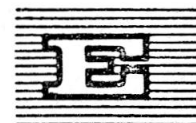


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REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT OF MADAGASCAR ON THE SITUATION
AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN MADAGASCAR SINCE THE FIRST UNITED
NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Report submitted by the Government of Madagascar*

I. PAST AND PRESENT SITUATION

Various factors should, in principle, facilitate the standardization of geographical names in Madagascar:

- (a) The homogeneity of the national language, Malagasy, which is both a written and a spoken language;
- (b) The simple and phonetically univocal spelling, using letters of the Roman alphabet (there are, however, some original pronunciation features, which are few in number and easy to remember);
- (c) The grammar, with very clear rules;
- (d) The relative simplicity of names. The reason is that the names are essentially descriptive, and closely linked to the various physical, natural, historical, economic and even social characteristics of the features named;
- (e) The lack of any profound social upheaval, such as mass migration, which would induce changes in, or disappearance of names;
- (f) The publication of names due to extensive base map coverage on a scale of 1:100,000, which now covers 89 per cent of the island.

* This report was prepared by the Toponymy Commission of the Geographical Service.

While in most cases acceptable solutions have been found, considerable problems remain.

Firstly, the existence of numerous dialectal variants, which differ only slightly from the national language, gives rise to transcription difficulties. The symbols of the present alphabet are considered adequate to transcribe them, but they have not been used consistently either over a period of time (as is natural, since certain symbols are of recent creation), or between different geographical areas.

Topographers must be given linguistic training, however rudimentary. The use of tape recorders is planned.

In addition, the obvious lack of co-ordination between various official services and private bodies leads to confusion. For example, one village is called Soavina (Ambositra) by the Post Office and Soavina (Ambatofinandrahana) by the Ministry of the Interior.

Imprecision is also caused by repetition, which is frequent; for instance, there are 70 places named Ambohibary and 35 named Ambatolampy in the province of Tananarive. However, if it were specified in which administrative districts they are located any ambiguity would be removed.

Problems also arise when there are two names for a single entity, such as Nosy Alanana (which is the local usage) and Ile aux Prunes (which appears on modern maps).

These few examples are sufficient to indicate the extent of the problem and the need for a serious study by an appropriate body. For these reasons, the Geographical Service, immediately following the First Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, took up the problem and, in December 1968, established a Toponymy Commission.

II. PROGRESS MADE SINCE THE GENEVA CONFERENCE

The Toponymy Commission deals with questions concerning geographical names which are to appear on cartographic publications of the Geographical Service. One of our principal publications is the base map on a scale of 1:100,000, which at the end of 1971 covered 89 per cent of the island (410 sheets out of a total of 464). However, the work of the Commission also covers other fundamental and detailed studies.

A. Base map on a scale of 1:100,000

Systematic studies are made before the first publication or republication of each updated sheet.

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An average of 200-400 names appear on a 1:100,000 base map covering 18' of longitude and 24' of latitude. As part of preparatory work, all disputed names, which do not normally number more than 30, are listed and annotated with the causes of error (misspelling, defective transcription, repetition, multiple naming, incorrect specification of locality, etc.). All the necessary documentation is assembled - notebooks and tracings of names provided by topographers, old maps, or any other documents. If necessary, and where possible, morphological and etymological analyses are made of disputed names.

Correct solutions are proposed in most cases and the few undecided questions are referred, with the observations and any proposals of the Commission, to the official authority in the area concerned, which decides on the name to be given.

This method has produced excellent results.

B. Large-scale maps. Maps of towns or individual surveys

The above methods for the collection of names in the field and their treatment and study by the Commission are applied, and produce acceptable results.

It should be noted that these studies do not relate to names of communes listed in the official geographical code, which may not be modified except by government decree.

C. Gazetteer of geographical names

The Commission has conducted studies for the publication of a gazetteer of standardized names. In view of the magnitude of such a task, it has been proposed to begin with a gazetteer of names which appear on 1:1,000,000 maps, and in particular the Map of the World on a Millionth Scale as it relates to Madagascar. That will be followed by gazetteers corresponding to larger-scale maps (1:500,000, 1:100,000).

The gazetteer will contain the following information:

Standardized name (or any variants)

Nature of the feature

Geographical co-ordinates

Location in an administrative unit

Reference to the sheet of the 1:100,000 base map which contains the feature.

Although no national names authority yet exists, the standardized name will be the name which appears on cartographic publications of the Geographical Service, which remain the official reference documents.

Due to lack of staff, the Commission has been unable to start work on this project.

D. Cartographic technical terms and generic terms

The Commission has carried out detailed research on generic terms, with a view to listing all generic terms in the national language and studying their usage.

More general research on technical terms used in cartography is under way. Its aim is to examine whether the technical vocabulary of the national language has the potential for the translation of technical terms which are better known in, for example, French or English.

E. National names authority

The working methods and basic principles adopted by the Toponymy Commission have so far proved satisfactory.

However, its powers of decision-making are limited, which is a handicap. For example, many towns have two names:

<u>Official geographical code</u>	<u>Local usage</u>
Tananarive	Antananarivo
Tamatave	Toamasina

The Commission establishes the authenticity of the local usage, which is usually supported by sound historical, grammatical or geographical reasons, but does not have the power to modify such names, as has already been stated (see section B above).

In addition, the sphere of research should be broadened by enlisting other members, such as linguists, geographers or historians from public or private bodies engaged in work on geographical names.

There is an increasing need for a national authority with greater powers, adequate numbers of staff and diversified and broad competence. For that reason, the Commission has held exploratory meetings with a view to the establishment of such a body. Preparation is at present under way, and it seems probable that the project will succeed.
