

MA Social Media as Culture

Assignment 2 (20 January 2012): A piece of empirical research
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Understanding motivations for participation within Volunteer and Technical Communities (V&TCs)

When criticizing 1960's Inter-American Student Projects, Ivan Illich once said "the road to hell is paved with good intentions". Illich meant that volunteering is nothing but a way for well-off students to feel less guilty over being more fortunate than others¹. A group of 21st century volunteers, however, mean there is more than guilt to volunteering.

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An earthquake breaks new grounds for volunteering



The earthquake that struck Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince on 12 January 2010 is one of the largest sudden onset emergencies the world has ever seen. While destroying infrastructure and affecting millions of people, the quake created a gap between what was known about situational and geo-spatial data in Haiti before and after the disaster. The

¹ <http://www.ciasp.ca/CIASPhistory/IllichCIASPSpeech.htm> (accessed on 14 January 2011)

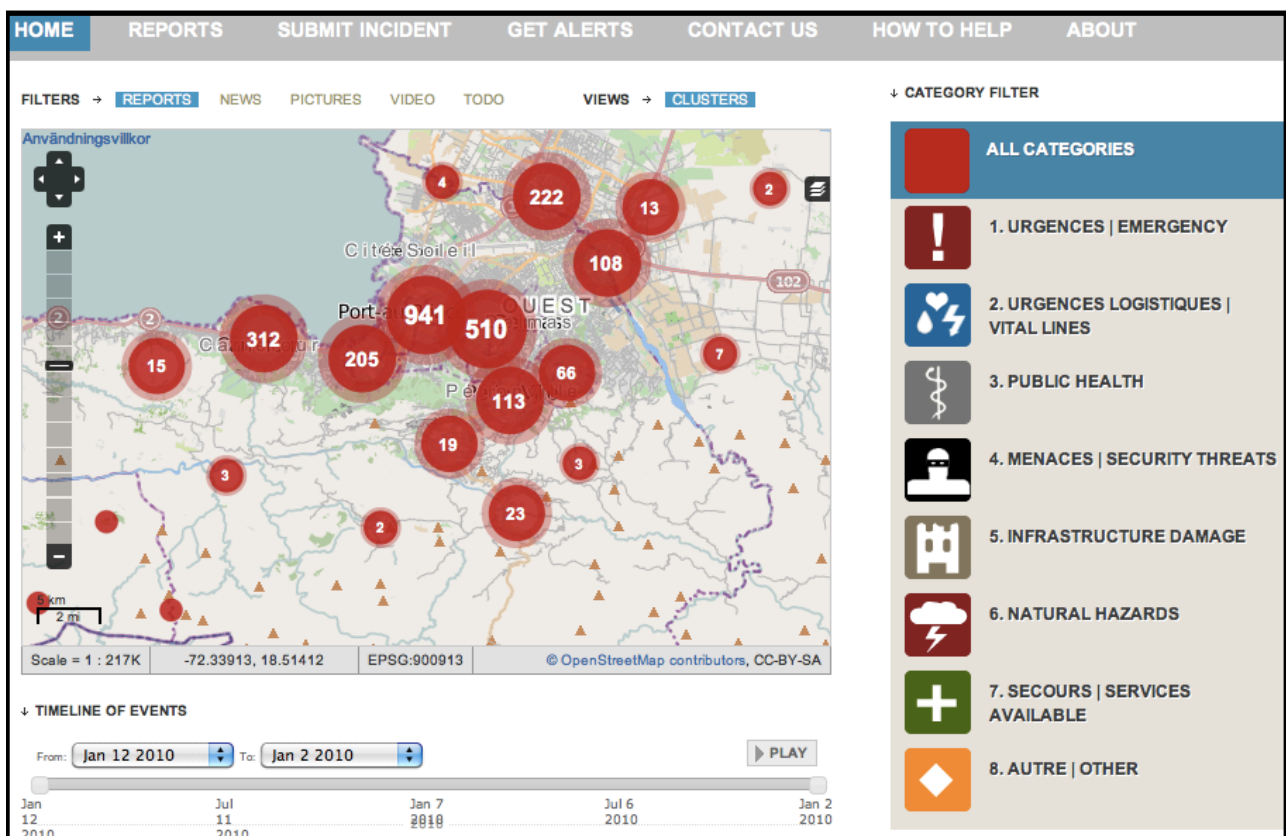
effort to fill in this information gap, i.e. to collect, analyze and distill the data, is usually taken on by the humanitarian community (e.g. the Red Cross and the United Nations). The Haiti quake, however, broke new grounds for the participation of Volunteer and Technology Communities (V&TCs), i.e. members of the public come together to explore how technology can facilitate relief work (HHI, 2011, p.8-9).

