee continuity of travel in the winter season.

Border Crossings
Border crossings are critical points for the regional productive chain and the country's commercial exchanges. Infrastructural conditions have a direct impact on merchandise mobilization times, transport costs, and security risk for cargo. Honduras has eight border crossings: three with Guatemala (El Florido, Agua Caliente and Corinto), three with Nicaragua (Las Manos, El Guasaule and La Fraternidad / El Espino) and two with El Salvador (El Poy and El Amatillo).

El Florido, El Amatillo and El Poy are the most important border crossings in terms of volume of cargo mobilized (both imports and exports). However, the country's border infrastructure is deficient, restricting the fluid movement of cargo and generating delays and cost overruns for users.

Air Transport
Service providers operating in the country include: Avianca, Copa Airlines, American Airlines, UPS, Iberia, DHL, Amerijet and FedEx. The Swissport GHB Honduras company handles air and intermodal cargo at the Toncontín and Ramón Villeda Morales airports.

Airport Constraints
The main limitation to air cargo transportation services is the capacity of the Toncontín International Airport. Restrictions on its infrastructure (short runway: 2,021 meters) and location (in an area of high urban pressure) limit the size and frequency of cargo flights. Commercial passenger flights are prioritized, further reducing cargo capacity at the airport. The Swissport warehouse has storage capacity constraints. It is located far from important cargo generation centers in the central and southern parts of the country. Ramón Villeda Morales International Airport does not operate at full capacity due to deficiencies in foreign trade processes.

There is a general scarcity of equipment and personnel to carry out non-intrusive inspections (customs) at both airports. The existing X-ray equipment belongs to the airlines.
To address these challenges, a new airport is currently being constructed in Comayagua, 50km from Tegucigalpa. The Palmerola International Airport or Comayagua International Airport (PIA/MHSC) should be finalized in 2021 and will have the capacity to receive up to 20 planes daily.

**Sea Transport**
Honduran foreign trade is carried out mostly by sea, thus showing a predominance in the country's imports and exports, both in weight and value. In 2011, maritime transport represented 74% of the total imported volume and 79% of the total exported weight. This situation is repeated in the statistics by value, since 52% of exports and 58% of imports are mobilized in this way.

Honduras has a set of companies (and/or shipping groups) that offer services on 21 routes, connecting the country with North America (United States), Europe, Central America, the Caribbean and South America; Puerto Cortés is the main access point (19 routes). However, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the connectivity of Honduran regular liner shipping is low compared to what is observed in the region (Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama).

One of the main problems associated with this mode of cargo transport is the high cost of ocean freight. This situation is attributed to the low volumes of cargo and its seasonality, the vertical integration of maritime and land transport for the provision of door-to-door services (especially in the agricultural sector), and the lack of agreements and collaboration between producers for the negotiation of ocean freight - each producer negotiates independently with the shipping companies.

**River transport**
The waterways total 465 km but are only navigable with small boats.

**Logistics Infrastructure, Storage and Cold Chain**
Honduras' logistics infrastructure is made up of a set of facilities for the provision of logistics services. Among these facilities are Free Trade Zones (ZOLIs), Industrial Processing Zones (ZIPs) and areas under Temporary Import Regime (RIT). The cities of Puerto Cortés, Omoa, Choloma, Tela, La Ceiba and Amapala have been designated as Free Trade Zones. The ZIPs are in Choloma, Búfalo, La Lima, San Pedro Sula, Villanueva and Tegucigalpa. According to the Honduran Maquiladora Association, Honduras has a total of 17 industrial parks which concentrate around 273 companies. Most of these companies (64%) are of foreign origin, with those from the United States, Korea, Guatemala and El Salvador predominating.

Regarding the logistics infrastructure to support the agricultural sector, the lack of storage systems and facilities for maintaining the cold chain and preserving products is notable. This situation disproportionately affects the producers of vegetables and fruits. According to the key players in the sector, the country lacks a network of collection and consolidation centers distributed in a balanced way and close to production areas. There are also collection centers in urban areas not suited to the flow of cargo.

It is also worth noting the lack of specialized logistics infrastructure at borders, as well as the absence of formal logistics areas to support the transporter (i.e. truck centers and rest areas).

