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Reports: Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names

Report of Madagascar

Summary**

As previously reported, the national committee on the standardization of geographical names is somewhat dormant owing to, inter alia, difficulties in appointing new members and the scarcity or lack of financial resources to conduct the corresponding studies. As a result, the revitalization of the committee has been and continues to be a major challenge for Madagascar.

There are several organizations carrying out a range of cartographic, survey and census work. Of course, identification is the core purpose at the heart of these efforts and toponyms are often the vehicle for the results of such endeavours. However, the geographical names used for a particular place in the various reports written as part of that work may differ depending on the field officers preparing them. Standardization is therefore needed to prevent information on a single geographical location from causing confusion for users of that information.

For example, “Manave” is the name that appears on the 1:100,000 scale map, currently the reference map. It was called “Manavy” on the National Statistics Institute census map used for the 2013 general population and housing census. The difference stems from a difference in dialect. However, the same place is called “Manavy Ambony” (which means “Upper Manavy”) in the 2015 official decree defining the parts of communes, the third-level administrative entity in Madagascar. It should be noted that these three sources are considered “official”, since they are all of government origin.

It has been repeatedly noted that many places have identical names. One example of a local solution is that adopted in a commune called “Ambazoa”: localities near to each other have the same name and are differentiated by number: “Ambazoa I”, “Ambazoa II”, “Ambazoa III”, “Ambazoa IV” and “Ambazoa V”. Places may also

* GEGN.2/2019/1.

** The full report, prepared by Herinirina Iarivo Nary, will be available under document symbol GEGN.2/2019/70/CRP.70, in the language of submission only, at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/1st_session_UNGEGN.html.



be distinguished by their relative positions, such as “Ambany (lower)”, “Ambony (upper)”, “Andrefana (west)”, “Atsinanana (east)”, and so on. Nevertheless, depending on the source, even these distinguishing labels are sometimes transposed.

In the geographical databases of the National Geographical and Hydrographical Institute, the technical solution has been to attribute unique codes to localities. Unfortunately, this does not completely solve the true problem on the ground because a name cannot ever be replaced by a code. And a new problem arises because it is also necessary to harmonize the codes used by different bodies.

Our recommendation would be to reduce the number of members of the national committee on the standardization of geographical names and to focus on the main government bodies that work on field surveys as an initial means of revitalizing the committee.
