REGIONALIZING SUPPLY IN MSF
MSF SUPPLY KENYA CASE STUDY: THE REDESIGN OF THE EAST AFRICA DISTRIBUTION NETWORK, 2023–2025

Vienna Evaluation Unit — MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES

OVERVIEW

Since 2007, the Kenya Supply Unit (KSU), a Belgian OC supply entity, handled regional procurement and transit activities out of Nairobi. In 2023-2025, a Transformational Investment Capacity (TIC) grant funded the transformation of KSU into MSF Supply Kenya (MSFSK), a fully operational regional supply centre under MSF Supply governance.

Rather than routing heavy 'bulky' items through European Supply Centres (ESCs) and shipping by air or sea, goods are now sent directly from manufacturers to MSFSK and distributed by road to seven East African missions (Burundi, DRC, Kenya, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda) across five Operational Centres (OCB, OCBA, OCP, OCG, WACA). This evaluation assesses performance against the TIC objectives and draws lessons for potential replication in other regions.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation confirms MSFSK has been implemented as planned and its objectives largely achieved. It now operates as a fully functional regional supply center delivering exceptional cost and environmental results while meeting - and in some respects exceeding - ESC quality standards. A phased rollout, close MSFS integration, successful ERP system interconnectivity with sustained stakeholder engagement were decisive to its success.

Challenges remain: ERP interconnectivity is still fragile, semi-automatic, and unidirectional (from MSFL to MSFS) requiring manual data entry by desk operators; legal constraints in Kenya complicate full structural integration of some departments with MSFS; and consolidation gaps at ESC and MSFSK level may be driving increased air shipments for non-bulky items - an unintended consequence that warrants monitoring. Stronger MSF-wide governance will be essential before this model is scaled to other regions.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- **For MSFSK- operations:** Monitor unrouted orders (<5% target), lead-time reductions, transport cost and carbon emission savings as a continuous KPI; advocate, in coordination with ESCs, for OCs to have a standard chronogram adjusted to MSFSK leadtimes; finish harmonizing of practices with MSFS in remaining departments.
- **For MSFSK - consolidation:** Investigate bottlenecks at the order documentation step and expand scope as a consolidation hub for non-bulky items from MSFS; verify whether ESC air shipments for non-bulky items have increased.
- **For MSFSK - quality:** Appoint a structural medical product specialist; conduct GSDP audits by pharmacists external to MSFS (e.g. MSFL); cross-check log item suppliers against IO-certified sources.
- **For the MSF movement:** Establish robust governance of the regionalization process - through an international supply centre platform or a dedicated structural role within ESCs — before deploying any further regional centre.
- **For future replication:** Await the new shared ERP system (MSFS go-live 2027, MSFL 2028); pair any new centre with an experienced ESC with legally binding integration; replicate the phased rollout with per-item switch deadlines and dedicated PMO-equivalent roles in both entities.

KEY RESULTS

- ***Rerouting:*** By end 2025, MSFSK fulfilled 59 of 61 bulky items. 94% of OCB bulky item order value transferred from MSFS; MSFL missions jumped from 18% to 81% routing in one year.
- ***Lead times:*** Road from MSFSK averages 123 days - 18 days faster than sea from ESCs and broadly comparable to air freight. In DRC, some OC/country combinations were actually faster than air from ESCs.
- ***Transport savings:*** €1,928,870 total savings over 2023-2025; €1.17M in 2025 alone, nearly double the €600k target set at project inception. DRC and South Sudan account for 72% of 2025 savings.
- ***Carbon emissions:*** 2,013 tCO_2e saved over 2023-2025. In 2025: 89% reduction vs the 2019 baseline - surpassing MSF's 50%-by-2030 climate target five years early. 98% of MSFSK shipments by value delivered by road.
- ***Quality:*** 100% match with IO-certified medical manufacturers for medical bulky items; GSDP-compliant warehouse confirmed across four successive audits (2022-2025); 0.38% claim rate in 2025.
- ***Financial viability:*** MSFSK reached break-even in 2025 with €1.15M income under the same flat cost-recovery model as MSFS, without requiring additional TIC support.
- ***Integration:*** ERP systems interconnected across MSFS, MSFL and MSFSK; MoU signed by all five OCs and both ESCs; bi-monthly ESC coordination platform established.

METHODOLOGY

- ***Mixed methods*:** quantitative analysis (primary) and 28 semi-structured key informant interviews for triangulation.
- ***Sources:*** IO SCPM Power BI report; MSFS OCB Extranet Outbound Indicators; IO CO_2 emissions tool; budget, financial, and quality documentation (2020–2025).
- ***Coverage*:** 7 East African missions (Burundi, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda); MSFSK, MSFS, MSFL, IO supply/pharma/climate, and OC HQ supply representatives across OCB and OCP.
- ***Period*:** Compared 2020–2022 baseline with 2023–2025 project period. Evaluation conducted January-April 2026.

Limitations: Certain analyses were not possible within the evaluation scope: a stock-out rate assessment required monthly inventory extractions that were inaccessible; inbound transportation costs and emissions (manufacturer to MSFSK) were excluded, though this has negligible effect on findings since 97% of inbound flows are by sea - a lower-emission and lower-cost mode than air. Three country missions (Tanzania, Ethiopia, Burundi) and some OC HQ perspectives were underrepresented in interviews, mitigated by oversampling large-volume missions (DRC, South Sudan).

Did you know?

In 2025, MSFSK shipped 237 more tonnes of bulky items than the 2019 baseline (61 bulky items in scope) while generating 89% less CO_2 - achieving MSF's 2030 climate target five years early. Several interviewees noted that MSFSK quality standards surpass MSFS in certain areas, including warehouse cleanliness and deviation management culture.

Contact and further information: evaluation@vienna.msf.org | *Full report available upon request*