

A FIELD CHECKLIST FOR COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

From the first chaotic days to dignified aid.

A field-ready checklist for locally-led teams, from first assessment to first distribution. Drawn from UNHCR, Sphere & the Logistics Cluster. Steps marked → **Boxtribute** show where the platform does the work for you.

1

Situation awareness

As people arrive, get a fast read on the crisis. Work out what is driving the need, who is most affected, and who else is already responding. Set a realistic scope you can deliver, and confirm you can safely reach the area.

2

Warehouse setup

Secure a dry, safe, accessible space and organise it to minimum standards before any goods arrive. → **In Boxtribute, create your warehouse and register staff with the right roles.**

3

Supply & intake

Turn your assessment into a clear procurement plan, source locally where you can, and check every donation before you accept it. → **Boxtribute scans each box in and tracks stock in real time.**

4

Registration

Set transparent, needs-based criteria, prioritise the most vulnerable, and community-validate your beneficiary list. → **Register beneficiaries in Boxtribute before distribution day.**

5

Distribution

Verify each person against the list, manage the queue safely, and hand over against a token. Then reconcile and report. → **Boxtribute logs each distribution and generates the donor report.**

3

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Crisis-response infrastructure for locally-led teams.

86,000

people reached in one urban response

<60 min

to train a volunteer with no experience

8 → 150

staff scaled without losing control



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PHASE 1

Sudden Onset

You are experiencing a sudden influx of people in your area or base of operations who are in critical need or requesting support or services. Here are the things you should be paying attention to.

SECTION 1 SITUATION AWARENESS & INITIAL ASSESSMENT

CHECK	ACTION	NOTES & GUIDANCE
☐	As people are coming through, or as you arrive on scene, try to get a sense of what sort of crisis is driving the need. Keep tabs on who seems to be most affected, the total number of people in need of services, and what services they need.	Crisis type determines what aid is needed: food, NFIs, shelter, WASH, or medical — best not to assume. Check OCHA sitreps and local government alerts. Consider the most vulnerable: children under 5, pregnant/lactating women, elderly, persons with disability, unaccompanied minors, female-headed households.
☐	BOXTRIBUTE Boxtribute lets you keep track of identified beneficiary vulnerabilities, numbers, and other needs through its Beneficiary Tags feature.	Create beneficiary tags in Boxtribute that correspond to identified vulnerabilities and special needs. This allows you to prioritise the most vulnerable.
☐	Check who else is already responding: other local NGOs, INGOs, public services, municipalities and/or government. Coordinate well and avoid duplicating aid. Try to estimate the number of people affected and the geographic area of impact.	Knowing who else is responding mobilises aid faster and directs it to the greatest need. Even a rough figure helps (e.g. 500 families in two villages) — use community contacts, local government, or cluster flash updates.
☐	Take the time to clarify your organisation's mandate and realistic capacity: what can you actually provide right now?	It is best to set a clear scope and do one thing well, rather than overstretch and do things poorly. Set a clear scope: food, NFIs, WASH, shelter, or a combination.
☐	Assess access: are roads passable? Security or permit restrictions? Can you physically reach the affected area?	Access constraints must be identified before committing to a response. Flag blockers to leadership and relevant partners immediately.
☐	Consider contacting the local government focal point responsible for disaster response to coordinate. Attend or request entry to inter-agency coordination meetings.	Clusters coordinate needs assessments, avoid duplication, and share critical operational information: road conditions, access, aid gaps.

PHASE 2

Procurement and Warehouse Storage Setup

If you are a local actor unexpectedly responding to a sudden crisis, you are likely already providing aid using makeshift methods. Using what you gather in this initial response to properly plan your procurement and delivery operations will determine the success of the recovery effort in the days and months to come.

SECTION 2.1 IDENTIFYING, PROCURING, AND STORING SUPPLIES

CHECK	ACTION	NOTES & GUIDANCE
☐	Based on your needs assessment, define exactly what items are needed and in what quantities. Check what you already have before procuring anything new — avoid over-procurement in the early stage.	Translate your assessment into a specific procurement plan. State item name, specification, unit, quantity, and priority. Excess stock creates security, management, and disposal problems.
☐	Identify available storage locations near the affected area: community hall, school, church, mosque, warehouse, or private building. If none is available, consider emergency options: shipping containers, Rubb halls, or shared UN Humanitarian Response Depot.	Assess surface area against estimated volume — a 5×10m space can hold significant supplies. Contact the Logistics Cluster for shared or temporary warehousing.
☐	Assess the storage location: is it dry, ventilated, secure, accessible by vehicle, and protected from flooding? Consider sharing warehouse space with another NGO if yours is inadequate.	Goods stored in damp or insecure conditions may be destroyed. Put partner storage agreements in writing: space delineation, controls, and liabilities.
☐	If you are working with a logistics cluster or coordination group, check whether they or UNHRD offer pipeline goods, shared procurement, or common services.	Pre-positioned stocks or shared procurement may be faster and cheaper than buying locally. Contact them before procuring internationally.
☐	For donated goods, confirm items are appropriate, in good condition, culturally suitable, and actually needed before accepting.	ASSORT guidelines apply. Poor-quality or irrelevant donations waste storage space, consume staff time, and create disposal problems.
☐	Identify local suppliers for key items; get at least two price quotes for any significant purchase.	Local procurement is faster and supports the local economy. Minimum procurement controls protect against fraud and non-compliance with donor rules.

