

SOP for Police during Natural Disaster

Police organisation has to see itself as a major player in disaster management. It will continue to have the first responder role given its proximity to the incident site and relationship with the people. **Therefore** it has to bring about change in its approach. It has to adopt disaster management function as a one of its primary functions. State & district level authorities cannot afford to wait for response specialized forces such as NDRF all the time. Moreover, on many occasions, it might not be advisable or feasible to obtain/deploy armed forces and NDRF. Hence state police must be prepared as response force.

The local police must be trained, equipped and supported with legislation and logistics so that they find themselves capable to support the victim in the 'golden hour'. Subsequently they can play supporting role to the specialist forces if and when they come in bigger emergency cases. On many occasions Special Forces are not required and the local police may retain the primary role to help the needy. The out side forces are also handicapped in operating in unknown area, among unknown people and here is the key to critical role of police.

The Police are among the first responders in any crisis because,

- LOCAL POLICE ARRIVE FIRST
 - POSSESS WELL DEVELOPED COMMUNICATION SYSTEM
 - FAMILIAR WITH LOCAL TERRAIN
 - WIDER REACH, EVERY VILLAGE COVERED
 - BETTER KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL PEOPLE FEELINGS AND MIND-SETS
 - PEOPLE RECOGNISE POLICE AS FIRST RESPONDER
- UNIFORMED, DISCIPLINED

While functions of local police are well defined for internal emergency, same is not true for natural disasters. But wherever earthquake or flood occurs, the police get involved from beginning. Hence if their role is designed and documented in police manuals, disaster management acts and policies, it will, to that extent facilitate immediate effective response, at least in the first few hours which are most crucial. Hence the need to frame SOPs that can help the police forces in being prepared and respond appropriated whenever any disaster happens.

Role of Police before disaster-Prevention and Preparedness phase

Superintendent of Police of a district is ex-officio member of District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) and in this capacity he could play important role in prevention and preparedness phase.

- ✚ **Emergency Traffic Plan:-** Being familiar with the local terrain, Police should prepare emergency traffic plan including detail mapping with focus on strategic

points, which may be used at the time of incident for safe transporting of personnel, resources and relief goods to and from the affected area.

- ✚ **Detail communication Plan:-** Police has a robust and effective Communication system that is also for non police functions. It can also be used to propagate information and warning of threatening disaster. Thus police can develop communication protocols for responding during disasters eg designate separate channels for rescue, relief for example. Chaukidars who are present at village level could play important role to collect sensitive information and disseminate emergency warning and other information.
- ✚ **Identification of Building:-** PS personnel travel in their area frequently. They can be of great help in identifying buildings and campus which are easy to access and could be used as relief centres/relief camps and godown for storage of food grains and other rescue and relief materials.
- ✚ **Security Plan:-** At the time of any serious incident it becomes inevitable to provide security to victims, responders and to relief materials at storage point and during transit. Resources deployed too may require security.
- ✚ **Resource Mapping:-** It is very important to locate essential resources at very beginning of search and rescue works. It has been experienced during the Kosi flood 2008 that in rescue and relief works even small and tiny elements become very important. So local police could identify, locate and document general essential elements useful for different kind of disasters. These resources may have to be operated under the guidance and protection of police as done during operation of boats in Kosi disaster of 2008.
- ✚ **Training:-** Men in uniform (Police) are most visible and reliable government agency nearest to the people in difficult times. Police should conduct mock exercises with various stakeholders and should test and update their different plans.

Role of police during disaster-Emergency response phase

The primary role of police is evident during the management of the actual disaster situation. It includes:

- (i) **Search and Rescue(SAR):-** The primary function during a disaster. Policemen must be trained and equipped to begin rescue at the earliest to take advantage of the “platinum 15”. They would be able to provide immediate relief to the victims till specialized forces arrive. During such activity, police has to provide protection to boats that are put in operation during floods. resources eg.
 - ✚ Deployment of policeman on the boat plying in floods helps prevent overcrowding of boats and prevent capsizing.

