

Making a Difference Through Volunteering: The experience of Deploying Young Surveyor Volunteers

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Key words: Volunteering, Capacity building, Young Surveyor, Project management, VCSP, Volunteer Community Surveyor Program.

SUMMARY

The act of volunteerism is a sole interest to willingly contribute time and effort to something without rewards. The Volunteer Community Surveyor Program (VCSP), an initiative of the Young Surveyors Network (YSN) of the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) is a program structured to give Young Surveyors the opportunity to invest their time, skills, and knowledge in humanitarian surveying. The VCSP is made up of different paths that work together to achieve the goals and vision of the program. The VCSP through the in-Country path organizes in-Country deployment of Young Surveyors called Volunteer Community Surveyors (VCS) through collaboration with VCSP partners which have been the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) of the UN-Habitat and Cadasta to solve issues related to land tenure security, registration and documentation.

During the period of deployment, the VCS spends maximum of 6 weeks working with the different partners with the following objectives;

- To Recognize the VCSP goals, core values, and how to improve them.
- Invest their time, knowledge, and skills in humanitarian surveying.
- Apply their skills, knowledge, and experiences to solve land-based community problems.
- Use open technologies and humanitarian skill sets to solve challenges in land registration and documentation.
- Build a professional surveying network and teamwork to serve the community in solving land tenure security challenges.

The VCSP initiative is the vital link between young surveyors and the VCSP partners to enhance opportunities for humanitarian surveying to become commonplace. This paper

highlights the work the in-Country deployment team has been doing in past years and summarizes the experience of VCSP deployments through testimonials of people who were directly engaged in the deployment program; the VCSP team members, the partners, and the volunteers (VCS). This will shed some light on how communities and surveying professions are closely related and how volunteering deployment like this can help surveyors and communities tackle land tenure security, development, poverty, and climate change challenges worldwide. Overall, the objective is to emphasize why such a program should be continued, promoted and invested in for solving land-related issues with a collaborative effort.

1. INTRODUCTION

Land is an important economical and livelihood resource. The security of land tenure and property rights ensures access to adequate housing, food security and economic empowerment of people. With an estimated of 70% of undocumented land worldwide (World bank, 2013). Increasing competition over land resources among rising population, poverty, inequality, human rights violation and unsustainable practices have become major issues in today's world, particularly in developing countries. Insecurity of tenure, dysfunctional land markets, inefficient land administration systems, unequal access to land and other resources are some major land related problems which need urgent attention in such nations and for this surveyors can play a major role. Surveyors are key players in land related matters due to their technical knowledge and skills in land survey and mapping including procedure, plans and tools formulation for maintaining efficient land administration systems and land governance.

In today's world where we have many countries/communities requiring surveying solutions and skilled young surveyors willing to work on such solutions, the Volunteer Community Surveyor Program (VCSP) is bridging the gap. VCSP was founded as a joint initiative of the UN-Habitat Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) and the Young Surveyors Network of the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) in 2017. The program is structured to give Young Surveyors the opportunity to invest their time, skills, and knowledge in humanitarian projects around the world. Strategically, the program focuses on three different approaches for engaging volunteers : in-Country Deployment, E- volunteering and Wisdom workshop that combinely brings together different ways of leveraging volunteers skills for a good cause. Different sub teams work together as a core VCSP Team to accomplish the objectives of each of these approaches and hence achieve the common VCSP goal.

2. ROLE OF in-Country DEPLOYMENT FOR VCSP MISSION:

VCSP in-Country deployment means sending young surveyors to volunteer in different countries for up to 4-6 weeks. During this time, the volunteers work with one of the VCSP partner organizations (such as GLTN or Cadasta) to support land administration development efforts and apply their skills and knowledge for community welfare. This gives them an opportunity to gain valuable professional experience and enjoy the local culture. Meanwhile for communities, a volunteer's presence makes them more likely to feel that they are receiving selfless help and support.

