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STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
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Item 9 of the provisional agenda

NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

Document submitted by the Government of Madagascar\*

I. FIELD COLLECTION OF NAMES

The Geographical Service is the only body dealing with all geographical names throughout Madagascar - villages, populated places, hydrographic features (lakes, seas, rivers), orographic features (peaks, mountains), or any feature which may have a geographical name.

Basic map coverage for Madagascar is composed of standard topographic maps on a scale of 1:100,000, or 1:50,000 for regions with high population density or of particular economic interest. By the end of 1971, 410 sheets out of a total of 464, or 89 per cent, had been published and completion of the coverage is planned for the end of 1975. It should, however, be pointed out that the 54 sheets which do not appear in the standard topographic map series are covered by maps produced from original surveys dating from before 1949, or by preliminary maps which provide brief data of a low standard of accuracy on the spelling and planimetric position of the features indicated.

Topographers from the Geographical Service are responsible for collecting names in the field. The fact that the written and spoken national language, Malagasy, is homogeneous despite some dialectal variants ensures faithful transcription of geographical names and facilitates the task of the topographers.

Before undertaking their field work, the topographers have the following material at their disposal:

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

Standard 1:100,000 or 1:50,000 topographic map

Preliminary map, if the area has not so far been mapped

List of village names compiled by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Research with the assistance of local administrative authorities, official geographical code and official list of villages

And, if appropriate, forestry map published by the Water and Forests Service or, cadastral documents if necessary.

Names collected in the field are listed in a notebook with any variants revealed by the above documents, their meaning, if any, and the form proposed by the topographer.

However, the existence of many dialectal variants gives rise to problems on which the Geographical Service has as yet no precise guidelines. Rudimentary linguistic training is given to the topographers and the use of tape recorders is planned. Application of the International Phonetic Alphabet (or any other suitable conventional phonetic alphabet) would be desired for certain problematical cases, but the Geographical Service is as yet only studying this possibility.

## II. OFFICE TREATMENT OF NAMES

The Toponymy Commission, which was established in December 1968, is the body responsible for such treatment within the Geographical Service.

It is competent to deal with all questions relating to toponyms which are to appear on all Geographical Service publications.

It is composed of between six and eight surveyors and cartographers of the Geographical Service who, through their duties, their abilities and their interest, are concerned with geographical names.

The Commission works closely with local administrative authorities. Before leaving the field, the topographers submit their list of names to the local official (mayor, sub-prefect or prefect). However, errors remain after this initial examination, and the role of the Commission is to consider all the resulting problems and seek the most satisfactory solution. For this purpose, all disputed names are listed and sent to the official authority concerned, together with all the necessary information (nature of the error, etymological and morphological analysis of the name and the Commission's opinion and proposal, if any); the role of the official authority is to provide the correct spelling and, if necessary, the planimetric position of the feature with supporting proof.

This method has produced excellent results, and we intend to continue our work pending the establishment of a national names authority.

### III. TREATMENT OF NAMES IN MULTILINGUAL AREAS

This problem does not arise in Madagascar.

### IV. NATIONAL GAZETTEERS OR OTHER SIMILAR PUBLICATIONS IN WHICH COUNTRIES MAKE AVAILABLE THEIR STANDARDIZED NAMES

The Toponymy Commission, which is part of the Geographical Service, has studied the compilation of a national gazetteer of standardized names, and has drawn up a draft model gazetteer including the following data:

Standardized name (or any variant)

Nature of the feature (or code symbol)

Geographical co-ordinates

Administrative district in which the feature is located

Reference to the Geographical Service map which contains the feature.

This is an enormous task, and lack of staff has made it impossible to begin the project.

There exists an historical and geographical dictionary, which deals in part with this problem and contains some very interesting information on the names of villages of economic or historical importance.

### V. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF NATIONAL NAMES AUTHORITIES

The Toponymy Commission, which is a part of the Geographical Service, has consulted various governmental and scientific bodies concerned with toponymy with a view to establishing a national names authority. These bodies are the Malagasy Academy, the Office of the Vice-President of the Government responsible for Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, the Office for Overseas Scientific and Technical Research, the Topographical Service, the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Research, the Humanities and Social Science Faculty (Malagasy Department of Humanities), the Directorate of Posts and Telecommunications, the National Assembly and the Senate.

At preparatory meetings, representatives of these bodies were provided with a definition of the standardization of geographical names, and an outline of all the problems which it poses nationally and internationally. This broad survey produced agreement on the need to establish a national names authority. It will be necessary to specify the authority's:

Duties

Underlying principles

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Composition (members and secretariat)

Working methods

Preparation is under way, and it is expected that the project will succeed.

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