**Road Transport Companies**
Honduras has a fleet of 53,842 vehicles for land transportation of cargo, with an average age of close to 18 years. The largest vehicles are destined for foreign (regional) trade, while the medium and small ones are for the domestic market. There is a limited formal supply of services, which is why land freight flows to ports are organized by the shipping companies through long-term contracts with carriers. There is no carrier registration system, except for international transportation maintained by the Ministry of Finance. There is no mandatory liability insurance nor is there a driver certification system.

In addition to the prevailing informality, the road transport service has important weaknesses, among which are reported:

a) overload practices due to the absence of certifications and weight control at the origin,
b) high levels of obsolescence of the fleet that generates service quality and road safety problems,
c) low use of the fleet due to a high proportion of empty returns (48%) in long-distance services, with the consequent impact on query sustainability,
d) limited supply of refrigerated vehicles,
e) high freight rates and operational costs due to inefficiencies in the service and border management, as well as the existence of numerous tolls,
f) increasing insecurity (assaults, theft of cargo and equipment) has resulted in additional costs to insure cargo (i.e. satellite monitoring systems -GPS or RFID-, escorts and convoys).

**Customs**

There are 17 customs offices in the Honduran territory, which control the traffic of merchandise, whether by air, sea or land.

The Honduran Customs Service was established through the Customs Law. The Revenue Administration Service (SAR) is the highest authority in customs matters: it is a decentralized body of the Ministry of Finance. The SAR’s responsibilities are the execution of the country’s customs policy, as well as the technical and administrative management of customs and other auxiliary agencies.

As part of a customs modernization reform process, the Honduran Government will be transitioning to a new Customs Administration Agency by the first quarter of 2019.

**Import Procedure**

In Honduras, when an import exceeds US $500 CIF, it requires a Customs Agent to carry out the procedures of import at the Deputy Directorate of Customs Revenue. The importer must present a Unique Customs Declaration (Import Policy) for each bill of lading.
2. PARTNERS LOGISTICS CAPACITIES, GAPS AND BOTTLENECKS

In general, organisations have shown a high level of adaptability to face the COVID-19 crisis and continue operating. They have reoriented their activities and programmes and have also altered the modality of their interventions to respond to the most urgent needs encountered by their beneficiaries.

**Humanitarian Presence and Programming.**

The humanitarian and development community have strong outreach in Honduras. Most organisations have programmatic presence in two or more departments of the country and taking into account the outreach by implementing partners, the presence is even greater. Even some of the most remote and isolated communities in the country have contact with one or more humanitarian or development actor. Some organisations working at ground level have deep and close ties to the communities they serve and the relevant authorities. Every programmatic sector was accounted for in our assessment, indicating that the humanitarian community consists of a diverse set of actors.

A notable point has been the shift in activities in order to include more in-kind deliveries to beneficiaries rather than cash-based transfers. This was done to overcome difficulties of accessibility, challenges faced by the banking system and restrictions of movement and gathering. This transformation was not an easy task for organisations lacking logistics infrastructure or personnel, but the difficulties were easily overcome using the private sector which demonstrated a good level of capacity and responsiveness.
Prior to the emergency, both CBT and in-kind resource transfers were used to meet the needs of their beneficiaries, with a greater portion of organisations using CBT as opposed in-kind transfers. While both transfer modalities have been used in the response to COVID-19, there was a notable shift towards using in-kind transfers. This was in part because beneficiaries were confined to their homes and without access to the financial services required to transfer monetary resources. Many organisations had to adapt and seek out services that they had not previously required for their operations.

**Humanitarian and Private Sector Logistics Capacity**

In general, the local market has been able to provide most of the items required by the organisations with generally little delay. Only a minority of them had to import goods or used their regional structures.

The humanitarian community in Honduras relies to a great extent on the private sector to meet their supply chain needs. The country has a strong commercial sector with a competitive service providers and suppliers. Markets for goods are strong and with a few exceptions, most goods required by the humanitarian community could be procured locally. Most organisations contract their transportation and storage needs to private companies. In fact, many suppliers can produce kits, provide temporary storage, primary transportation and, often, secondary transportation. Given the strength of the private sector, and the tendency by organisations to use the CBT transfer modality, few organisations invested in maintaining transport and storage capacity, particularly before COVID-19.

