

**FACILITATING OFFENDER SUPERVISION AND RE-
ENTRY THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORT
SERVICES: THE ROLE OF VPOs IN KENYA**

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- **Vision Statement**

A just, safe, crime-free society

- **Mission Statement**

“To Promote and enhance the administration of justice, community safety and public protection through provision of social inquiry reports, supervision and reintegration of noncustodial offenders, victim support and social crime prevention”

Core Functions

1. Facilitation of the administration of criminal law by assisting courts and penal authorities through provision of various advisory/assessment reports,
2. Interventions in the lives of offenders placed on various statutory orders (*probation orders, community service orders*) with the aim of reducing re-offending and effecting behaviour change,
3. Enforcement of various court orders particular to each offender, offence and sentence,
4. Resettlement and reintegration of offenders and psychiatric offenders into the community
5. Promotion of harmony and peaceful co-existence between the offender, the family and the victim/community through reconciliation, participation in crime and delinquency prevention initiatives

The Concept of VPO

- The concept of volunteerism in probation service is understood as defined by the UN Standard Minimum Rules for non-custodial measures (TOKYO RULES) which define a VPO as ***‘any person appointed by the government to assist a probation officer in the rehabilitation of offenders’***.
- Volunteers are meant to assist probation officers towards changing the lives of offenders (through supervision) and help reduce crime in their local areas of operation.
- The concept was borrowed from Japan as a community participation effort in crime prevention and offender management

The Concept of VPO

- The formal VPO programme was started in 2005 as an initiative of the department in order to address shortcomings identified in the general offender supervision and resource gap.
- The demand for the volunteer input was mostly felt in far-flung districts which posed considerable challenges in offender supervision.
- In line with international standards, the objective of having the VPO programme was generally to provide auxiliary support to mainstream probation system but specifically:
 1. To expand the departmental reach in the community in criminal justice dispensation
 2. To intensify offender supervision and reintegration and
 3. To increase the capacity and speed within which probation officers can be able to provide court services.

Guiding Principles on Volunteerism

Kenya National Volunteer policy (2015)

- Respect for fundamental human rights and freedom as provided by the constitution, legislation and international instruments;
- Volunteerism is not carried out in expectation of any financial gain;
- Volunteers participate on the basis of freely expressed consent;
- Volunteerism should be encouraged with a certain degree of autonomy from the public authorities, to safeguard its independence;
- Volunteerism as service to humanity;
- Volunteering is not an alternate for employment or internship;

Guiding Principles Cont'd

- Volunteerism based on a National Volunteer code of conduct;
- Volunteering as an act for the common good and on the basis of social commitment;
- Volunteerism for promotion of human rights and equality;
- Volunteerism respects the rights, dignity, culture and religion of communities involved; and
- Volunteer recruitment based on equal opportunity and non-discrimination.

Why We Needed Volunteers

- Need for greater role for communities in the supervision & rehabilitation of offenders
- Need to provide space for probation officers to supervise offenders requiring professional intervention or intense supervision
- Need for new techniques of case load management that draws from available community resources
- Inadequate transport yet probation work is community based and requires reliable and convenient mode of communication

Why We Needed Volunteers

- Lack of adequate personnel especially those that could be deployed in the marginalized districts and in areas with high caseload.
- Limited Funding as much of the public finances are diverted to other needy social services sectors like education and health
- Geographical coverage area especially for the marginalized regions is vast yet with skeletal staff. This is in addition to the nomadic way of life of some local population.
- Much of the marginalized districts have rugged terrain that present considerable challenge to supervision.

Why We Needed Volunteers

- Need to tackle supervision challenges especially among the youthful offenders who constantly require close follow-up and mentorship
- Need to create rehabilitation networks. Probation as a single entity cannot effectively provide the needed offender supervision. Further, there is increasing demand for the Service to employ multi-agency approach in offender supervision
- Need for publicity and awareness creation on non custodial court sanctions in the communities

VPO Recruitment & Appointment,

- Recruited from among community members who meet certain criteria set by the department of Probation and Aftercare service.
- Appointed by the National Director of Probation upon an induction training or orientation by the department.
- The recruitment and appointment of the V.P.O in Kenya is devoid of job seekers and it has no monetary reward
- Those who qualify are mostly retired civil servants, religious leaders, social workers, community leaders who are willing to find time, provide free service, be role models of strong moral standing and integrity and at least above 30 years from both genders

