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REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR
REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS
CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Report on Progress of Standardization of Geographical Names
in Nigeria
1977 - 1982**

Paper presented by Nigeria

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There is not yet a statutory body which is charged with the responsibility of standardization of geographical names in Nigeria. The work of standardization of place names is, as before, being carried out by a National Committee on Standardization of Place Names, which comprises the Director of Federal Surveys as Chairman, and the State Surveyors-General and representatives of other Federal Government Ministries, Departments, and agencies as members. In addition to the National Committee, there is a State Committee under the chairmanship of the State Surveyors-General which carries out standardization of place names in each of the 19 states of the Federation. At each state level, the members are drawn from the local government councils, state education authorities, and state organizations for the promotion and encouragement of local languages and cultures.

In Nigeria, the National Survey organization is, by an administrative arrangement, responsible for the basic topographical mapping of the country. In addition to the efforts of the State Survey organizations, however, it carries out large-scale township mapping. The basic topographical mapping of the country had been at the scale of 1:50,000, and at this scale, about 96 per cent of the country had been covered with maps. The Federal Government had in 1975 decided upon the mapping of the country at the scale of 1:25,000, and work on this scale is virtually just commencing. With the creation of more states, and the take-over by civilians of the administration of the country and its component states, there has been a remarkable upsurge in the demand for and commissioning of large-scale township mapping projects. Besides, there are myriads of other projects which require the production of maps at other scales/^{different} from those of conventional responsibility mapping. Thus there has always been and there is still a great deal of work to do in Nigeria with regard to standardization of geographical names.

The collection of place names and consequently of their standardization at the National Committee level have as their basis the 1:50,000 map series. As soon as the 1:25,000 map series begins to be published, there will be new and greater dimensions to the work of standardization of place names. Currently, names for this series of maps are collected from the field by surveyors assisted by local persons with a good personal knowledge of the names of places and features of their areas which are to be indicated on the maps, and of the local languages and dialects spoken in the areas of such places and features. The names so collected are first forwarded to the appropriate local government councils for vetting and thereafter to the appropriate committees for authentication before they are accepted for entries into maps.

Many languages are spoken in Nigeria, among which the three principal ones are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. In all, there are not less than 400 languages in Nigeria, very many of which are not written. The official language in Nigeria is, however, English and the production of early maps of Nigeria was very much influenced by this, as many of the place names and features shown on the maps were anglicised. New maps which are now being produced are indicating place names and features in the names by which they are known in their localities. Between 1977 and May 1982, not less than sixty-five 1:50,000 sheets had been produced, with the place names and features on them standardized and authenticated right from the grass roots to the National Committee level. The same measures apply to the place names and features in about thirty to forty maps of towns and cities which have been produced in the period.

Romanization

Fortunately, the English alphabets are the same as the Roman alphabets. The three principal languages and a few more others which have been written are in Roman alphabets; there is therefore little or no problem here except that former place names with anglicised spellings are yielding ground to some names with precisely the same pronunciation but with different spellings in accordance with the appropriate language roman alphabets. For example "Oshogbo" is now written as "Oṣogbo" while "Ogbomosho" is now written as "Ogbomoṣo". The problem however is with the many unwritten languages for which there will have to be a remarkable combined efforts of map-makers, educational, linguistic and the local inhabitants to have such languages written in Roman alphabets in accordance with the decision of the United Nations on the standardisation of geographical names.

Gazetteers

A fourth edition of the Gazetteer of Place Names for Nigeria has been prepared but is yet to be printed. It is based upon the names which have been field verified and authenticated and which are in the 1:50,000 map series. It shows the names, the features, the locations and finally the map editions in which such place names may be found. For the locations, these indicate the geographical coordinates, the State, and reference to a well known city or town. The fourth edition which is in two volumes is unlike the previous edition not produced manually. There was a great deal of collaboration with the Department of Meteorology that handled its automatic processing using punch cards.

Since smaller-scale maps are derived from the basic 1:50,000 map series it is hoped in the near future to embark upon producing more but less voluminous gazetteers based upon the smaller-scale map series.