To get the full benefit of volunteering to both community and volunteers, matching the right person at the right time is very important. This is the area the in-Country deployment team of the VCSP focuses on. It aims to put together skills, time and talents of young surveyors through deployments in countries where VCSP partners work. For successful deployments, the In-country deployment team first collaborates with VCSP partners – Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) and Cadasta for arranging volunteering opportunities under sufficient financial support

from VCSP sponsors. As per the time of deployment and number of volunteers required, volunteers are then called and applications are evaluated based on certain qualifying criteria, the best applicants are finally selected as Volunteer Community Surveyors (VCS). If possible, for proper guidance of the volunteers during deployment, VCS Mentors are selected and allocated to each VCS. Also the performance and enjoyment of volunteers is closely monitored by taking timely progress reports from them. Finally, the overall impact of the deployment is reviewed, analyzed and documented by collecting testimonials and responses from VCS, VCSP partners and other stakeholders, if necessary.

2.1 Criteria for selection of Volunteers:

The selection criteria of potential VCS are similar in each deployment (Table 1).

Table 1: Selection criteria for VCS selection for in-Country Deployments

Criteria	Justification for criteria's relevance
Academic qualification (preferably a degree in land administration/management, surveying, GIS, or geomatics)	We seek volunteers who are undertaking these in-Country deployments with an amount of knowledge of land administration and relevant industry knowledge that they will learn how to apply in the deployment. While they will learn many valuable skills, it is not our intention or ability to teach foundational concepts during the deployment.
Familiarization with VCSP Partners' tools with basic experience (e.g. Cadasta, STDM, Fit-for-Purpose, Technical Documentation, GeoICT, GIS Programming and IT, technical documentation, recordings, land registration)	
Proven or exhibit traits that show alignment with VCSP values of volunteerism, curiosity, sustainability, and respect	Humanitarian surveying requires the ability to embody values of volunteerism, curiosity, sustainability, and respect - as the VCSP, we recognise that culturally, these factors maximise both the success of the experience of the VCS, and also the success of the impact that they have on the VCSP Partners and local community as a result of their deployment.
Prior experience in volunteering (outside of VCSP)	Humanitarian surveying requires a mindset that involves giving. We are seeking VCSs who inherently seek out volunteering opportunities because they want to create a difference to the world

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	from within.
VCSP Wisdom Workshop attendance	We seek VCSs who are already driven to be active within their industry where possible, as this is another indicator that they are driven from within to create a positive change on the world around them selflessly.
Involvement in FIG activities, for example through contribution to working groups, organising or active participations in Young Surveyors Network (YSN) events, or joining Commission meetings	

2.2 Expected role from volunteers:

Generally, there are some common roles expected from VCS in all projects, as given below, specific roles can also be specified during the project from VCSP team or VCSP partners:

- Represent the VCSP by adhering to the Code of Conduct and displaying VCSP values.
- Contribute to partners' programmes by involving in office-based works such as digitization of satellite imageries, data entry, management and visualisation in STDN or other platforms, documentation of progress or field-based works such as GPS use for data collection, questionnaire survey and so on as specified by the programme.
- Satisfactory and timely completion of tasks in the project.
- Report to the partner's office regularly.
- Prepare a report after one week to VCSP and the VCSP Partner
- Prepare a full report after completion of the deployment to the VCSP for further reporting to FIG and GLTN
- Share experiences on Social Media under guidance of FIG YSN
- Fill in a feedback form (VCS and Partner)

2.3 Expected learning benefits to the volunteers:

VCSP in-Country deployment can have several benefits in the professional and personal life of young surveyors, as they learn following professional and soft skills during the deployment.

The VCSP's key values are volunteerism, curiosity, respect and sustainability - which sit within the broader framework of a purpose to have a positive impact on the environment and people in need at a community level, a country level, and on a global level for our common future. VCSP is committed to enabling young surveyors to volunteer for the future through projects that prepare them for the world (career and personal) through learning different perspectives and allowing them to connect, promote, and share knowledge with others. As Volunteer

Community Surveyors experience in-Country deployments, they are able to understand beyond just a cognitive level what these values, purpose and commitment mean for humanitarian surveying as a whole. Through this experience, they are able to really learn what it means to map the world a better place, which acts as a powerful motivator for many years to come for them to continue to invest their time, knowledge and skills towards humanitarian surveying efforts to solve land-based community problems.

“Working with Cadasta has not only helped my growth in technical skills but also developed a holistic young professional. My confidence grows every day and I am certain I can work and be more useful in any corner of the world. I am very grateful for the safe, healthy community that VCSP is creating and I hope for more young people to get the same opportunity.”