- ✚ Such boats are provided with handheld wireless sets one to keep tracking its movements and provide help in disasters.
- ✚ To provide security to resources from unscrupulous elements. eg. During Kosi 2008, boats were captured by local goons.

During Orissa super cyclone of 1999 the collector's office at Cuttack was flooded by mud. Men of the police force rescued the collector on their shoulders.

(ii) **Deployment of resources:-** Police can help in deployment of resources, provide safety and security to the resources and the persons manning them.

- ✚ **Restoration of communication system/liasoning with rescue teams:-** Telephonic communication breaks down since the telephone towers/offices get destroyed with the result that landline and mobile phones stop working. Wireless communication might be the only means left. During floods or any other disaster most of the rescue teams operate in unknown territories under adverse conditions where landmarks are either washed away or destroyed. During Kosi disaster 2008, Army & NDRF boats got lost and they had to spend nights outside the camps. The new course of the river had very fast current as a result of which, they could not reach their locations by end of the day. Several times, these boats got capsized. The army, navy and the NDRF had their own communication systems but it needed to be integrated with the district communication setup so that information of any emergency could be disseminated quickly and support reached at the earliest. Wireless communication was established on all the boats. Similar communication with wireless has to be established in operational camps. Wireless can be provided to rescue and relief teams.

- ✚ Make available police communication resources for other DM task eg. **Relief distribution, medical teams.**

- ✚ Standby for emergency communication networks

(iii) **Prevention of commission of cognizable offences including all offences against property, human body and public tranquility:-** During disaster situation people abandon their houses with or without belongings. The safety and security of such houses and belonging is at risk. During such time people are without jobs hence incidence of crime generally increases. It also provides opportunities for the lumpen element such as robbers and thieves to commit cognizable offences i.e. looting etc., against property.

Similarly the vulnerable section of society particularly women and children susceptible to crimes against human body. Police can provide safety to such persons by active patrolling during disasters and by arresting the suspects beforehand.

- ✚ Investigation of cases.

(iv) **Security during Relief distributions/ Relief management:-** Relief distribution **is an** important aspect of disaster management.

- ✚ The designated relief distribution centre is generally located in the interiors. Therefore the security of personnel engaged in distribution and the material to be distributed (Cash and Kind) requires special attention.
- ✚ Similarly many bank branches get closed and therefore cash is sent **from** far of places for distribution as relief of maybe mobile ATMs will be used for people requiring cash. Police is required to provide security of the Cash and or ATMs.
- ✚ Likewise the security of grains and other relief material eg food packets being transported from different places to distribution centers is also important. Dedicated escorts are needed from the FCI godowns, railway stations to temporary storage/ distribution centers. The security of the food godowns, Railways stations where relief materials are received also require security.
- ✚ Relief material sent by NGOs etc. is also important and Police can play significant role in this regard.
- ✚ During the actual distribution of relief large numbers of people gather at the relief centre. The crowd management becomes important. The regulation of the process of distribution of relief can help in maintaining law and order.

(vi) Isolate disaster sites and control site access for safety of victims, general public and efficiency of incident operation

(vii) **Camp management:-** Security of camp inmates, officials and volunteers engaged in running of camps including health workers **is** core function. During Kosi disaster over 400 relief camps **had** people from many villages with different religious, political and caste backgrounds and thus had potential for friction. This requires deployment for law & order maintenance.

- ✚ Hundreds of government and non government employees/volunteers are engaged in running of kitchens, medical centers, sanitation units etc. They require protection all the time.

(viii) **Emergency transportation and Traffic Regulation:** Police has to facilitate the movement of rescue, medical, fire and other essential services.

- ✚ During Kosi disaster
- ✚ Highways roads had to be kept free for movement of rescue teams and relief material.
- ✚ Check posts were established for ensuring safety of relief material. Road patrol was arranged for safe passage of army convoys, boats and other resources sent from outside and vehicles for army was arranged.