Less than two hours after the quake, Ushahidi (Swahili for ‘testimony’ or ‘witness’), an open source platform developed during Kenya’s 2007-08 post-election violence, came online (Heinzelman et al, 2010, p.2). The platform, haiti.ushahidi.com, was intended for people affected by the earthquake to freely add information describing among others trapped persons, medical emergencies and needs such as water, food and shelter to a map (CDAC et al, 2011, p.15). At first, however, most of the data were not submitted by trapped survivors, but by a group of volunteers operating out of Boston.

“I just couldn’t sit there and do nothing,” explained Patrick Meier, then a Ph.D. candidate at Tufts University, “so I reached out to Ushahidi’s lead developer, David Kobia, and we went live with the Ushahidi-Haiti map” (Heinzelman et al, 2010, p.6). Operating out of Meier’s 1.5 bedroom apartment, with their feet overlapping on a coffee table, a group of students (*pictured below*) started to trawl Facebook and Twitter for messages carrying information related to the quake (Ziemke, 2011, p.5). Each piece of information (report) was uploaded on haiti.ushahidi.com, which within four days was adopted as a source of situational data by the U.S. Coast Guard and other teams on the ground (Heinzelman et al, 2010, p.2).



Meanwhile, working separately from the Ushahidi project in an attempt to identifying where survivors might be, was a group of seasoned NGOs who teamed up with the U.S. Department of State. They established a free SMS short number (4636) to which Haitians could send text messages about their locations and needs. As many of the information was received in the local language (Creole), the group mobilized volunteers from the Haitian diaspora to provide real-time translations via Skype. (HHI, 2011, p.26-28). This collective effort, later referred to as Mission 4636, was fully wired with haiti.ushahidi.com (pictured below) by day six, which eventually recorded 3,500 reports (2,200 via SMS) plotted by volunteers from across the world (CDAC et al, 2011, 15-17).



Stakeholders of haiti.ushahidi.com and Mission 4636 are convinced lives were saved as a result of their work (Morrow et al, 2011, p.26), an assumption portrayed by U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, in her speech about Internet freedom on 21 January 2010²:

"The technology community has set up interactive maps to help us identify needs and target resources. And on Monday, a seven-year-old girl and two women were pulled from the rubble of a collapsed supermarket by an American search-and-rescue team after they sent a text message calling for help."

² <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/135519.htm> (accessed on 5 January 2011)

However, the assumption and Clinton's statement, a report claims that only 132 people were found alive in the rubble (Hattotuwa et al. 2010, p.1). Critics further describe haiti.ushahidi.com and Mission 4636 as raising expectations that cannot be met and far from being a core component of the humanitarian response (Currion, 2010).

While many studies carried out in the field of 'crisis mapping', the use of modern technology to analyze the combination of time, location and content (Ziemke, 2011, p.1), have looked at the technology aspect, few have focused on the significant differences in culture, mindset and approach that separates V&TCs from the humanitarian community (HHI, 2011, p.40). For example, little light has been shed on the volunteers who actually 'pulled the ropes' on the back-end, who they are and what motivates them (Clemenzo, 2011, p.9).

Therefore this paper presents the findings of a brief study trying to understand motivations of people doing volunteer work for V&TCs. Conducted in January 2012, within the framework of Birmingham City University's Master of Arts in Social Media³, the study ultimately aimed at providing an answer to the question:

What motivates people to volunteer with V&TCs?