SECTION 2.2 WAREHOUSE ORGANISATION & MINIMUM STANDARDS

CHECK	ACTION	NOTES & GUIDANCE
☐	BOXTRIBUTE Add your product categories to Boxtribute: food, blankets, hygiene kits, clothing, shelter items, etc.	Setting up item categories enables accurate tracking of what you have, where it is, and how much has been distributed.
☐	Ensure basic warehouse safety: fire extinguisher or sand bucket, clear exit routes, no-smoking signs, first aid kit on site.	Basic safety infrastructure must be in place before storing goods — it protects both your staff and your supplies.

CHECK	ACTION	NOTES & GUIDANCE
☐	BOXTRIBUTE Create your warehouse locations in Boxtribute and register your Warehouse Coordinators and staff with permission settings.	Set up area name, instock status, address, and capacity. This is the foundation for all stock tracking — do it before receiving any goods.
☐	Store goods off the ground on pallets, boards, or plastic sheeting. Leave walkways between stacks for access and counting.	Goods on bare ground absorb moisture and are harder to count. Keep 50cm clearance from walls.
☐	Stack goods by item type, and by batch/lot number if applicable. Try not to mix different items in the same stack.	Mixing items makes counting hard and slows distribution. Each pile should contain only one item type.
☐	BOXTRIBUTE Conduct an opening stock count and enter all existing goods into Boxtribute. Label each stack or box using Boxtribute QR Code Labels, and save item name, quantity, and date received.	Your opening stock entry is your new baseline. Scanning QR Code Labels gives a one-click update of each stock movement and a full history — replacing manual stock cards.
☐	Apply FEFO (First Expiry First Out) for all food, medical, and perishable items: oldest stock to the front.	Items nearest expiry must always be dispatched first. Boxtribute tracks when each box is created and every change to it.
☐	Establish basic security: padlock and access log; an overnight guard for high-value goods where needed.	Even a simple entry log creates accountability. Work with other NGOs and the Logistics Cluster on what's right for your context.
☐	Establish who has authority to release goods from the warehouse. Limit this to 1–2 named people.	Goods should only leave with an authorised release note or waybill signed by an approved person.

PHASE 3

Beneficiary Targeting and Distribution

After the first rush of emergency response, the next stage centres on planning aid distributions. Proper targeting saves lives, protects people from further harm, and ensures the most vulnerable are prioritised. Keep both staff safety and beneficiary protection in mind throughout.

SECTION 3.1 BENEFICIARY REGISTRATION & TARGETING

Do not distribute without a beneficiary list. Distribution without registration creates duplication, excludes the most vulnerable, and prevents donor reporting.

CHECK	ACTION	NOTES & GUIDANCE
☐	Confirm what you will distribute: item types, quantity per household (ration size), and total goods required.	Calculate households × per-household = total goods needed. Check your Boxtribute stock report to confirm sufficient stock before committing.
☐	BOXTRIBUTE Decide whether you will use a token-based system for your distribution(s). Boxtribute's choice-based free shop system has pre-issued digital tokens for easy tracking at checkout.	A token system prevents double-dipping and creates a clear receipt record. Issue a numbered card per household during registration.
☐	Define your beneficiary selection criteria: who is eligible and why? Apply consistently and communicate transparently. Prioritise the most vulnerable, consulting your Phase 1 assessment records.	Criteria must be based on humanitarian need — not political, ethnic, or personal connections. Document them and make them publicly visible at the site.
☐	Compile a beneficiary list: name (or household ID), household size, location, and specific vulnerabilities. Engage community representatives and local leaders to verify and validate it.	One site should serve a maximum of ~4,000 households (~20,000 individuals). Community validation reduces errors, disputes, and exclusion.
☐	BOXTRIBUTE Set up Beneficiary Tags with the vulnerabilities and special needs identified in Phase 1, and tag affected beneficiaries.	Entering each household and tagging their needs ensures the right aid reaches the right people, and enables tracking and reporting on who received what.
☐	Select a distribution site: safe, accessible, no more than 5km from the affected population, with shade and shelter where possible.	The site must be safe for all, including women and girls. Assess for protection risks, crowd management, and vehicle access.
☐	Communicate the selection criteria and distribution date/time to the community in the local language. Register all eligible beneficiaries before and on the distribution day.	Lack of clear communication is the single biggest cause of tension at distributions, and can cause crowd surges, confusion, and exclusion.
☐	Plan crowd management: waiting areas, defined queue lines, separate queues for men and women if culturally appropriate, and a priority queue for vulnerable persons at the front.	Crowd-control failures cause injuries, exclude the most vulnerable, and result in loss of goods.