- Diana Kyalo, VCS in Kenya in 2021

The VCSP in-Country Deployments program is also able to provide VCSs with the chance to experience, learn and use open technologies and humanitarian skill sets to solve challenges in land registration and documentation. Many young surveyors across the globe learn various technologies and skills during their studies, however applying these in the real world can look different to what is learnt in theory. Through working on projects during in-Country deployments, VCSs are able to learn creativity and agility in their ability to come up with new ways of thinking and doing when time, resources or data are limited, as they inevitably are within a real-world setting, and this makes them stronger candidates for jobs and benefits their professional development and potential positively.

These in-Country Deployments not only bring value to VCSs, but also to the partners that we work with to make these deployments happen.

“[The VCSP] not only allowed for the volunteers to showcase and share their skills but also to enhance their capacities and that of the organization. Pamoja Trust will always readily welcome more of such volunteer engagements as we have truly seen and appreciated the program’s value.”

- Diana Wachira, Program Officer with Pamoja Trust (GLTN Partner)

Lastly, the in-Country Deployments path of the VCSP works alongside the Wisdom Workshop, e-Volunteering and Knowledge Portal paths to offer young surveyors a comprehensive set of tools to engage with to build their professional surveying networks and teamwork to help serve communities round the world. Young surveyors are able to contribute in many different ways to solving land tenure security challenges across many countries, near and far to them, to be able to take learnings from in-Country deployments and apply these in different contexts. They are also able to make friends with people around the world from whom they can seek advice and guidance over the decades of their career journey, and learn from and about different land tenure security challenges in different contexts around the world at different scales.

“Earlier in the year [the FIG VCSP] organized a workshop where I learned about the various tools Cadasta uses in securing land tenure for communities across the globe. Since then, I have been working in the capacity of a GIS Assistant within the programs team at Cadasta. My technical skills have increased greatly.”

- Deborah Haggith Jepkoeche, VCS in Tanzania in 2021

Volunteer Community Surveyors (VCSs) from VCSP’s in-Country Deployments, as well as the partners we work with to make these deployments happen and the VCS Mentors who support the VCSs during deployment, have uniformly reported over time that involvement in these initiatives is a rewarding, fulfilling and impactful process that they are pleased to support and hope continues to grow in the future.

3. INFORMATION ON PAST DEPLOYMENT

3.1 Deployments projects: year, volunteers engaged and countries:

Since the start of VCSP in 2017, 20 volunteers have successfully been deployed in three deployment missions in different countries of Asia Pacific and African Regions (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Countries of VCSP deployments

In the pilot deployment of 2017/18, a total 13 volunteers provided technical support and guidance in process documentation for GLTN programs in Zambia, Uganda, Philippines, Kenya, Nepal and in Democratic Republic of Congo. The objective of the GLTN programs was mostly to provide technical support and strengthening capacity of implementing partners at the country level; strengthening the role of young surveyors in promoting and improving land governance at country level, and, enhancing and enriching the professional career development of young surveyors.

Similarly, in April-May 2021, three volunteers were engaged in deployments in conjunction with The Cadasta Foundation to support their work in Tanzania and Kenya. Due to global pandemic (COVID), only volunteer surveyors from Tanzania and Kenya were selected to take part in the in-Country volunteering program. The volunteers provided assistance in documentation and technical support for conducting training on data view, edit and analysis in Cadastra platform using dashboards, webmaps, StoryMaps, and Hub Sites.

Likewise, in 2021 also the deployments were organized in partnership with GLTN and its partners within the East African countries. The deployment spanned from 3rd May to 14th June 2021 where only four volunteer surveyors from Kenya and Uganda participated in the deployment due to pandemic situation.

3.2 Information about budget/cost :

The cost used for the deployments so far varies depending on the deployment location and number of VCS required. In the most involved state, a deployment may need the following costs covered:

- VCS flights and accommodation;
- VCS costs of living (food, transport, necessities);
- VCS insurance (travel and medical including treatment at location);
- Equipment and software (but not expected to be likely).

The total deployment expenses for all four VCSs during the Pilot deployment was \$2,518.98 USD. Since the 2021 deployments, communication costs are to be added to future budgeting due to the need for volunteers to use the internet to stay in touch with their VCS Mentor, partners in a remote setting, and due to large costs in some countries for this service.

Again, the nature of each partnership and program will dictate what donations are required. Aside from equipment and software donations, Technology Partners may be able to offer specific training for a program. Often the issue is not access to tools, but knowledge of how to use them.

