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Standardization of Geographical Names  
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REPORTS BY GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR COUNTRIES  
AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF  
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE SEVENTH CONFERENCE

Report on the State of Standardization of Geographical Names  
In Uganda

(Submitted by Uganda)\*\*

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**REPORT ON THE STATE OF STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN UGANDA**

**Definition:**

Geographical names are names used on geographical maps (Cartography field). For example;

- Place names (Populated areas, Administrative units)
- Natural features (Rivers, Lakes, Swamps, Mountains, and Forest, Valleys)
- Objects of people's economic and cultural activity (Mines, Monuments)

But also used in:

- Official documents (Population census)
- Publications (Gazetteer, News papers)
- Reference (Catalogue)
- Transport (Sign posts)
- Communications (Radio, Television)

Therefore there is need to put in order and standardize the spelling of geographical names and keep uniformity.

Standardization therefore means the officially approved existing and the new standard names of any place or feature that appear on the map or any other document in the language spoken.

**Background:**

Uganda being one of the countries that was colonized (former British Protectorate) many places and features were named by colonialists and some original names of indigenous people not considered or distorted.

Topographic mapping at 1: 50,000 was commenced by Directorate Overseas Surveys in 1950 and completed in 1969.

After Independence in 1962 some names on the maps were changed to reflect national sentiments.

Therefore the standardization needs a lot of practical research to be attached to it.

Mandated by the 1995 Constitution, Lands and Surveys Department is the official national authority responsible for the standardization of geographical names since most complete set of place names can be collected from large-scale topographic maps and plans. For production of the first editions of maps at 1:50,000, surveyors would be given proofs to go and collect names from field and members of the Department were engaged in the process of checking spellings and uniformity and hence produced the national gazetteer.

The majority of these maps were produced in 1960 or early 1970. Because of the political and economic problems that the country has gone through, most of the maps were not revised until in the early 1990.

Therefore not much has been done to adhere to the process of standardization of names or organizing commissions. Suggestions put forward for naming or alteration of names by other departments, organizations and agencies directly concerned with the process like Bureau of Statistics, Electoral Commission, Health Ministry, Posts and Communications, Geographic and other research Institutions should be considered.

However we have an old gazetteer with 40,000 names collected from the 1:50,000 map series and arranged in alphabetical order. Codes, letters, numbers and

abbreviations have been used to describe the types of features and their administrative divisions.

There are various entries that give the following information: Names, Features, and Administrative Divisions, Map references, Grid reference and geographical coordinates.

Our old gazetteer was published in 1971 and is now being converted to digital form where revision will follow thereafter.

### **Goals:**

There are 319 sheets of 1:50,000 map series covering the entire country. Only 40 sheets have had their names and features updated and are available in digital form. Our program is to update names and features of the remaining sheets and make them available in digital form.

A national topographical GIS at district level is being established. Out of 56 districts, which make the entire country, 27 have been surveyed and names and features collected from field.

These updated maps help Planners in planning for economic and social developments. The plan is to cover 6 districts per year. Our program is to cover the entire country and develop district topographical GIS.

Revision of land use maps at scale 1:250,000 using satellite images and collecting names from field is going on, out of 16 maps covering the entire country only 2 have been revised. The plan is to cover 2 maps per year.

After my training the information provided will help to revive the process concerned with the standardization of geographical names; that is collection, surveys and names standardization and prepare the revised gazetteer or digital Toponymic database.

### **Achievements:**

-Topographical maps, reference books, publications are all issued in one language, which is English.

-Hand held GPS have been introduced to record exact position of name or feature in the field.

-40 maps have been completely revised with Japanese Government support and are available in digital form.

### **Problems:**

-Uganda has a population speaking various native languages, so it becomes difficult to standardize geographical names, when only one language (English) is generally accepted and used on all official documents.

-If the initial recording is not correct, identification collections of names are not complete the standardization becomes difficult, as mistakes will be carried on.

-Lack of enough funds to carry out all the activities involved in the standardization process.

### **Solutions:**

-There should be completeness of identification and collection of names and correct spelling.

-The person collecting and recording the names should know the language spoken in a given region.

-Solicit funds from donors and relevant organizations to achieve our goals

**Conclusions:**

Standardization of geographical names is a complex and time-consuming process that includes several stages.

Each country is different from the other, so we should learn from the experience of others.

We should have specialists and trained staffs so as to succeed.

**Recommendations:**

To revive a national names authority, which is permanent, well organized and with staff being experts in national languages, geography and mapping.

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