Per Patrick Meier's recommendation, who kindly helped setting the focus of the study, the research question was targeted to the recently established Standby Task Force (SBTF), an online community of 700 'mapsters' (Task Force lingo for volunteers). The SBTF, as described on their website, is as follow⁴:

"The concept for the [SBTF] was launched at the 2010 International Conference on Crisis Mapping to streamline online volunteer support for crisis mapping following lessons learned in Haiti, Chile and Pakistan [...] The SBTF is not an organization, it is a platform, a shared space for those who have skills to offer [...] to assist crisis affected communities through the use of crowdsourcing and mapping technologies."

The research question was broken down further into seven motivations extracted from an extended version of a model called the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), introduced by Gil Clary (College of St. Catherine) and Mark Snyder (University of Minnesota).

Resting with a social psychological approach, Clary and Snyder suggested that while different people can perform the same actions, these actions may serve different

³ <http://www.bcu.ac.uk/courses/social-media> (accessed on 16 January 2011)

⁴ <http://blog.standbytaskforce.com/about> (accessed on 5 January 2011)

psychological functions for different individuals. Based on case studies dating back to the late 19th century, Clary and Snyder catalogued six functions (motivations, or reasons) of volunteerism (Houle et al, 2005, p.337-338):

Function	Description
Values	The person is volunteering in order to express or act on important values, such as humanitarianism and helping the less fortunate.
Understanding	The volunteer is seeking to learn more about the world and or exercise skills that are often unused.
Career	The volunteer has the goal of gaining career-related experience through volunteering.
Social	Volunteering allows the person to strengthen one's social relationships.
Protective	The individual uses volunteering to reduce negative feelings, such as guilt, or to address personal problems.
Enhancement	The individual is seeking to grow and develop psychologically through involvement in volunteering.

Those six functions, however, do not cover how the Internet has enabled volunteers to work remotely and to be visible beyond their local communities. Therefore Brian Butler (University of Pittsburgh) suggested a seventh function in an attempt to broaden the VFI model (Butler et al, 2010, p.10):

Visibility	Online volunteering provides the person with an opportunity to be visible beyond the boundaries of their geographical community.
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In the book "Making is Connecting", David Gauntlett (University of Westminster) describes recognition as an incentive for participation in online communities (Gauntlett, 2011, p.101) which backs up the seventh function added by Butler to the VFI model:

"People spend time creating online content because they want to feel active and recognized within a community of interesting people, and because they wish to express or display aspects of themselves and their interests".

Charles Leadbeater (a British author) and Clay Shirky (New York University) add further weight to the extended VFI model when describing reasons to why people engage in volunteer work online:

"People who produce, for free, [...] encyclopedia articles, software, [etc] are finding ways to express themselves through voluntary labour [...] Non-market, social forms of production allow people to do things because of their passions, interests and skills rather than because of the financial rewards" (Leadbeater, 2009, p.14).

[Volunteers] have always wanted to be autonomous, competent, and connected; it's just that now social media has become an environment for enacting those desires, rather than suppressing them (Shirky, 2010, p.44).

Together, the seven motivations (or reasons) rephrased into questions which answers are provided using a Likert-style rating scale (Saunders et al, 2009, p.594). The rating scale ranges from 'not at all important' (1) to 'extremely important' (7).

Hosted on SurveyMonkey⁵ (*pictured below*), the questionnaire was distributed (via Meier) to the 700 mapsters on 10 January 2012. An additional set of questions (about gender, age, profession and education), as well as an optional question to describe what type of work mapsters carry out with the SBTF, were added to put the responses into context.

Reasons for doing volunteer work with the Standby Task Force (SBTF)

Gender:

Age:

Profession:

Education:

Using the 7-point scale below, please indicate how important each of the following 'reasons for volunteering' is for you in doing volunteer work with the SBTF:

	Not at all important						Extremely important
I am genuinely concerned about the people I helped through my volunteer work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering allows me to sharpen my skills and to learn through 'hands-on' experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I make new contacts that might help my professional career.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering is a way to make new friends and learn how to interact with different groups of people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Doing volunteer work makes me feel less guilty over being more fortunate than others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering allows me to gain perspectives and increases my self-esteem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering gives me recognition for my work beyond my local community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Briefly describe the volunteer work you do with the SBTF:

As of 17 January, 60 questionnaires had been collected. Given the study's limitations, its findings might not represent the entire SBTF community (Saunders et al, 2009, p.158). As presented in the following, the findings should rather be considered as a base for further studies about the SBTF or V&TCs. What motivates people to volunteer with the SBTF is:

⁵ <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/RSCXDDF> (accessed on 14 January 2011)

A genuine concern and ‘hands-on’ experience

According to the data gathered, a typical SBTF volunteer is male (56%) and 32 years old. He holds, or is currently enrolled in studies leading to, a Master’s degree (49%) in computer science, development studies or international relations. He often works as expert in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) or Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and has some experience from public sector or non-profit environments.

While operating in a team setting focusing on what appears to be different stages of the crisis mapping process (e.g. monitoring, reporting and verification), mapsters carry out tasks which often correspond to their professional experience and education. Typical tasks include media monitoring and analysis of satellite imagery.

As pictured in the table below, mapsters are genuinely concerned about the people they help (6.13). To them volunteer work provides an opportunity to learn through ‘hands-on’ experience (5.80), to further one’s professional career (4.58), and to make new friends (4.45). Some seek new perspectives or self-esteem (3.55), while few seek recognition (3.33) or a means to overcome guilt of being more fortunate than others (2.42).

5. Using the 7-point scale below, please indicate how important each of the following 'reasons for volunteering' is for you in doing volunteer work with the SBTF:									
	Not at all important						Extremely important	Rating Average	Response Count
I am genuinely concerned about the people I helped through my volunteer work.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	6.7% (4)	18.3% (11)	30.0% (18)	45.0% (27)	6.13	60
Volunteering allows me to sharpen my skills and to learn through 'hands-on' experience.	0.0% (0)	1.7% (1)	5.0% (3)	6.7% (4)	20.0% (12)	31.7% (19)	35.0% (21)	5.80	60
I make new contacts that might help my professional career.	6.7% (4)	5.0% (3)	13.3% (8)	18.3% (11)	21.7% (13)	25.0% (15)	10.0% (6)	4.58	60
Volunteering is a way to make new friends and learn how to interact with different groups of people.	5.0% (3)	10.0% (6)	13.3% (8)	15.0% (9)	28.3% (17)	20.0% (12)	8.3% (5)	4.45	60
Doing volunteer work makes me feel less guilty over being more fortunate than others.	45.0% (27)	20.0% (12)	8.3% (5)	8.3% (5)	13.3% (8)	3.3% (2)	1.7% (1)	2.42	60
Volunteering allows me to gain perspectives and increases my self-esteem.	13.3% (8)	20.0% (12)	15.0% (9)	18.3% (11)	20.0% (12)	10.0% (6)	3.3% (2)	3.55	60
Volunteering gives me recognition for my work beyond my local community.	20.0% (12)	28.3% (17)	3.3% (2)	15.0% (9)	16.7% (10)	13.3% (8)	3.3% (2)	3.33	60
answered question									60
skipped question									0

Bibliography and further reading

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Data gathered between 10-17 January 2012

Data gathered within the framework of this study may be recycled. Please do not hesitate to contact isaac@griberg.com if you have any questions. Thank you.

Gender	Age	Profession	Education	Volunteer work with the SBTF
male	33	International Development	MSc	
Male	28	IT Consultant	College	Online volunteering using my IT skills in a variety of ways from GIS to report monitoring on international TV and Radio stations and verifying news from news media
Female	30	Student	Working on PhD	I am a report team coordinator, which means I help with training new report team volunteers and activating them for particular deployments. The report team prepares and approves reports submitted by the media monitoring team on a given map so the verification team can work more effectively on triangulating and verifying the reports.
Male	29	IT	Bsc in Computer Sciences, BA in Development Studies	I'm part of the Geo Location and Satellite Team creating crisis maps and interpreting satellite images.
Female	25	Lawyer	Tertiary/uni	Media monitoring
Female	33	Master's student	Master's student candidate (Social Sciences)	I took part in the Somalia deployment as well as the recent DRC 2011 deployment, especially through media monitoringé
Female	24	Student	Bachelor of Engineering, Computer Engineering. Pursuing Master of Public Administration, Development Practice.	Crisis Mapping - so far have helped with analysing satellite imagery for the Somalia crisis map in late 2011.
Male	35	Software developer	MSc Information Technology, MSc Disaster Management	I try to be part of deployments on as many different teams as possible
m	37	Crime Prevention Coordinator	BA, Linguistics, McGill University; Masters degree, Urban and Regional Planning, Portland State University	I do media report gathering.
female	44	teacher	master's degree	I volunteer where needed, when I can. I have done work that I initially wanted to do, as well as other tasks that were not part of my interest list, but that gave me the opportunity to see how other groups within SBTF function.
Male	35	Public servant	Legal	
Male	45	Ecologist	B. A (Hons) Zoology; 3 years as post-graduate	Geo-location work for libyacrisismap; media monitoring for this and other projects