4. EXPERIENCE FROM PAST DEPLOYMENTS:

4.1 Response of Volunteers after deployment:

4.1.1 Motivation/Experience during volunteering:

Deborah Haggith Jepkoech-VCS in Tanzania - 2021

‘Earlier in the year [the FIG VCSP] organized a workshop where I learned about the various tools Cadasta uses in securing land tenure for communities across the globe. Since then, I have been working in the capacity of a GIS Assistant within the programs team at Cadasta. My technical skills have increased greatly.’

Gundelinda (Linda) Ringo-VCS in Tanzania - 2021

‘Personally, I have been able to see and learn many things from you including working in organization, unity and cooperation, being transparent, discipline in time and work, how you communicate’.

Diana Kyalo-VCS in Kenya - 2021

‘Working with Cadasta has not only helped my growth in technical skills but also developed a holistic young professional. My confidence grows every day and I am certain I can work and be more useful in any corner of the world. I am very grateful for the safe, healthy community that VCSP is creating and I hope for more young people to get the same opportunity’.

4.2 Response of Project partners/communities:

4.2.1 About performance of volunteers:

Stephanie Michaud-Trimble - VCSP Partner

‘VCSP provides a welcome injection of passion and energy to tackle global challenges that surveyors face today. I have enjoyed working and collaborating with VCSP members on projects such as accessible cadastral mapping, encouraging new talent into the surveying profession, and developing new algorithms for mapping the plastic in our oceans. We also recently donated several Catalyst GNSS receivers for use in the upcoming STDM cadastral

projects. I speak on behalf of Trimble when I say we are honored to be a part of the next phase of VCSP and look forward to our continued work together”

Justus Wambayi, Program Specialist, Cadasta Foundation - VCSP Partner

Cadasta Foundation is very pleased to work with the FIG Young Surveyors Network to offer opportunities for young surveyors in Africa to showcase their skills and also work to solve real-life world problems. This year, we worked with amazing volunteers - 2 from Kenya and 1 from Uganda - to document land rights in the region for an indigeneous community and also to develop an atlas of informal settlements in Kenya.”

Diana Wachira, Program Officer with Pamoja Trust (GLTN Partner)

“The volunteer program contributed greatly to 2 major spatial mapping projects that are ongoing in the organization. The program provided an opportunity for exchange of skills and information between the volunteers and Pamoja Trust. It not only allowed for the volunteers to showcase and share their skills but also to enhance their capacities and that of the organization. Pamoja Trust will always readily welcome more of such volunteer engagements as we have truly seen and appreciated the program’s value”

Justus Muhando - Technical lead at Spatial Collective, VCSP Partner

“I would like to take this moment to applaud the work being done by the FIG young surveyors’ team and in particular the VCSP program. As a company involved in land and property rights in East Africa, we are encouraged to see more young surveyors being engaged through the VCSP program. As you know, there is still a lot of work to be done regarding this topic not only in East Africa but Africa as a whole and having more younger surveyors engaged, mentored, and trained only makes the profession merrier!”

Ernst Peter Oosterbroek, Kadaster Netherlands - VCSP Partner

“At the Netherlands Kadaster we love to share our knowledge and experience from a long history of land administration activities. And at the same time we are inspired by the eagerness and the modern knowledge of young surveyors around the globe. Claire [VCSP Core Team Lead], you called Kadaster a VCSP Knowledge Partner. And we fully agree. We will keep collaborating, as we have a common goal - To make surveyors contribute to a better world!”

Aaron Hick, VCS Mentor, Australia

“I’d first like to congratulate the VCSP for continuing this program - it’s great to see the benefits being realised through collaboration, especially given the challenges of today’s world, and I really appreciate the opportunity to be involved in such a worthwhile project. Mentoring for me goes both ways - I’ve always learnt so much from my mentees in the past. Whilst I may have more experience in the industry than those who I’ve worked with, their enthusiasm, alternative ideas and local knowledge of those volunteering has always provided a positive outcome for me. Both in my past and present volunteer mentoring roles, when you take a step back and think about the outcomes, I realise that whilst I may have been able to provide support and pass on some good advice or guidance, I’ve indirectly gained an equal amount - if not more. I couldn’t recommend both volunteering and mentoring for anybody who is interested and able. As a mentor, you get access to the vibrancy of your mentee or volunteer, as well as the expertise and drive of other professionals who are mentoring or organising. Too often in our daily jobs we are surrounded by similar ideas, personalities and worldviews, which only serve to reinforce our small bubble of understanding of the world. Both volunteering and mentoring have given me the ability to understand more deeply the challenges faced, especially by those in developing nations, and given me renewed enthusiasm and drive to continually strive for better outcomes in my work. It’s so rewarding to see and be involved in. Thank you! Now go get involved!”