CHECK	ACTION	NOTES & GUIDANCE
☐	Establish a feedback and complaint mechanism before distribution: complaint box, phone number, or designated community focal point.	People must have a way to raise concerns safely and anonymously before distribution begins.
☐	Assign clear roles for distribution day: queue management, list verification, item handover, data recording.	Even 4–5 people can run an effective distribution with clearly assigned roles. Brief every volunteer before starting.

SECTION 3.2 RUNNING THE DISTRIBUTION

CHECK	ACTION	NOTES & GUIDANCE
☐	Kick off distribution day by briefing all volunteers and staff on their roles, the eligibility criteria, and how to handle disputes before opening.	A 10-minute pre-distribution briefing ensures everyone knows who is eligible, how to check the list, and who to escalate to.
☐	Proactively identify and prioritise vulnerable individuals at the queue entrance and allow quicker access.	Ask a volunteer at the entrance to identify and escort elderly, disabled, and pregnant individuals.
☐	Verify each beneficiary against the list before handing over goods. Obtain a signature and collect the token as confirmation of receipt.	Do not hand over goods without verification. One card per household, collected at handover, prevents double distribution.
☐	Maintain a visible feedback and complaint process throughout the distribution.	Designate one person to receive and note all feedback and complaints — documented and followed up on.
☐	BOXTRIBUTE Record each distribution on the spot — do not rely on memory. Boxtribute's free shop checkout deducts tokens like store credit and tracks items checked out automatically.	Even tally marks on a printed list help. Reconcile all records at the close — records completed days later are unreliable and create audit risk.
☐	Conduct a physical stock count at the close of distribution and reconcile all records immediately.	Count what remains, subtract from opening stock, compare to distribution records. Investigate any discrepancy.
☐	Debrief your team immediately after distribution: what worked, what did not, what needs to change.	A 20-minute verbal debrief while memory is fresh beats a written report a week later. Assign owners and deadlines.
☐	BOXTRIBUTE Generate the post-distribution report from Boxtribute and file it for donor reporting.	Boxtribute can show what was distributed, to whom, and when — your primary accountability document.

SECTION 3.3 POST DISTRIBUTION: REVIEW & NEXT STEPS

CHECK	ACTION	NOTES & GUIDANCE
☐	Report to donors and coordination partners: what was distributed, to whom, quantities, and remaining needs.	Regular, honest reporting supports accountability. Use your Boxtribute distribution report as the basis.
☐	Reassess the situation: have needs changed? Are new populations arriving? Are other actors filling gaps?	Situations evolve rapidly. Reassess every 72 hours during the acute phase rather than following an outdated plan.

CHECK	ACTION	NOTES & GUIDANCE
☐	Update the beneficiary list: add newcomers, remove households that have left or no longer need assistance.	Lists become stale quickly in displacement crises. Review before every distribution cycle.
☐	BOXTRIBUTE Review Boxtribute stock levels. Flag items running low and restart procurement planning before you run out.	Initiate procurement for the next cycle early — lead times in emergency contexts are unpredictable.
☐	Identify your next distribution date and restart planning from Section 3.1.	Each cycle should improve on the last. Apply your debrief learnings and restart the planning cycle.

REFERENCE

Quick Reference: Key Terms & Tools

The terms and tools referenced throughout this checklist.

GRN (Goods Received Note)	Completed every time goods arrive at your warehouse: date, supplier, item, quantity, condition. Essential for audits and donor reporting.
Waybill	Accompanies every goods movement from warehouse to distribution or another location. Creates a documented chain of custody.
Stock Card / Bin Card	A card or notebook row for each item type recording in, out, and balance — updated every time stock moves.
FEFO	First Expiry, First Out. All food, medical, and perishable items dispatched in expiry-date order: oldest stock first.
Sphere Handbook	The primary reference for minimum humanitarian standards (spherestandards.org). Covers WASH, food security, shelter, and health.
Logistics Cluster	WFP-led humanitarian logistics coordination body. Free services: shared warehousing, road-condition data, common procurement (logcluster.org).
UNHCR Emergency Handbook	Comprehensive operational guidance for emergency response (emergency.unhcr.org): distribution, registration, protection, and logistics.
Boxtribute	A digital public good and nonprofit providing humanitarian warehouse management and beneficiary tracking for locally-led NGOs (boxtribute.org).

Sources referenced: UNHCR Emergency Handbook (emergency.unhcr.org) · Sphere Handbook 2018 (spherestandards.org) · Logistics Cluster Operational Guide (log.logcluster.org) · CARE Emergency Toolkit (careemergencytoolkit.org) · IFRC Emergency Needs Assessment Guidance (ifrc.org) · IOM Emergency Manual (emergencymanual.iom.int)

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