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Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

Reports on the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, its divisions, working groups and task teams since the Ninth Conference

Africa South Division

Summary**

A consultative workshop on the future orientation of geographical names activities in Africa was held in Gaborone from 23 to 25 November 2011. The workshop was organized jointly by the Government of Botswana, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

The workshop developed the Gaborone Action Plan, which was presented at the third meeting of the Statistical Commission for Africa and the seventh Africa Symposium on Statistical Development, which was held in Cape Town from 17 to 23 January 2012 under the theme “Harmonizing statistics in support of economic, monetary and social integration in Africa”.

Geographical activities from member countries

Botswana. Since the consultative workshop, Botswana has made effort to resuscitate the Botswana Place Names Commission. This matter has been communicated to the Ministry of Lands and Housing for further consultation. The Department of Surveys and Mapping has embarked upon a project to collect data and identify locations of geographical features in the country in order to compile a geo-referenced database of names. Consultations with relevant district authorities such as commissioners, land boards, tribal authorities and councils are ongoing to pinpoint the correct locations of other geographical features. The inclusion of geographical names using freeware software supplied by ECA is ongoing.

* E/CONF.101/1.

** The full report was prepared by Lucy Mmasepatela Phalaagae, Interim Chair, Africa South Division, and is available in the language of submission only from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/ungegnConf10.html>.



Mozambique. The Mozambique Geographical Names Institute, responsible for geographical names activities, was established in December 2009. The body coordinates all geographical activities in the country. A law governing geographical activities, which has not existed since the colonial period, is currently being proposed. Consultation is ongoing with various stakeholders in provinces and districts. Consultations are in place to advise municipalities to follow specific laws for naming areas such as plazas, squares and streets. A national conference has been proposed to try and address issues on geographical names, but this will not be possible due to limited funds.

South Africa. The South African Geographical Names Council held a national workshop to share and exchange experiences on geographical names in the region. Geographical names committees attended the workshop, at which the Africa South Division met and discussed the best approach to raise awareness on geographical names in Africa and the role of bodies such as the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, ECA, the African Union and the regional centres in helping to promote this matter.

Swaziland. Geographical names activities in Swaziland have been minimal due to the non-existence of names authorities or boards in the country. Attempts were made to set up a names authority in the 1980s but not much was accomplished. A similar effort towards standardization was evident around 2004, when the Remote Sensing Unit of the Southern African Development Community, assisted by the Earth Resources Observation and Science Data Center and the environmental science organization EIS Africa, championed the development of national spatial data infrastructure in the region. Implementing this initiative in Swaziland was not possible due to other developmental activities taking place at that time. The problems and challenges encountered by Swaziland have included:

- A lack of statutory naming authorities and support, despite attempts to create such authorities
- The inability of representatives of Swaziland to attend training or meetings of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names or other United Nations conferences
- Limited funds to develop capacity and geographical names activities, which has negatively impacted progress

Zimbabwe. A national geographical names committee exists and is chaired by the surveyor general, but is not functional due to economic reasons. A geographical name database is available but only in manual form, since the initial system, for which there were no backup facilities, crashed. The challenges in Zimbabwe are a lack of trained personnel, computer hardware and software and a lack of funds to resuscitate the committee and the development of a geographical place names database.