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Progress made in Standardization of Geographical
Names in Kenya since the eighth session of the UNGEGN

(submitted by D. Kamau, Kenya)

Since the eighth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names held from 26 February to 9 March 1979 much has been achieved in collection and standardization of geographical names in Kenya. The main activity has been accelerated collection of more place names following the guidance of National Standing Committee on Geographical Names. Of particular importance has been collection of topo names to appear on more than 50 sheets of newly constructed maps at a scale of 1:50,000 during the past two years.

In addition to names collection another problem has arisen out of the older maps requiring urgent solution. The areas of Kenya covered during the last two years had previously been covered by maps of scale smaller than 1:50,000, especially at 1:100,000. These maps had been prepared and published many years back. At that time place name collection and treatment were faced by two problems. Firstly there were about 40 dialects spoken in the country without adequate qualified personnel or linguistic experts to suit all the dialects. Through National Standardization and guidance under National Standing Committee on Geographical Names, this problem has almost disappeared.

Secondly, all the areas covered during the last two years are of very hostile terrain. Communication was very difficult during the years of publication of the old maps. Most of the land was sparsely populated. These problems hindered name collection and due to the adverse conditions very little time was spent to clarify pronunciations and spellings. As a result many errors exist not only in position of place names on the old maps but also in spelling. Communication has now been improved and the number of the Government officials has increased in those areas. This has made names collections easy and a lot of time is now being spent clarifying positions spellings, meanings and other requirements of toponames.

It will be seen that apart from collecting more names for the larger scale topo maps (1:50,000), correction data is being gathered. This is to ensure that the errors on old maps will not be transmitted to the new maps, and that the corrections will be carried out during revision of existing smaller scale maps. Finally corrections will be reflected on the National Gazetteer for Geographical Names during its next revision.