Digital Emblems
Perspective from one human(itarian)

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Who is this guy?

• I was active in VoIP, and a chair of SIP and SIPPING in the 2000s

• I was an international humanitarian aid worker from 2012 until 2019
  • Action Against Hunger (ACF) in DR Congo as head of base (2 bases)
  • Doctor’s Without Borders (MSF) in South Sudan (x2), DR Congo (x2), Central African Republic, and Bangladesh as technical logistician (ex: construction, energy, water, transport, security) or all-around log (+supply/admin/HR/finance)

• Back at IETF working on MLS and MIMI

• **Note Well:** I do not speak for ACF, MSF, or the MSF association.
One obvious place a digital emblem could help: Customs Clearing / Cargo Paperwork

- Cargo for humanitarian work often takes a complex route. A lot of cargo for remote regions transits multiple countries.
  - To reach South Sudan:
    - Medical items: might fly from Amsterdam or Marseille to Nairobi, truck to Lokichoggio, fly directly to small airstrips in South Sudan
    - Therapeutic food might truck from Mombassa, ship to projects on barge up the Nile
    - Vehicles might ship by boat from Dubai to Kenya then drive in via Uganda
  - To reach Eastern DR Congo
    - No reliable commercial flights from Western DRC (ex: Kinshasa) to Eastern DRC (ex: Goma, Bukavu). No reliable land route
    - Hand-carried laptops and phones: fly to Rwanda, taxi to border, walk across
    - Many bulk items (ex: spare parts, cement) purchased in Kenya or Tanzania, might drive through Rwanda or Burundi to Goma or Bukavu, then resend to projects
  - Specialized used equipment sometimes travels from adjacent countries in roundabout way.
    - Obo to Yambio is 230km “as the crow flies”, 323km by road
    - Lab equipment for sleeping sickness hand carried from Eastern CAR via Bangui, Douala, Nairobi, and Juba to Western South Sudan. Actual distance ~7000km.
Other useful things you might want digital

• Patient transfers that would otherwise not be allowed to leave a region — but you would need willing cooperation of authorities
  • ex: Rohingya refugees in an ambulance traveling from Kutupalong hospital to Cox’s Bazaar. Cross checkpoint at Ukhia

• Donation paperwork
  • NGOs often donate drugs and supplies to each other; occasionally medical equipment and vehicles (ex: when projects close)

• Human tissue / blood
  • Regularly send samples (ex: blood) to a lab in Holland for confirmation
  • Ever sent an Ebola sample?

• Cargo Special handling
  • Lithium ion batteries (ex: medical equipment, laptops, comms)
  • Cold Chain
  • Hazardous Lab Reagents, Fuel
  • Lab equipment

• Tracking when cargo gets unloaded
  • Once someone dropped a shipping container of therapeutic peanut paste into the river at the Port of Matadi. It was underwater one month before customs officials admitted where it was
Where it probably does not help us*

Enforcement of humanitarian law, evidence, or prosecution

- The best protection humanitarians can have is **acceptance** by the community
  - A logo or a piece of paper does not magically protect us. A digital version no more so.

- Smaller NGOs or obscure missions might benefit
  - but only if the local authorities can read the emblem

- Sadly, violations of humanitarian law happen too often. This isn’t because the perpetrators are unaware of the presence or location of humanitarians or their legally protected status
  - **Trincomalee Massacre**: Sri Lanka — 17 executed in ACF office
  - **Kunduz Hospital Attack**: Afghanistan — Airstrike for nearly an hour kills 42 in MSF hospital
  - **Al Awda, Nasser, vehicles**: Gaza — MSF-supported hospitals destroyed, MSF staff killed, MSF vehicles intentionally destroyed

*us = humanitarians. YMMV
Where it could hurt
Location tracking — Mandatory to use? No thank you!

• Making your exact location known is often discouraged:
  • Paying salaries
  • Moving valuables in areas with ordinary crime
  • Treating vulnerable populations (HIV positive, ethnic minorities, victims of government violence)

• When you are a target
  • Afghanistan
  • Somalia
  • Yemen
  • Someone obviously helping the Rohingya in Bangladesh is not well received in Myanmar