Gender	Age	Profession	Education	Volunteer work with the SBTF
Male	28	Netherlands Red Cross	Technical Cognitive Science, Information management	I have helped the development team to set up the Ushahidi platform. I participated in the Libya task force. At the NLRC I am working on setting up a Red Cross pool of Dutch volunteers, to work on an information processing task formulated by the NLRC during deployment.
Male	29	Information Technology	Professional Certifications	I volunteered for the Mumbai Blast in India, Contributed to the Libya and Japanese Crisis. Recently participated in the Samoa Cyclone Simulation to better prepare me for future real-time crisis.
female	32	Public Information Officer at United Nations	M.A.	media monitoring team and satellite team
male	35	Safety Coordinator	Sociology/ Criminology	i seek out new perspectives on the mapping and share insights in partnerships with local communities
Male	28	PhD Student/ Research Analyst	Master of Arts (Political Philosophy and Ethics)	I am new to the SBTF - but will be involved in media analysis and report writing.
Female	41	Online Communications Manager (ex-Aid Worker)	MAster degree in Policitical Sciences & Communications	Participate in Libyan Mapping Hleath Facilities I have been mostly looking for datasets, and also trying to make contact with Mibyan networks to recruit volunteers.
male	30	computer	masters	
Male	26	Web developer	Bachelor of Engineering	I volunteer with the tech team. Working on the Ushahidi code: Adding new features, fixing bugs and improving user experience.
Female	36	Professor	PhD	Media Monitoring in the main
Male	29	GIS/RS	MSc	Crisis mapping in general and particularly in the Geolocation team and task team. I have also been active in the satellite team where we applied rulesets to map features of interests such as settlements.
Female	35	Software Developer	University	
Male	29	Systems Analyst	Graduate	Have been on the report team of SBTF since the Libya Crisis Map, and have been able to join some other deployments, the capacity value chain has been wonderful!
Female	41	IT Lead	International MBA	I am interested in crisis management and also GIS, so crismapping is a good fit for me. It also allows me to contribute as I have time and from my home, yet connect with the world and use my skills (hopefully) to help people.
Female	38	Translator, conflict mediator	Master in conflict mediation	Coordination of the report team within the SBTF in Libya Deployment; crowdsourcing of shelters in Somalia, crowdsourcing in Libya, electoral monitoring (DRC). Use of technology in humanitarian emergencies: Flooding in Colombia.
Female	25	Risk Mapping Assistant	University of the South Pacific	I haven't done anything for far, yet just reading up on all the newsletters and emails that come my way Vinaka

