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### **Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

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

Submitted by the Africa South Division\*\*

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**UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERT ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES**  
**AFRICA SOUTH DIVISION REPORT**  
**Twenty seventh Session, New York 31<sup>ST</sup> -09<sup>TH</sup> August 2012.**

Botswana held a Consultative Workshop on the Future Orientation of Geographical Names Activities in Africa, from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> November 2011, in Gaborone, Botswana. The workshop was organized jointly by the Government of Botswana, the Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

The aim of the workshop was to develop a comprehensive work programme on geographical names that includes technical, administrative and institutional issues, such as the establishment or revamp of geographical names authorities in member States, and to identify appropriate areas of intervention by Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), African Union Commission (AUC), AUC and other stakeholders and partners. The workshop in Botswana came up with the Gaborone Action Plan, which was presented at the Third meeting of the Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom Africa III) and the 7<sup>th</sup> Africa Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD) which took place in Cape Town, South Africa from 17<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2012 under the theme “Harmonizing Statistics in Support of Economic, Monetary and Social Integration in Africa”.

The Gaborone Action Plan was endorsed, and National Statistics Offices were called upon to take active part in standardization of Geographical names to provide coding systems for names and also increase awareness on the development of geographical names management in Africa.

Following the consultative workshop held in Botswana and the StatCom meeting held in Cape Town. The South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC) a member of the Africa South Division held a national workshop to share geographical names experiences in the region. At this workshop, invitations were sent to other member countries such as Lesotho, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia and only Botswana, Malawi, Swaziland and Mozambique attended the meeting and promised to give feedback on the activities of Geographical Names Activities in their countries.

At the SAGNC, the Africa South Division met and discussed the best approach to raise awareness on geographical names in Africa and the role that bodies such as UNGEGN UNECA, AU and the regional centers can assist to promote this matter. The proposals put forward were as follows:

- Decision makers to be made aware of the importance of geographical names standardization, this could be achieved by sending official letters via ECA and AUC to heads of states.
- Increase knowledge by providing training courses on geographical names and assisting countries to use software Geonyms
- Assisting countries to establish national committees and also to give directions to those countries that have national geographical names commissions’ but are not operational.

### **Geographical Activities from member countries**

**Botswana:** After the consultative workshop held in Gaborone, Botswana has made some effort to resuscitate the Botswana Place Names Commission (PNC). This matter has been communicated to the Ministry of Lands and Housing to consult further on this issue. The Department of Surveys and Mapping (DSM) has embarked upon a project to identify locations of geographical names in the country to compile geo-referenced database of names. Locations of settlements in all the districts have

been identified using Global Positioning Systems. Consultation with other relevant authorities in Districts such as District Commissioners, Land boards, Tribal authorities and District councils is on going to locate correct places of other geographical features. Populating geographical names using freeware software supplied by ECA is ongoing.

**Mozambique:** An institution which is responsible for Geographical Names Activities known as Mozambique Geographical Names Institute (INGEMO), was established in December 2009. The body coordinates all Geographical activities in the country. Currently they are proposing the initiation of the law that will govern the Geographical activities, because such kind of laws has never existed since the colonial period. Consultation is on going with various stakeholders, in provinces and districts in the country. Municipalities have also been advised to follow the specific laws which are available when discussing name changes in areas such as plaza, square and street names. This process is on going. A national conference has been proposed to try and address issues on Geographical names, but this will not be possible due to limitation of funds.

**Swaziland:** Geographical Names Activities of in Swaziland has been minimal due to the non existence of names authorities or boards in the country. Attempts has been made to set up a names authority in the 1980,s but not much has been accomplished. A similar effort towards standardization was evident around 2004 when the SADC Remote Sensing Unit assisted by EROS Data Center and EIS Africa championed the development of National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) in the region. Implementing this initiative in Swaziland was not possible due to other developmental activities then. Other related developments in Swaziland include the establishment of the National Development Data Center (NDDC). This multimillion-dollar facility houses the Swaziland Integrated Geospatial Information System (SIGIS). The relevance and requirement for standidardized geographical names for this information system cannot be overstated. More importantly, the country has also embarked on implementing “a whole of government “approach designed to reform and enhance service delivery using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) better known as e–government. The approach thrives, in part, on the integration of sectoral databases to facilitate seamless provision of information services to business, citizen and government customers. The programme was launched in 2011 and promises a realistic opportunity to include standardization of geographical names as one of the reform initiatives.