The humanitarian community demonstrated considerable adaptability in response to the COVID-19 pandemic- finding solutions to the challenges posed by the market conditions and mobility restrictions. Even the organisations without significant logistics experience were able to find service providers that could reach some of the more remote locations. The national market for critical goods eventually managed to keep up with demand from the humanitarian sector. Collectively, organisations reported that approximately 90% of the goods were procured locally (10% procured internationally).

While the private sector has generally managed to support the humanitarian community, the prices of goods and services have increased notably. This was particularly true in the market for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and hygiene products. Due to the spike in demand, the costs of medical and PPE rose, and the national market struggled to maintain a stock. The wait times for critical goods was also of concern to many organisations who had to delay their response efforts in some cases to deliver the goods they needed. Recently the prices have stabilized, but several organisations have expressed concerns over the quality of the products that have entered the market and if they meet the requisite specifications.

**Coordination**

The participation of individual organisations within the humanitarian community in coordination mechanisms varies significantly. Nearly all form part of the Humanitarian Country Team and participate in the technical sectors within this structure. 13 of the 20 institutions
interviewed participated in the Logistics Working Group. The Logistics Working Group holds bi-weekly meetings and is comprised of NGOs and UN agencies and led by WFP. This working group was borne out of the Food Security Cluster, when it became apparent to the partners that a separate logistics forum was necessary. Only half of the organisations coordinated efforts with the central government. The sectoral working groups appear to run parallel to the coordination mechanisms of the national government. Individual organisations may engage with government agencies on a bilateral level but there is a strong need to connect the UN/NGO system as a collective to the relevant governmental coordination platforms. Some NGOs, particularly the religiously affiliated ones, expressed that they had strong coordination mechanisms at the local level with communities and with their other faith-based counterparts.

Most of the interviewees have mentioned the positive role of the logistics sector forum in interchanging information and sharing best practices. It has also to be emphasised that the usual operational and coordination forums of the different organisations such as Espacio ACI, ACT alliance and Red Asonog have also played an important role in that matter.

Despite the inclusion of the Red Humanitaria within the SINAGER, coordination with the authorities presented challenges especially regarding travel authorizations given the context of strict and formal restrictions on mobility as a result of nationwide curfew imposed by SINAGER on 14 March. Most of the organisations relied on bilateral contacts in order to get the necessary documentation and to be able to operate. Existing mechanisms intended to ensure smooth collaboration between humanitarian actors and the authorities did not always work effectively.

“Salvaconductos”

One of the significant logistical challenges faced by the humanitarian community was access to “safe passage” documents allowing humanitarian personnel and transporters to move freely between and inside departments. This challenge greatly impacted the speed of the initial response, particularly for smaller NGOs without strong ties to national and regional authorities. It appeared that it was significantly easier for the health organisations to get hold of this documentation. Many organisations remarked, however, that they believed this dilemma is being resolved as they have managed to get in contact with the relevant authorities. They do not foresee this being an obstacle in the future.

Outlook and Staffing Needs

The general perspective among the partners is that significant challenges lie ahead for the humanitarian community. Resources are quickly being exhausted, and the needs of the beneficiaries are likely to increase due to the severity of the crisis and the economic consequences that will follow. Many organisations also expressed that they had concerns about their staffing requirements, particularly in procurement and logistics. In some cases, organisations had few or no supply chain personnel to manage the logistics components of their organisations. Additionally, staffing shortfalls created challenges for interagency coordination as not all the partners had the time to participate in sectoral meetings.
3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings indicate that humanitarian actors in Honduras have demonstrated an extremely high resilience in their logistics responses, relying on existing logistics capacities and coordination mechanisms despite the impact of COVID-19 on humanitarian procurement and movements.

Considering the current response activities and the increasing needs of affected populations, it appears critical to continue strengthening existing coordination mechanisms and efforts to streamline information. Additionally, Honduras also appears as a strong case for lessons learned and logistics preparedness activities in the mid/long run to ensure the humanitarian community builds a strong logistics know-how to face upcoming emergencies.

Taking all of this into account, the Global Logistics Cluster recommends the following:

1. Coming six months: strengthen the participation of humanitarian actors in the Logistics Working Group of the Red Humanitaria
   - Enhance information sharing through:
     - Updating Logistics Capacities Assessments (LCA) with COVID-19 logistics specific information
     - Streamlining information sharing between different coordination mechanisms (provider lists etc.)
     - Engage with partners to begin mapping logistics needs of regional and local governments:
       - Divide responsibilities between partners, taking advantage of the programmatic presence of each organisation and the connections they have already built.
       - Develop a questionnaire to guide discussion
       - Collect and organise findings to share with the humanitarian community
   - Develop future participation and means of coordination through:
     - Adjusting meeting frequency and format
     - Extending meeting invitations to broader networks
     - Contemplate possible participation of Government focal point for logistics coordination
   
   To facilitate these efforts, the GLC will attend the next meetings and provide practical feedback and best practices.

