

An Effective Humanitarian Supply Management System for Natural and Man-Made Disasters

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History of SUMA project

SUMA, the Supply Management System project from the PAHO/WHO started in 1992 as initiative of various countries in Latin America and the Caribbean with the technical cooperation from PAHO/WHO and financial support of the Government of the Netherlands. Later on it received financial support from other donors such as ECHO, OFDA, CIDA, and DFID.

The SUMA software was designed and has always evolved from the perspective of the users in the countries. Their recommendations, based on practical experience with the software during emergency operations, have been incorporated whenever possible to better satisfy the needs of the users.

The SUMA methodology

It is an information management tool that helps national authorities to make order of the chaos often caused by uncoordinated and unsolicited humanitarian assistance. Though some chaos is an integral part of all disasters, this methodology helps to prevent a "secondary disaster" to occur due to the mismanagement of humanitarian assistance. It helps countries to improve their logistical and organisational capacity to manage emergency supplies, by providing this tool for countries that don't have a proper logistic system at hand to manage the relief supplies. SUMA uses a software instrument to track items from the moment donors commit to send supplies until they are distributed effectively to the affected population.

Its main objective is to create and strengthen the national capacity to manage effectively the humanitarian supplies. Apart of being a technical and operational tool, SUMA has evolved into an indicator and tool to improve transparency and accountability during the response phase in times of a disaster.

The SUMA system allows to:

- **Register** incoming humanitarian aid. Every shipment arriving to the country is registered by the system at the entry point. This can be a border, marital port, airport etc.
- **Classify** each item regardless of its ownership, according to 10 pre-established categories or by creating a new category (if needed).

The 10 pre-established categories are:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Pharmaceutical Products | 6. Logistics/Management |
| 2. Water and Sanitation | 7. Personal Needs/Education |
| 3. Health (Non Pharmaceutical) | 8. Agriculture/Livestock Industry |
| 4. Food and Beverages | 9. Human Resources |
| 5. Shelter/Housing/ Electricity/Construction | 10. Unclassified Items |

- **Sort** the supplies by assigning a level of priority.
 - Priority 1: Urgently needed.
 - Priority 2: Useful but can wait.
 - Priority 3: Not useful, landfill
- **Inventory** the items according to:
 - Technical features
 - Presentation (syrup, tablets...)
 - Packing unity (bottles, boxes...)
 - Total quantities
- **Warehouse management.** A module for the warehouse inventory control, controlling stock balance.

So far, some 3.000 volunteers have been trained to use the SUMA system and form SUMA teams. They come from the ranks of Ministries of Health and other health agencies, as well as people from other sectors with logistical experience such as the Civil Defense, national emergency committees, Red Cross societies, customs departments and (inter)national NGOs. Several of them are now acting as instructors in their own country and abroad.

The training program has two main components. Training courses are given in:

- Training in application Supply Management Software (SMS)
- Training in Comprehensive Management of Emergency Supplies (MISE), which focuses on basic logistical planning procedures.

SUMA in practice

As response tool

SUMA has been mobilised in dozens of crises in large- and small-scale natural disasters as well as in complex emergencies. It has been implemented in the region of the Americas in every mayor disaster operation in the last 10 years, but also in various (complex) emergencies in other regions, including East Timor in 1999. United Nations agencies, national emergency committees, NGOs and donors have adopted SUMA as the standard for managing emergency supplies.

As preparedness for response tool

SUMA is not only an electronic tool but also a total system for supplies management.

It contains:

- Trained local and international staff
- Specific material designed
- Software to manage the information on relief supplies
- Basic insights in Logistic Management
- Flexibility: used on several types of disasters, small or big emergencies

SUMA can be an important and effective "Preparedness for Response" instrument, for the following reasons:

- SUMA creates and strengthens the capacity of local authorities for a better disaster management and enhances a better inter-institutional coordination based on information-sharing.
- SUMA provides a technical contribution to logistics management and inventory control within each agency.
- SUMA is also used in normal "non-disaster" situations, particularly in warehouse management and inventory control. E.g. in pharmacies of hospitals or health centres, in warehouses of Red Cross societies or for the inventory of a Ministry of Health. This ongoing use of SUMA allows a familiarisation with the program in normal times and improves the preparedness for disaster situations.
- Further, SUMA stimulates the debate about national humanitarian supply management policies. And it contributes to a culture of accountability and information transparency.

Summary

What are the benefits of using the SUMA methodology?

- Technical contribution to the logistics management of a country or institution.
- Contribution to transparency and accountability in disaster management to donors.
- A useful tool by unavailability of other affordable tools to register the incoming supplies.
- Available free of charge.
- Easy to use.
- Flexible to be used for several types of disasters, small or big emergencies.
- Technology requirements easily fulfilled in any region (hardware, basic communication system, and diskettes).

References

For more information on SUMA or for the SUMA software and training materials, please visit our Web site at:

www.disaster-info.net/SUMA

or contact:

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