Main Tasks, Duties, and Roles

- The volunteers provide auxiliary services to probation officers especially with regard to verifying information (for probation reports) about the offenders coming from their communities,
- Supervising offenders on probation orders and community service orders and those on Aftercare supervision upon exit from correctional facilities especially for the youth.
- Helping probation officers verify some of the information on the accused person due for sentencing
- Providing close contact and supervision of offenders on probation orders and community services orders
- Helping with the reintegration of youthful offenders exiting from correctional facilities •

Main Tasks, Duties, and Roles=Cont'd

- Maintaining records of work by them and work done by offenders on community punishment orders
- Liaising with local agencies and linking the offenders to community resources
- Helping in crime prevention by identifying at risk children and youth and taking remedial action in collaboration with probation officers
- VPO keep daily watch on offenders placed in various community service work centres within their respective jurisdiction and reporting to probation officers non-compliance.
- They also directing probationers and other supervisees on where to access help
- The VPOs are responsible to the probation officers to whom they report directly

Resource Materials

- **VPO Training Manual**- this was developed internally to foster the trainings and provide consistency in the in all areas of induction into probation practice and VPO programme in particular. Trainings were mounted in different areas at different times by probation officers. The training manual has been a resource for the trainers who are the POs.
- **VPO Code of conduct**- to provide ethical and accountable inputs that would forestall abuse of position as a VPO and also enable them conduct themselves professionally. Offenders are a vulnerable group and need cushioning from abuse and manipulation. The Code of Conduct mirror that of POs
- **VPO Practice Guidelines**- besides providing the practical guidance on what is expected of them as VPOs, this acts as a quick reference point

Programme Status

- The programme is established in 30 of the Counties 47 countries. It is coordinated from the National Office but each probation station has its field coordinator who is the station manager.
- There are currently 295 volunteer probation officer comprising of 235 (80%) are males and 60 (20%) are females.
- Out of this number, 212 are active while 83 are inactive
- In Kenya, the volunteer probation officers are not paid however a few had been facilitated by provision of communication gadgets like of mobile phones and bicycles some of which also act as incentives for the job.

Organization

- The director of probation and Aftercare service has the overall responsibility for the programme.
- Head of Supervision Section at the Headquarters is responsible for the national coordination of the programme.
- At the County Level, the county probation directors provide oversight but the day to day work with the VPOs is carried out by the Station officer In-charge.
- The VPOs report to respective probation officers who are responsible for the supervision of a particular client.
- The VPO are yet to form an association

Progress

- New arrangement is to link each VPO to a particular probation officer thus VPO not being seen to be responsible only to the probation office manager
- More frequent case conferencing and training
- Meeting with officers from the Probation Service headquarters more frequently to instill sense of being and show of recognition
- Expansion underway to other areas not having the programme
- Linkages with other NGOs working in the areas or operations

Public Recognition

- Local administration have acknowledged the role of VPOs in promoting crime prevention
- Some VPOs have been identified and feted= in 2016 one Volunteer was awarded State Honours (**Head of State Commendation=HSC**) for exemplary work in offender supervision while other are given internal commendation letters
- This conference has offered an opportunity for one of the VPOs to participate thus being the desired incentive and recognition

Challenges& Responses

1. **Weak laws**= need to entrench VPO work in statutes and policies currently working on statutory Rules and regulations to anchor VPO programme
2. **Needs for greater recognition=working** with County governments administration and NGOs to support VPOs
3. **Capacity building**=Provision of opportunities to learn through formal training and case work that do not require in-depth academic knowledge e.g. social skills training and Counseling
4. **No Government funding**=linking up with NGOs and development partners of good will (e.g. Kenya No Mirai, Youth Change Initiative UNODC)
5. **Some areas not covered**= expansion in phases. Setting off with pilots and communities involved in identification of potential VPOs

Conclusion

- The VPOs system is a very noble initiative. It is bound to have a significant impact in probation service delivery including the following
 1. Potential to help reduce remand homes and prisons population with more offenders being accorded community supervision supported by VPOs.
 2. Improved caseload management resulting into improved supervision of offenders
 3. Reduced recidivism (re-offending) owing to close supervision and acceptance of offenders in the community .
 4. Improved relationship between Probation officers, offenders and the community.
 5. Harnessed community based resources for rehabilitation of offenders.
 6. Enhanced confidence in community sentences by Courts & the community
 7. Greater involvement by the community in offender management

- THANK YOU
- ARIGATO GOZAIMAS