New Surveyors-General’s offices raise public awareness of geomatics

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to bring to the attention of the industry the role of the new Surveyors-General’s offices in raising public awareness in this profession. It is based on practical learning experiences in the Surveyor-General: Mpumalanga in the fight against the scarcity of skills in the surveying/geomatics profession. This experience was gained over the past ten years as the office celebrates a decade of existence in 2015 following the opening of its doors to the general public in early 2005. At first the office experienced challenges when introducing geomatics to the general public as the profession was fairly unknown or unpopular in comparison to other related professions.

The paper will also discuss how the office overcame the challenges faced by this profession by applying strategic methods.

Introduction

In 2004 the Department of Land Affairs (now the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform) decentralised Surveyor-General offices for the purpose of bringing its services closer to the people. The challenge that was faced by new offices was the lack of awareness in geomatics. As a result it was difficult to sell the office’s products to the public.

The background investigations proved that in Mpumalanga geomatics was not recognised even though the land development industry was growing. The public was more familiar with the deeds office compared to the Surveyor-General (SG) office. This challenge was also experienced with the officials in other branches of our department. The officials did not know the functions of the SG and were also not familiar with the duties of a land surveyor.

It is acknowledged that the term “geomatics” is relatively new, but it was found that even the term “land surveying” was fairly unknown. It was also found that some people confused land surveying with quantity surveying. Members of the public used to come to the SG office to request services of a quantity surveyor.

These days many people drive vehicles equipped with GPS and cellular phones with maps yet they do not know how these maps are created. The reason for that is the lack of public awareness in this industry.

The Surveyor-General: Mpumalanga came up with strategic methods to increase public awareness by involving the officials in the office.

Establishment of new Surveyors-General’s offices

The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform started establishing decentralised Surveyors-General’s offices in 2004 through a Departmental project called Mutingati. Surveyor-General (SG): Mpumalanga was the first office to open in the new democratic government, followed by SG: Limpopo and SG: Eastern Cape.

Limpopo and Mpumalanga cadastral data was previously housed at SG: Pretoria while Eastern Cape data was previously housed at SG: Western Cape which was previously known at SG: Cape Town before the gazetting of the new Eastern Cape office.

Factors found to be contributing to the lack of awareness in geomatics

Investigations were done to find out why geomatics was relatively unknown in Mpumalanga. The following factors were identified:

- There was no university in the province.
- Tshwane University of Technology: Nelspruit and Witbank campuses do not offer a geomatics/surveying diploma.
- Local municipalities in the province do not have land surveying sections.
• The provincial government has only a few posts for geomatics professionals in the relevant provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

• There are few survey companies in the province and as a result people easily confuse land surveying with quantity surveying.

• A large percentage of the province is comprised of rural areas.

**Methods applied by the office to increase awareness**

The office implemented the following methods:

• The office established an internal committee which was tasked with ensuring delivery in the operational plan output of the office relating to cadastral awareness campaigns, which output also incorporates career exhibitions for the geomatics profession.

• The office has since participated and continues to participate in various provincial career expo and GIS day events.

• Furthermore, a small team of two to three officials in the office visit selected schools and municipalities in the province during public service week.

• Participation by officials in the office in all instances is on a voluntary basis and officials have always shown a lot of interest in such events.

• The office at first relied solely on the departmental special bursary scheme booklet and promotional materials from other SG offices for the exhibitions but now has its own promotional material which is produced in-house.

**Youth development programmes**

The office contributes extensively in youth development in the following Departmental and Branch: National Geomatics Management Services (NGMS) programmes:

• **Marketing the special bursary scheme for part time and full time study:** The office takes responsibility of distributing bursary adverts to schools and rural municipalities.

• **Facilitating the training of candidate professional surveyors:** Training is provided to professional land surveyors-in training and prepare them for PLATO examination.

• **In-service training for surveying students:** The office has partnered with land surveyors to assist the students to complete the in-service training as required by the universities of technology.

• **Geomatics officer qualification (NQF Level 4):** This is a SAQA accredited course in which the office provides in-house training on Surveyor-General internal processes and procedures.

• **Appointment of youth for state land audit project:** The youth are provided with the opportunity on a contract appointment for this project. This prepares them for future work opportunities.

**Results achieved**

• The number of professional land surveyors and survey technicians who are originally from Mpumalanga has increased in the office.

• The number of bursary students from Mpumalanga has increased.

• Some former pupil geomatics officers have graduated with National Diploma: Surveying.

• Other organs of the state have been able to recruit from the bursary scheme pool.

• Regulations pertaining to cadastral surveys are now better observed within the province.
The ROLE OF THE SURVEYOR-GENERAL

1. The role of Surveyor-General’s office in South Africa which is responsible for regulating land surveys in the province or provinces for which it is responsible.

2. The preconditions for services as contained in the Land Survey Act, 1957 (Act of 1957), which states:
   • Examine and approve diagrams, general plans and sectional plans prior to their being registered in a Deeds Registry.
   • Prepare and update all relevant documents and records pertaining to cadastral surveys in the province or province falling under their jurisdiction.
   • Prepare and update cadastral maps and plans in both paper and digital format.
   • Supply copies of documents as required by the public or other institutions.
   • Provide relevant information pertaining to the cadastral all the time.

The fact that the Surveyor-General’s office holds possession of all cadastral surveys ensures that there is virtually no possibility of properties overlapping and once registered, there is little chance of conflicting claims of ownership.

SURVEY DOCUMENTS

The Diagrams in the Deeds Registry are registered documents prepared by the Land Surveyors for the following reasons:

1. The unique designation of a site or building.
2. The boundaries describe the location of the site and buildings.
3. Descriptions of the boundaries.
4. The plan is a general plan that shows the boundaries of the site and buildings.

Fig. 1: Example of office promotional material.
Findings from tests done in the office

The number of officials with geomatics/surveying qualifications has increased in the office. Some of these officials started as general workers and/or pupil geomatics officers in the office. They were introduced to the special bursary scheme and applied.

Officials who matriculated after 2004 were interviewed:

- Out of 15 geomatics officers interviewed twelve of them found out about geomatics in the office.
- Out of 15 survey technicians interviewed nine of them found out about geomatics during the department’s visit to their schools.
- Out of five professional land surveyors interviewed four of them found about geomatics during the career expo where the department participated.

Other findings

- 2008 pupil geomatics intake: Out of seven officers, one is doing BSc Geomatics degree; five are doing National Diploma: Surveying and one has graduated.
- 2010 pupil geomatics intake: Out of eight officers, three are doing BSc Geomatics degree; four are doing National Diploma: Surveying.
- 2012 pupil geomatics intake: Out of eight officers, one of them is doing BSc Geomatics degree.
- General workers: Two officials who joined the office as general workers are now doing National Diploma: Surveying.

Proposed interventions

The methods applied by the office have worked, but further interventions are required to assist this profession in facing future challenges.

The following interventions are proposed:

- Introduction of geometics and/or geoinformatics qualification at the new University of Mpumalanga.
- Bursary applicants from rural areas to be given first preference.
- Partnership between SG office, SAGI and GISSA to promote geomatics at high school level.
- Introduction of national geomatics day.

Conclusion

With all the activities which are taking place at the Surveyor-General’s office, including being a PLATO examination centre, it has been proven that the opening of the Surveyor-General office in the province where it was not available increases awareness in geomatics in that particular province.

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Reference


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