- ✚ Control traffic during and after the incident and maintain access and egress routes
 - ✚ Make available police resources to transport rescue and relief personnel and victims.
 - ✚ Assist in managing huge logistical problems in handling relief supplies
- (ix) **Coordination with various agencies:-** During disasters various agencies such as NDRF, SDRF, Paramilitary forces such as BSF, CRPF, CISF etc, Army, IAF, Cost Guard, medical teams from outside the state arrive at the disaster sites. These external agencies are not informed about the physical terrain, Route Charts etc. The police can coordinate the activities of these agencies. The coordination among police and other agencies needs to be standardized in clear procedures.
- ✚ Police can function as link with external agencies since most are uniformed. NDRF today is the most visible trained emergency response force made up of personnel of CRP, BSF and CISF. Rescue teams from Army, Coast Guard, IAF and other states also policemen based.
 - ✚ The coordination among police and other agencies needs to be standardized in clear procedures. Protocols are needed for deploying resources in case of a disaster in a manner that is well-coordinated between local, state, and central emergency agencies including armed forces.
 - ✚ Importantly police organizations do not stand alone in doing what is necessary to deal with major disasters. Instead, police agencies must be integrated and be able to cooperate with other police and emergency agencies.
- (x) **Casualty information/ Disposal of dead:-** The identification of people involved in accidents/emergencies is a Police responsibility. All enquiries could be handled by police station staff.
- ✚ Tracing of missing persons and notification to their next of kin could be another area of work allotted to police.
 - ✚ Disposal of dead bodies and documentation of dead and the missing for the benefit of next of kin to claim the compensation and ex-gratia.
- (xi) **Family Liaison Officers:-** The Police could appoint family liaison officers (FLOs) to the families of those who have died. The FLOs are specially trained police officers who, if requested, will liaise between the families and the media as a way of minimizing intrusion and distress.
- (xii) **Media management:-** During any disaster situation information flow through the audio-visual as well as print media. The reports from need to be verified as soon as possible for quick response. The police can not only verify the facts of the information but also play an important role in briefing the media regarding the actual situation. This can help in checking the spread of rumours. In certain countries, Police officers play role of the Police Press Officer at the

scene of any major emergency to co-ordinate the response to all media enquiries.

- (xiii) **VIP Security:-** VIPs visit the affected area and relief camps frequently. Many a times, politically opposed/ dissatisfied resort to protests thereby posing threat to VIP and law and order. This must be handled by police.
- (xiv) **Crowd Management:-** Both at disaster site as well as at the relief distribution centre a large number of people gather as on lookers as well as the kith and kin of the victims. Sometimes the dissatisfied people disrupt the traffic – road and rail. The police can play important role in management of the crowd.

Role of police After disaster-Restoration Face

- (i) In long term operation of evacuation shelters the issues over the shelters would change and if they are not addressed soon they would create law and order problem. Therefore it is important to find the causes of the problems as soon as possible, assess the situation and reviews the previous ways.
- (ii) Accommodation of persons with special needs in evacuation shelters such as small children, pregnant women and mothers with nursing infants etc. requires utmost care. In a limited shelter space it is very important to provide special rooms for them. Police can play very important role in this respect.
- (iii) At the time of relief distribution and primary accommodation of victims support for the disabled and issues related to hygiene, infectious disease should be looked after carefully otherwise it create serious problems to restoration face.
- (iv) Police can play an important role in selection of beneficiaries of houses and other assets to the victims to avoid complications and litigation.
- (v) **Restoration of Critical infrastructure:-** Disaster usually affects the critical infrastructure such as road, telecommunication, health centers, school, electricity supply etc. Police can provide protection to the agencies which are involved in restoration of such infrastructure because people who are rendered jobless after disaster may hinder the process.
- (vi) **Safe exit of the personnel involved in disaster management:-** After the disasters due to fatigue laxity might seep in to the system. Although the overall law and order situation is monitored and maintained by the police, it becomes very important after the disaster for the safe exit of the personnel from outside agencies involved in management of the disaster i.e People from NGOs, INGOs, medical teams etc.
- (vii) **Feedback/assessment:-** Since the police is the key factor in managing the disaster, their feedback/ assessment is very important in updating the plans for the future.
- (viii) **Contingency planning:-** The police familiar with the local terrain and the resources available in the locality. They can plan the actions taken at the time of the disaster before hand.