Gender	Age	Profession	Education	Volunteer work with the SBTF
female	45	editor -- self-employed	BA	report team -- worked on Libya deployment. Yes, for gaining perspective, but no for increasing self-esteem.
Male	43	IT Consultant	Masters Degree	new member of the task team
Female	24	gis coordinator	B.A.	I recently joined and have worked on a project to classify types of shelters via satellite data.
Female	43	GIS Specialist/ Emergency Response/City Government	M.S.c. GIS	I have contributed to the Sudan and Libya deployments working on the task and geolocation teams.
m	43	student	bachelor's	I have veriously been a member of different groups doing sub tasks of SBTF deployments. I have been frustrated that the energy and perspectives I started this work with have been largely ignored. i.e. I saw whole systems being well thought out and implemented. Now it seems that the SBTF does as little of the big picture thinking as possible in favor of organizing a lot of labor doing relatively little amount of work compared to what is needed in all of the situations we have been deployed on. Repeating our partially effective function has superseded the real work of empowering the general public to participate in their own recovery. Also, your 6th question is deeply flawed. There is a lot of value in gaining perspective that has nothing to do with one's self esteem. Lately in what I consider to be a huge lack of imagination, the SBTF has taken to seeking publicity and congratulating itself rather than seeking ways to learn from past deployments and help the largest number of people by 'getting out of the way'. SBTF at best is able to process a very small number of messages compared to what well thought out processes + technology + the citizenry can accomplish. SBTF must seriously reconsider their practices or get caught being just a small group who has high self esteem for the wrong reasons.
Male	48	Systems developer	Tertiary	Might want to consider those not wanting to send money but have skills and time to contribute instead.
Female	24	HR Assistant	Bachelor's Degree - International Relations	I help process incoming SMS messages during deployments so that they can be mapped. I also help with other tasks that need to be done like finding health facilities in Libya for the WHO Libya Health Registry.
Male	44	web developer	Informatician engineer	I'm involved in the web tech team; I have got talent for web designing; database user interface development.
Female	30	Graduate Student /GIS professional	Graduate / MA	I get involved with deployments when I have the time, so far I've been involved with 3 of them in minor roles.
F	29	PhD candidate	MA	Assist the GPS team if there is a deployment, and I am able to commit the time.

Gender	Age	Profession	Education	Volunteer work with the SBTF
Female	30	Student	Degree: Development Studies	I've only recently joined the SBTF and as of yet have not taken part in any projects. I have volunteered overseas for 5 years in the disaster response field managing in a variety projects in different fields, livelihoods, debris removal & construction - shelter, schools and Latrines. I am at home at present and volunteering with 2 local groups, one working to elevate poverty, the other working with survivors of rape. My work as a volunteer in a variety of capacity's has helped me be better informed of the inequalities that exist in my own society and further a field, it has enabled me to play my part as a member of the global community, gain skills and knowledge and opened doors to a life I would never have considered previously.
Male	30	Researcher	Masters Degree	GPS Team, Satellite Image Analysis, Translation Team
Male	21	Journalist	Graduate	
Female	40	Self Employed (Marketing)	University Grad: Double Major: Psychology & Philosophy	I'm a coordinator for the Reports Team and sit on the Core Team, making decisions on how the SBTF operates on future deployments. It's a full time job, but I enjoy it more than my "real" job. :)
male	25	crisismapper	Geography (M.Sc.)	I am active in the satellite team
Female	26	Grad student Public Administration	currently enrolled in MA program	I have participated in one deployment in which I assisted with satellite imagery tagging.
Female	22	Hospital Outreach Coordinator	Tufts University, BS in International Relations, Community Health	I have worked on the reports team.
male	26	Student	masters degree candidate	
Female	27	grad student	MPP	imagery analysis
m	57	tech support	BS	
Male	31	Crisis and Disaster Management	MSc Crisis and Disaster Management	I have been a member of the SBTF for a little under a year now and did most of my work with them last winter/ spring as part of the Libya deployment and GIS verification team/Geo-location team in my spare time while studying for my degree.
m	54	computer scientist	masters in computer science	geolocation, and a bit of code contribution
Male	20		junior year engineering, Btech in ICT	I am part of the geolocation team, satellite imagery team. I took active part in somalia II and samoa cyclone deployments.
Female	40	Geospatial Technologist	Master level	GIS mapping and satellite image interpretation
male	27	GIS&LOG officer	BS geography, PG Logistics	Geolocalisation of places or events
F	32	MANAGER IN INGO	PHD ANTHROPOLOGY	I just joined the network.
Male	34	Production Director	Engeneering	

Gender	Age	Profession	Education	Volunteer work with the SBTF
female	30	researcher	doctorate	I have worked with SBTF in several deployments but mainly as translator and media monitor. Good Luck!
Male	29	Student	MA in Poverty Reduction	
Male	18	Student	'A' Levels	Social media monitor
Male	29	ICT Specialist	Bachelor's	
M	35	GIS Coordinator	MS	