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Standardization of Geographical Names**

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

Evaluation of the UNCSGN and UNGEGN Sessions

Submitted by the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation **

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Evaluation of the UNCSGN and UNGEGN Sessions¹

SUMMARY

Surveys on evaluating the contents and logistics of the meetings continued for the 10th United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) and the 28th and 29th Sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). The questionnaire was designed to ask the usefulness or efficiency of each program and content, documentation and presentation method, time allocation, usefulness of resolutions, restrictions to implementing resolutions, and need for assistance for the works of standardization. The results, before reported at the next meeting, were reviewed at the meeting of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation in order to find reference items for the next meeting. The 29th Session adopted an on-line survey, which will be continuing at the 11th Conference with additionally itemized questions.

History of the evaluation survey

The survey on evaluating the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) and the sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) began at the 6th Conference in 1992. The results of this first survey were reported at the 17th Session (W.P.34) in 1994 by then UNGEGN Vice-Chair, Helen Kerfoot, and also referred at the 18th Session in 1996 (W.P. 37) with regard to planning the 7th Conference in 1998. Reference was again made to suggestions collected from this survey in the preparation of the 8th Conference in 2002, as indicated by W.P.7 of the 21st Session held the day before the Conference.

The survey was resumed at the 8th Conference in 2002 and conducted continuously at the 23rd Session in 2006, 9th Conference in 2007, 25th Session in 2009, 26th Session in 2011, 10th Conference in 2012, 28th Session in 2014, and the 29th Session in 2016. At the 23rd Session, the working paper that comprehended the accomplishments of the Conferences and suggested future directions with reference to former evaluations (W.P.55), prepared by the Chair, Helen Kerfoot, requested experts to extend their suggestions for a few items, e.g., length of conference, whether to distribute or present country/division reports, resolutions, etc. in a questionnaire form.

The results of the surveys were reviewed in detail at the meetings of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation and referred in preparing for the next conference or session. During the 25th Session in Nairobi, merely eight responses were collected, overshadowed by another circulating questionnaire form that asked about facilities and logistics. To cope with this problem, one questionnaire form combining all the elements of contents, programs, and logistics was designed and circulated from the 26th Session onwards. The questionnaire form has been serviced in three languages; English, French, and Spanish.

¹ This working paper pertains to the UNCSGN resolutions V/4 (Work performed by the UNGEGN and its future activities), VI/4 (Working group on evaluation), and X/1 (11th UNCSGN and 28th Session of the UNGEGN).

The Working Group meeting in October 2011 decided to report survey results at the next meeting in a working paper. According to this decision, detailed reports on evaluation were submitted to the 27th Session (W.P.14), the 28th Session (W.P.47), and the 29th Session (W.P.60). The 29th Session in 2016 adopted an on-line survey, based on the expectation that it would facilitate the collection and analysis of responses.

Composition of the survey

The evaluation survey is composed of three parts; respondent's general information (country, frequency of participation) and overall assessment, programs and contents (documents, meetings, presentations, exhibition, duration, time), and resolutions and general work of UNCISG/UNGEGN (implementation of resolutions, UNGEGN's priority, assistance needed). Questions on resolutions were added at the 28th Session as a measure to draw attention to implementing resolutions.

At the Working Group meeting in Innsbruck, April 2017, a thorough review of the questions was performed. According to comments received and making use of on-line survey advantages, the questionnaire form will be extended with additional topics, e.g., UNGEGN Bulletin and orientation briefing, and with additionally itemized questions on the UNGEGN works and meetings.

Evaluation of the 10th Conference, the 28th and the 29th Sessions

It is notable that the number of responses has steadily increased for the last three meetings; from forty-six, fifty-three to sixty-seven. In average, 30.5% of the respondents were first time participants, 28.1% second or third time participants, and 41.4% attended more than three times. Given the fact that about 30% of the respondents were newcomers, there was a need for an introductory session for them. Indeed, at this 11th Conference, the UNGEGN Bureau and the Secretariat have planned to arrange an orientation briefing that will explain UNGEGN procedures and share general information.

An overall assessment of the Conference or the Session was very positive. Most of the respondents indicated that it had met their expectations (100% in 2012; 98.1% in 2014; 98.2% in 2016). Most of the respondents rated the overall usefulness of the Conference or the Session very highly or highly (87.0% in 2012; 92.5% in 2014; 95.5% in 2016). When divided by each element of the Conference or the Session and using the five-step likert scale ('very useful'; 'useful'; 'moderately useful'; 'of little use'; 'not useful') on each item of the programs, contents, and logistics of the meeting, there were some variations in the assessment; the rate of 'useful' or 'very useful' being higher for special presentations, documents and Working Group meetings, but lower for exhibition and Division meetings. It is notable that the percentage of the respondents who rated the usefulness of Division meetings and that of exhibition/displays as 'very useful' or 'useful' increased from 48.7% to 82.5% and 45.2% to 75.0%, respectively, between 2012 and 2016. But this could be resulting from the difference between the conference and the session with regard to the characteristics of documents and discussion.