### **Problems and challenges**

- The lack of statutory naming authorities in Swaziland has been a stumbling block. Although attempts have been made in the past, lack of neccessary support from authorities who were previously from the tribal administration structures from did not do much. The whole process stalled.
- Lack of communication by the then names authorities regarding the benefits derived from geographical names in general, and geographical names standardization in particular.
- Other countries have benefited in terms of knowledge transfer at national level as UNEGEN trainees. Swaziland has not had the opportunity to attend such training. This also includes opportunities to participate in UNGEGN meetings and UN Conferences. This has the potential to contribute to the current muted level of standardization characterizing this country.
- It is also true that financial challenges has had negative impact on the capacity of the country to develop and publish geographical names products
- Swaziland ironically possesses adequate technological capacity to digitize geographical names data for distribution purposes but lacks institutional capacity to leverage the technology towards this end.

## **Opportunities**

The workshop held in Gaborone, Botswana has opened up opportunities for African countries to benefit from and improve names structures in their countries for development projects.

The expertise within the NGEEN working groups can provide to Swaziland an opportunity to overcome its inherent internal deficiencies related to lack of capacity to establish name standardization mechanisms, development of databases or national gazetteers, promoting the dissemination and wider use of nationally authorized names and for developing of communication and training tools. The workshop further noted that UNGEEN has developed several manuals, brochures and publicity kits over the years to facilitate national and global standardization of geographical names. It has been noted in previous sections of this report that lack of appropriate publicity material undermined efforts of names authorities in Swaziland in the past.

The Task Team for Africa presents another opportunity for African states by collaborating with African organizations such as AOCR and RCMRD to provide toponymic training. As stated before, such opportunities were not evident in Swaziland and their importance cannot be overstated. The implementation of e-government in Swaziland, will assist government realize the goals of standardizing national geographical names and the development of toponymic websites that will host standardized geographic names, toponymic guidelines and exchange of toponymic data.

Swaziland has highlighted various toponymic issues in their report and in particular the development of standardized geographical names. Although not much has been achieved by the country, actions taken by both UNGEEN and ECA to support African countries over the years to facilitate standardization programmes are being acknowledged. The conclusions and recommendations of the different consultative workshops have been noted by Swaziland and will provide the basis for the reconstruction of this important agenda. The E-government programme currently implemented in this country will be the appropriate policy that will inform and drive the renewed standardized geographical names initiative.

## **Zimbabwe**

Geographical Names Committee was in existence chaired by the surveyor general. Currently it's not functional due to economic reasons. The geographical name database is available but in manual form, the initial system crashed with out any backup facilities. The challenges in Zimbabwe are lack of trained personnel, computers both hardware and software and lack of funds to resuscitate both the committee and the development of geographical place names database.

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## APPENDIX

### **AFRICA SOUTH DIVISION**

Africa South Division used a workshop held in Gaborone, Botswana on 23 – 25 November 2011 to meet, during the meeting Botswana was requested to assume the chairpersonship and South Africa to provide secretariat support since the division was no longer functioning properly.

Since then regional conferences related to geographical names in the region were then used to promote the work of the geographical names amongst member countries to encourage participation on UNGEGN activities. Amongst the conferences we can name STATCOM-Africa held in Cape Town, South Africa on 21-23 January 2012 and National Workshop on Geographical Names held in Johannesburg on 12-13 April 2012.

Through this exercise we were able to locate and identified relevant officials for almost all member countries and amongst successes is the revival of active participation of Mozambique in the activities of the division and for the first time we were able to get participation from Malawi, they made a commitment to encourage Zambia with whom they are involve in a number of geospatial projects to also translate that to UNGEGN activities in the region. We hope to build from this strategy to achieve total participation of all member countries in the division.