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NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF NATIONAL NAMES AUTHORITIES

Submitted by the Government of Kenya*

Recommendation I of the Group of Experts^{1/} makes several recommendations about national names authorities. It is clear that arrangements which would be appropriate in a sophisticated developed country must differ from those which would be suitable for a country at an early stage of development, lacking complete coverage of basic topographical mapping and shortage of textbooks of grammar or dictionaries in native languages. Experience of Kenya in this field may be a help to countries in the latter category.

Before considering the appropriate structure of an authority it is necessary to consider the material from which it will have to work. The basic requirement for any thorough and systematic work on geographical names is adequate map coverage. Unless this is available there will be uncertainty as to the true position of names and to what topographical features they refer. The density of names increases with intensity of development. While a map at scale 1:250,000 may clearly display all named features in a desert area, it is suggested that the minimum scales required elsewhere are: 1:100,000 in thinly populated and undeveloped areas, 1:50,000 in areas of medium population density and development, 1:25,000 in other non-urban areas. Urban area maps have to be big enough to show individual streets; scales from 1:10,000 to 1:2,500 or even larger are necessary.

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^{1/} See E/CONF.53/L.2, recommendation I.

Investigation of names in an area without adequate map coverage is of little value because when more knowledge in the form of up-to-date detailed maps becomes available, many of the earlier decisions will be found to be in need of revision.

A country, however, need not wait for the whole of its territory to be mapped before setting up a names authority, which can start work on any area which is adequately mapped.

Now that the normal method of mapping is by photogrammetry, plotted in an office far from the area being mapped, collection of place names is no longer an integral part of map making (as it was in the days of the surveyor travelling with a plane-table) but is a separate exercise.

Where the terrain is hostile to travel by motor vehicle, or where personnel or funds are not available for a thorough field investigation, the addition of names to a newly plotted map is often done by unsatisfactory methods, e.g. by transfer from old small-scale maps or by questioning persons who know the ground but are not topographers. Such methods result in names being applied to the wrong features, and many names being omitted, thus creating basic initial difficulties for the names authority. It may be necessary for the names authority to have to convince the national mapping authority of the importance of devoting adequate resources to the initial collection of names.

The first collection of names to be recorded on a new map is usually (and best) done by a topographer (land surveyor). He requires the services of a guide who knows the area, and probably of an interpreter to translate the local language or dialect. By inquiry from a sufficient number of the inhabitants he should be able to place names in their correct position on the map but he will not be able to render all spellings correctly because he will not be trained in the disciplines necessary to accomplish this. He must take his name recordings to one or more local authorities who can help him. These may be administrators, teachers or any person or body having thorough knowledge of both the geography and languages of the area, who will be able to amend and amplify the information already collected. Following this, the names are ready to appear on the first edition of the map.

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Until the above stages have been completed the national names authority cannot usefully do any work on the area. The first edition up-to-date map at appropriate scale is the minimum earliest useful working material.

A central national names authority cannot compass among its membership sufficient geographical and linguistic knowledge to decide the correctness of position and spelling of tens of thousands of names on the national maps. This task must be delegated to suitable local authorities which should appoint committees of local experts. Special powers may be needed to ensure that such committees are appointed and do function effectively.

The central authority must lay down policy and general principles, prepare work programmes, and co-ordinate, compare, and approve the work of local committees. It should arrange for publication of approved names, deal with objections, and ensure that finally adopted names are brought into official use.

To perform these functions it must have adequate powers written into the national legislation. It must also have adequate resources particularly of secretarial, clerical and records personnel.

Suitable membership of the central authority will vary according to the state of national development. In Kenya, for example, with over thirty main languages, a population of 9 million, an area of 580,000 sq. km., and 30,000 recorded geographical names, it is thought that the permanent members of the authority should be representatives of the Survey Department, the Languages Board (of the Ministry of Education) the Literature Bureau (which produces vernacular publications), the University faculties of geography and history (and of anthropology, if such faculty is founded). Part-time members might be drawn from other authorities with partial interests in place-names, for example, the post office, the railways, the army, and the departments of lands, forests, roads, etc.