Regarding the logistics of the Conference in 2012, items such as allocation of time and summarizing groups of documents were evaluated positively with over 75 percent 'excellent' or 'good' (others were 'adequate,' 'poor' and 'very poor'), while time for Working Group and Division meetings and the duration of the Conference (eight days) were evaluated less positively, receiving a few negative responses.

With regard to the logistics of the Session in 2014 and 2016, items such as the duration of the Session (five days), allocation of time, distinguishing discussion papers from information papers, and summarizing groups of documents were evaluated positively with over 80 percent giving ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ ratings, while time for Working Group and Division meetings was evaluated less positively, receiving a few negative responses.

Table 1. Evaluation of the usefulness of each program and content of the Conference or Session (2012, 2014, 2016)

	2012 very useful and useful (%)*	2014 very useful and useful (%)*	2016 very useful and useful (%)*
Usefulness of documents	77.6	98.1	92.4
Usefulness of special presentations	93.6	92.5	97.0
Usefulness of workshops	77.8	93.5	89.8
Usefulness of Working Group meetings	71.1	91.8	93.9
Usefulness of Division meetings	48.7	86.7	82.5
Usefulness of exhibition/displays	45.2	75.0	75.0
Usefulness of talking/networking with experts	76.6	94.2	92.5

* Based on the five-step likert scale of ‘very useful’; ‘useful’; ‘moderately useful’; ‘of little use’; ‘not useful.’

Table 2. Evaluation of the logistics of the Conference or Session (2012, 2014, 2016)

	2012 excellent and good (%)*	2014 excellent and good (%)*	2016 excellent and good (%)*
Duration of Conference or Session	57.4	82.0	92.5
Allocation of time	79.1	89.8	87.9
Discussion versus information papers	65.1	81.6	85.1
Summarizing groups of documents	77.8	85.7	84.8
Time for WG and Division meetings	40.0	72.0	57.6

* Based on the five-step likert scale of ‘excellent’; ‘good’; ‘moderate’; ‘poor’; ‘very poor.’

Based on the survey results, the Working Group of Evaluation and Implementation once again discussed the advantage of distinguishing discussion papers from information papers and suggested as such. The percentage of respondents who rated the item of distinguishing discussion papers from information papers as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ increased from 65.1% to 85.1% between 2012 and 2016. However, some respondents still assessed the time for Working Group and Division meetings as being insufficient.

With regard to the UNCISG resolutions, most of the respondents indicated that the resolutions were ‘very useful’ or ‘useful’ in promoting the standardization of geographical names for managers of geographical names (89.8% in 2014; 95.4% in 2016). Most of the respondents rated the importance of the implementation of the resolutions in each country’s work on geographical names very highly or highly (95.8% in 2014; 95.4% in 2016). The survey results imply that continuous efforts are needed to implement UNCISG resolutions in each country’s work on geographical names.

Suggestions for special presentations and workshops for the next meeting included the following topics:

- UNCSGN resolutions
- Asian-oriented theme in presentations (for the Bangkok Session)
- presentation of geographical names as cultural heritage
- workshop covering a basic concept for less developed countries
- future relationship between UNGEGN and UNGGIM
- urban toponymy
- crowd sourcing and geo-spatial themes
- works of related UN organizations
- cultural aspects of naming
- undersea feature naming and toponymic training

The following groups of comments and suggestions were noted for the next meeting:

10th Conference (2012)

- reducing the Conference period (1 or 2 days)
- reducing reports
- increasing communication in Divisions and workshops
- not presenting and discussing Division reports
- preparing more academic presentations and addressing multiple questions
- having more discussions about topical issues

28th Session (2014)

- longer breaks for networking
- more social events
- more discussions about topical issues
- more special presentations
- time limit on presenting documents

29th Session (2016)

- encouraging participation from more countries
- improving presentation methods
- earlier arrangement for exhibitions
- reserving more time for Working Group and Division meetings
- social activities

At the 29th Session, as many as thirty-one countries approved on the need for assistance in establishing a standardization program of geographical names. Assistance was mostly required in training courses, expert visits, and publication of materials for standardization.

Future of the evaluation survey

The evaluation survey has functioned as a device of figuring out items for improving future conferences and sessions and the workings of the UNGEGN by recruiting evaluation opinions and ideas. The survey will continue to ask with meaningful and relevant questions and, expectedly, invite further active

participation from experts. The adoption of the on-line survey is expected to facilitate the survey by enabling convenient participation from respondents and increasing flexibility in the management of questions. The Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation welcomes any ideas or comments for the evaluation survey.