2. After six months: initiate the Logistics Preparedness Project for Honduras led by the WFP Country Office through:
   - A scoping mission, when travel restrictions allow, to meet all actors and establish a road map for the Logistics Preparedness Project in Honduras
   - An Emergency Logistics Induction Training to empower national stakeholders in a joint exercise
   - Contract a Preparedness Officer to rollout the Preparedness Project (one to two years)
   
   The Logistics Cluster will fund the activities of the Preparedness Project and provide adequate tools and guidance.
ANNEX I – GNA Concept Note

Background

The Global North American (GNA) Cluster for Humanitarian Logistics has been selected by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as one of the focal clusters to support the recovery efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian. The GNA Cluster includes actors from across the humanitarian, development, and corporate sectors, including government agencies, international organizations, NGOs, and private sector companies. The GNA Cluster is led by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and is supported by the United Nations System in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLCAR). The cluster is supported by the Global Cluster Support Team, a network of national and regional cluster support teams.

The GNA Cluster is working to improve the coordination and effectiveness of humanitarian logistics by identifying and addressing gaps in the system. This includes supporting the development of logistics plans, identifying and implementing best practices, and fostering partnerships between stakeholders.

Objective of the annex

The objective of the annex is to identify and address potential gaps and needs in the logistics sector in the areas of planning, coordination, and response.

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Annex

The annex includes a detailed description of the logistics sector in the area of planning, coordination, and response.

**ANNEX II – Invitation Email**

To: [Recipient List]
Cc: [Recipient List]

Subject: Participation - Logistics Cluster - Gaps and Needs Analysis

Estimado/a [Recipient Name],

Les escribo para invitarlos a participar en la próxima reunión de la Clúster Logístico Global (CLG) en [country].

La Clúster Logística Global está organizando una reunión de seguimiento de la respuesta logística a la crisis del COVID-19 en [country]. La reunión tiene como objetivo identificar y discutir las brechas y necesidades en el sector logístico en el [country].

La reunión se llevará a cabo el [date] y tendrá lugar en [location].

Si desea participar, por favor, confirme su asistencia a la dirección de correo electrónico [email address] o llame al [phone number] para obtener más información.

Gracias por su interés y participación.

Saludos,

[Your Name]

CC: [Additional Contact Information]
ANNEX III – Interview Data

Overview of Organizations and Respondents

Number of Organisations: 20

Number of Organisations by Type of Organisation:
- INGO: 14
- UNA: 5
- NGO: 1

Number of Activities by Sector:
- Protection: 14
- Development Activities: 7
- Education: 5
- Other: 4

Number of Interviewees by Profile:
- Programme Officer: 14
- Country Director: 4
- Logistics Officer/Profile: 4
- Programme Officer: 2

Regions

Number of Activities by Department:
- Distrito Central (B) 11
- Cortés 10
- La Paz 9
- Lempira 9
- Copan 7
- Intibucá 6
- El Paraíso 5
- Valle 5
- Yoro 5
- Gracias a Dios 4
- Olancho 4
- Santa Barbara 4
- Comayagua 3
- National Level 3
- Atlántida 2
- Colon 2
- Olancho 2

Before and After COVID-19

In-kind or CBT activities before COVID-19 and In-kind or CBT during COVID-19
- Both: 9
- In-kind: 5
- CBT: 5

Number of Activities by Framework and Before and After COVID-19 Changes
- Both: 9
- N/A: 1
- CBT: 5
- In-kind: 5

Regions

Number of Activities by Department:
- Distrito Central (B) 11
- Cortés 10
- La Paz 9
- Lempira 9
- Copan 7
- Intibucá 6
- El Paraíso 5
- Valle 5
- Yoro 5
- Gracias a Dios 4
- Olancho 4
- Santa Barbara 4
- Comayagua 3
- National Level 3
- Atlántida 2
- Colon 2
- Olancho 2

Number of Activities