

The Rockefeller Foundation to Host Bellagio Center Conference on *Humanitarian Logistics: Networks for Africa* Anna Nagurney

In the Summer of 2007, I was deeply honored when notified that my proposal to the Rockefeller Foundation; <http://rockfound.org> to organize a conference on "Humanitarian Logistics: Networks for Africa," was approved for May 2008 through the Foundation's Bellagio Study and Conference Center program. The conference will take place at the Foundation's Bellagio Center on Lake Como in Italy. As we work through finalizing the conference which will convene 19 leading academicians and practitioners from four different continents to tackle the challenging topic of the conference, I thought that it would be timely to outline some of the underlying themes that will be discussed in depth.

Logistics networks, in times of need, provide the essential infrastructure for the movement of goods: water, food, fuel, clothing, housing, medicines, and other basic supplies, as well as services: relief and medical workers, engineers and technicians, security officials, critical expertise, etc. Recent historical events in the form of natural disasters, wars and uprisings, and the spread of diseases, among others, have presented major challenges for the timely delivery of essentials to needy and suffering populations. The discipline of "humanitarian logistics," which is still in its infancy, in terms of academic scholarship and transfer to other relevant organizations, will be the focus of this specially themed conference. An accompanying theme of the conference will be "networks for Africa" since no continent struggles with and endures more crises where appropriate emergency and disaster preparedness and new linkages through enhanced humanitarian logistics can make a distinctive difference.

This conference will convene academics at the frontiers of logistics research, including supply chain research, along with members of leading humanitarian agencies and NGOs, in order to focus on the major research and practical needs of humanitarian logistics at a time of increasing risk and uncertainty. The conference will push the knowledge of both research and practice in an intense, collaborative setting. It will convene individuals from the continents of Europe, Africa, North and South America to exchange expertise and to build bridges for the enhanced future of humanitarian logistics. Since education is a necessary vehicle for the transfer of research into practice, the establishing of partnerships across the continents for education on humanitarian logistics will also be a primary topic of the conference. To-date, invited speakers that have confirmed their participation in the conference on humanitarian logistics include representatives from the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies, World Vision, Oxfam, CARE Kenya, the International Telecommunication Union, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, South Africa, and leading academics from Imperial College in the United Kingdom, INSEAD, the Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration in Finland, the University of Nairobi and the University of Johannesburg in Africa, the Georgia Institute of Technology, the University of Florida, the University of Connecticut, Auburn University, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in the US. The Fritz Institute and IBM will also be represented.

The timeliness for such a conference cannot be more opportune -- the new generation is seeking outlets for social responsibility whereas academicians and professionals are increasingly aware of the needs of the world at large and the suffering of many of its citizens.

The Bellagio Conference Center will provide an ideal, centralized forum for convening the conference on humanitarian logistics.

Challenges of Humanitarian Logistics for Africa

Humanitarian logistics faces the novel challenges of being high-stakes; often involving "life or death;" of being characterized by zero lead times in terms of the event and the need for humanitarian assistance, which dramatically affects the availability of the inventory of goods, their procurement, as well as their distribution. In addition, many humanitarian operations lack effective performance measurements/metrics and may have varying levels of enabling technology for communication and decision-making, resulting in supplies not reaching the destinations in a timely and effective manner, thereby, adding to the human suffering. At the same time, humanitarian supply or "relief" chains have similarities to their classical or commercial counterparts in that both are characterized by such basic concepts as demand, distribution networks, inventory control, strategic and operational goals. Hence, there are synergies between humanitarian supply chains and commercial or corporate supply chains that need to be deeply examined, understood, and learned from. The state-of-the-art in humanitarian logistics is decades behind that of commercial logistics. This conference will aim to bring these two knowledge networks closer.

Moreover, there are unique challenges that suggest that enhanced methodologies and technology-based decision support tools may make a difference in providing essentials in times of disasters and crises. For example, in the case of humanitarian logistics and the accompanying supply or relief chains, the demand is generated from "random" events that are, typically, unpredictable in terms of date of occurrence,

geographical locations, and scope of impact. This is quite different from the demand in commercial supply chains, which tends to be relatively stable and predictable across space and time. Furthermore, the challenges in capturing the demand for supplies in uncertain and risky environments continue with the determination of distribution network configurations not being well-defined. In addition, the information that is available in times of crises and disasters is often-times not reliable, not complete, and difficult to obtain for the stakeholders.

At the conference we will examine and scope out the specific challenges facing humanitarian logistics on the continent of Africa, given its unique history, geography, and myriad cultures, stressed by poverty, disease, lack of resources, diversity of climate, lack of critical infrastructure in terms of: roads, warehouses, telecommunication and power lines, healthcare centers, and, in places, serious civil strife, wars, and unrest.

One of the principal goals of the conference will be to develop new partnerships for humanitarian logistics and education with a focus on creating networks for Africa.

The Virtual Center for Supernetworks is deeply gratified to be able to lead in the organization of this conference.