

THE LAST MILE OF FOOD AID DISTRIBUTION: INSIGHTS GAINED THROUGH FAQR'S FIELD STUDIES IN MALAWI, BURKINA FASO AND SIERRA LEONE

Summary of a Report by the Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR) Project

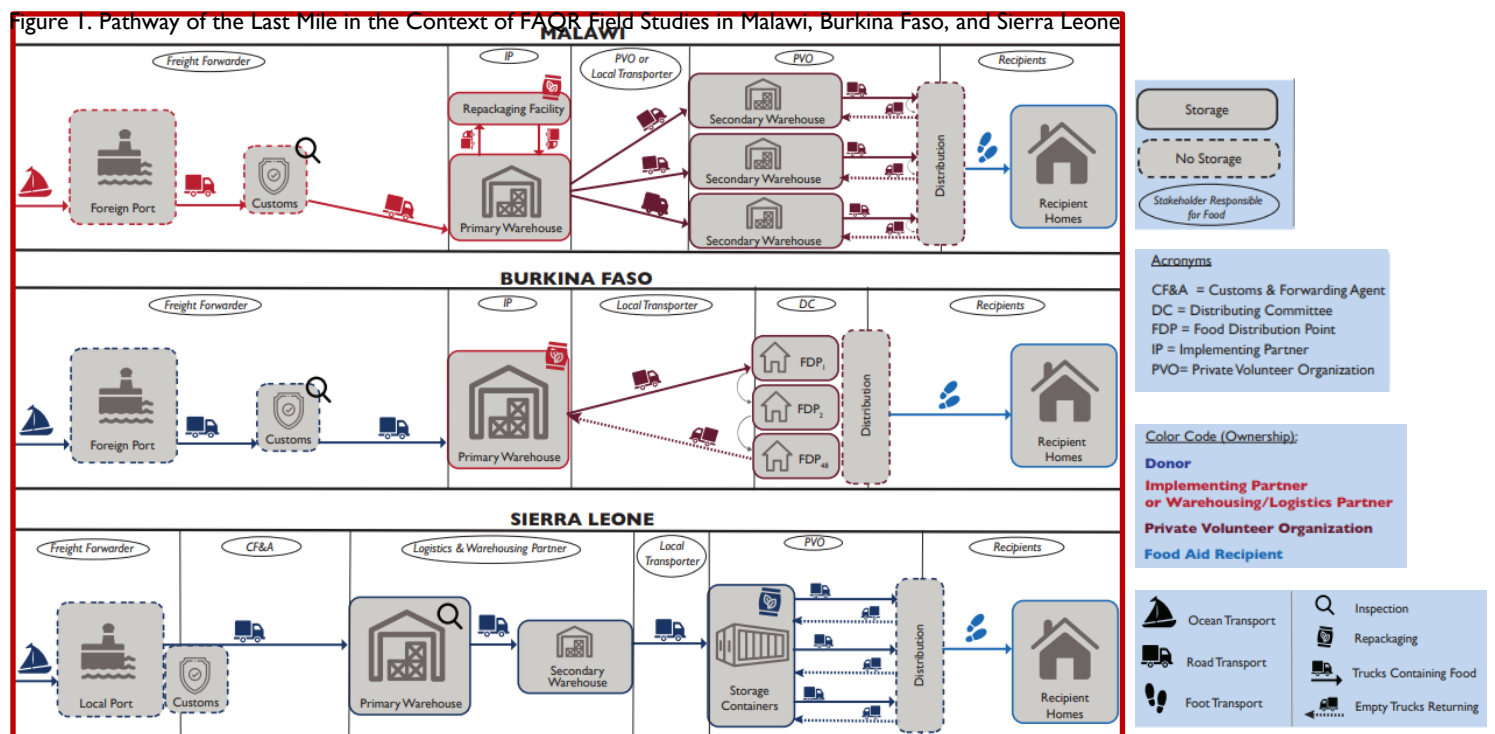
BACKGROUND

In 2017, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Office of Food for Peace (FFP) shipped **over 1.4 million metric tons** of food aid products from the United States to vulnerable populations across the globe. The foods go through a complex journey to reach end recipients, usually being shipped by ocean freight and brought by truck to a main warehouse in the receiving country. This process takes several months, and even once the foods arrive in-country, significant challenges can arise.

The “last mile,” defined as the section of the food aid supply chain between receipt of the foods by the implementing partner and storage at the recipients’ homes, is often a source of major holdups for food aid stakeholders.

UNDERSTANDING THE LAST MILE: EXPERIENCES FROM FAQR FIELD STUDIES

Last mile scenarios vary greatly among food aid programs and there is no one-size-fits-all solution to common problems. However, **a better overall understanding of the last mile can help to improve the design, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of food aid programs.** [The Last Mile of Food Aid report](#) draws on experience from FAQR’s field studies in Southern Malawi, Northeastern Burkina Faso and Southern Sierra Leone. Through observations, interviews, and focus groups, the FAQR team collected feedback from food aid recipients, volunteers, and implementing partners on the challenges they face and strategies they have implemented to move foods through the last mile.



KEY TAKEAWAYS



Creating **open, clearly defined communication channels** between the many stakeholders in the last mile is necessary for **promoting smooth operations, facilitating coordination and avoiding confusion and delays.**

Action Item: When establishing partnerships at project startup, prioritize establishing communications channels and decision trees to guide project actions.



Implementing partners should be allowed the flexibility to adapt to their local environment. Some challenges, like weather, cannot be eliminated, but implementing partners and local stakeholders often can develop context-specific systems that mitigate the risks. **Departing from standard protocols can result in overall efficiency and cost-effectiveness gains,** in some cases.

Action Item: Funders and implementing partners should agree on areas where standard protocols and contract requirements can be adapted to allow for more flexibility to adjust last mile resources to the local context.



Distribution committees and community volunteers commonly spend several days every month working for the program, which keeps them away from their fields, families, and other occupations. **Compensating volunteers for their work would significantly improve their working conditions and, consequently, improve their motivation and performance.**

Action Item: Implementing partners should develop recognition and compensation structures for volunteers. Funders should support inclusion of these line items in program proposals and budgets.



Enrollment in a food aid program requires a significant time commitment from the recipients, who cannot always follow the program's guidelines. There should be a **greater emphasis on trying to understand the feasibility of programs' recommendations from the recipients' perspective.**

Action Item: Implementing partners should consider strategies to elicit recipient feedback throughout the program life cycle, and funders should allow programs to be adjusted based on recipients' feedback.



The last mile is not the largest contributor to the total cost of a food aid program, but it can significantly impact the program's cost-effectiveness. **An increase in resources allocated to last mile operations to optimize cost-effectiveness should be considered.** Future efforts should be directed to collecting more reliable data to quantify the extent of these potential cost-effectiveness gains.

FULL REPORT

Roubert, Agathe; Cliffer, Ilana; Griswold, Stacy; Shen, Ye; Suri, Devika; Langlois, Breanne; Maganga, Gray; Walton, Shelley; Rogers, Beatrice; Webb, Patrick. 2018. *The Last Mile of Food Aid Distribution: Insights Gained through FAQR's Field Studies in Malawi, Burkina Faso, and Sierra Leone*. Report to USAID. Boston, MA: Tufts University. ([Read Here](#))

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