Donmarl Camua, VCS Mentor, Philippines/Australia

“I am proud to be a mentor of this year’s Volunteer Community Surveyor Program of the FIG Young Surveyors Network. My mentee is Edwin, and he is a young surveyor based in Nairobi, Kenya. I am happy that I was able to share with him my experience during our brief chats, and hopefully was able to encourage him to pursue a career in surveying... We still keep in touch and he shared with me his experiences on various projects, particularly in updating the digital atlas of informal settlements in Nairobi County, both his field and office experiences. Being a mentor was quite a different experience for me - I still consider myself as a mentee or a mentor-in-training, however this mentorship program has encouraged me to step up and become an inspiration to young surveyors.”

Chief Innocent Egbuh, VCS Mentor, Nigeria

“My name is Innocent Egbuh from Nigeria, 35 years veteran of surveying and geoinformation. When I saw the form for the VCSP Mentorship Program, I imagined how it was going to be implemented. I have been a mentor for many young people, including surveyors, but much of it was at close quarters. One of the most surprising aspects of this program was when I was promptly contacted by my assigned mentee from Uganda - thousands of kilometers away. Shortly after, we worked out modalities for engagement and compliance with the guidelines. I

discovered that I could set time out to mentor someone very far from me - long distance mentoring is real. The joy it brings is indescribable. This program for me is very successful.”

4.3 Challenges faced during deployment:

- For the VCSP in-Country Team
 - Funding!
 - Notice from partners of when deployments will happen
- For the VCSs
 - Just getting going when the deployment ends
- For the Partners
 - Wanting longer deployments

4.4 Lessons learnt from deployment:

There were lessons learnt during the each deployments, this lesson were channeled towards improving the coming deployment. As a team, following were notable knowledge we had;

- 1) Through our partners, we were able to find the different opportunities needing surveying skill which the VCSs can be a part of and leverage to contribute their quota in achieving solution to the challenges needing solutions.
- 2) The peculiarity of the different projects defines the required skills needed to achieve results. This peculiarities are sometimes defined by different cultural and social vibes of the community.
- 3) It was a good opportunity to learn the different technical approach deployed by our partners. This knowledge were always shared during the VCSP Wisdom Workshop event were our partners train on how they achieve results both on field and after.
- 4) Funding was a critical part of the depolymnet and it was always a threat. This opened our minds to different funding strategies and planning for future deployment.
- 5) Improved project management skills. The deployment required a follow up on the VCSs, their mentors and our partners on a weekly basis by filling up a report form. This is to help us identify if there are issues and also get to know how they are faring while undergoing deployment. This reports were carefully studied, analysed and evaluated in other to measure the level success.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The VCSP in-Country deployment path is a vital part of the VCSP team, it is the main organ for actualising the vision of the VCSP Program. So far, it has enabled interactions with Young

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Surveyors who are willing to commit their time, skills and knowledge through volunteerism and also mitigating some of the challenges affecting land tenure security. The testimonials received from the VCSs and our Partners shows that the program has positive impact on the VCSs involved, it contributed to the host organisation (VCSP Partners) and it was of great impact to the community. By this testimonials, the VCSP team is encouraged to project into the future, finding a way to overcome some of the challenges identified as threat and seeking for more opportunities that will allow more young surveyors to be able to contribute the skills and efforts towards tackling developmental challenges worldwide.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

in-Country deployments is one of the essential path of the FIG VCSP. It offers Young Surveyors the opportunity to become Volunteer Community Surveyors (VCSs), spending time immersed within a community for up to six weeks. During this time, they work with one of the VCSP Partner organisations (such as GLTN or Cadasta) supporting land administration efforts. This is a chance to apply their skills and knowledge while gaining important professional experience and a unique cultural experience. All VCSs are supported by the VCSP in-Country Team and by an individually-assigned Mentor for their deployment.

in-Country deployments happen one-to-two times per year, with locations varying according to VCSP arrangements with partner organisations

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