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### **Tenth United Nations Conference on the 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 Ninth Conference  
(for distribution only).**

Status of Standardization of Geographical Names in Kenya

Submitted by Kenya\*\*

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## Table of Contents

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Table of Contents.....</b>                                 | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Summary:.....</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Background:.....</b>                                       | <b>4</b> |
| <b>Goals and National Programmes:.....</b>                    | <b>4</b> |
| <b>Challenges, Problems, Solutions and Achievements. ....</b> | <b>5</b> |
| Challenges:.....  | 5        |
| Problems.....   | 5        |
| Solutions.....  | 5        |
| Achievements .....  | 6        |
| <b>Conclusions and Recommendations .....</b>                  | <b>6</b> |

# STATUS OF STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN KENYA

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## Summary:

*The Standing Committee on Geographical Names(SCGN) in Kenya is established by Survey Act, Chapter 299 (articles 34 and 35)of the laws of Kenya. It is operationalized in the Survey Manual, the official document on the conduct of Surveying and Mapping in Kenya.*

*The law requires that all geographical names published in all official maps in Kenya should be approved by the SCGN, whose chairman is the Director of Surveys. Data collection and collation of Geographical Names is carried out alongside feature verification for map production.*

*To date thirty eight thousand (38,000)names have been standardized and published in Kenya: Official Standards Names Gazetteer, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition published in 1978. Standardization is based in Swahili language for the about forty two (42)dialects in Kenya.*

*Due to increase in population, creation of more and smaller administrative units, it has become necessary to prepare a third edition of a new Official Standards Names Gazetteer. This will be prepared in digital format and covering a larger scope by including all Geographical Names at scale of 1:2,500 from the scale of 1:50,000. Already the first phase of converting the existing analogue basedata is nearing completion.*

*The department is strategizing on how best to handle the imminent challenges and problems since this is an enormous task. An all-inclusive discussion in the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) session is recommended to evaluate and propose solutions.*

## Status Of Standardization Of Geographical Names In Kenya

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### Background:

Kenya has an active Standing Committee on Geographical Names (SCGN) hereafter referred to as “the committee” established through an Act of Parliament (Survey Act Chapter 299 of the Laws of Kenya ; articles 34 -35). The Director of Surveys is the Chairman of the committee appointed by the Minister for Lands. The Director appoints the secretary of the committee who must be a public officer.

Data collection for Geographical Names (GNs) is carried out in tandem with feature verification for map production and map revision. The procedures of the conduct of collection, approval and authentication of the names are spelt out in Survey Manual, the document that controls all survey and mapping in Kenya. The law requires that all names published in all official maps in Kenya should have been approved by the committee.

Kenya has published two editions of the Official National Gazetteers of Geographical names. The first, published in 1964 contained 26,000 names while the second, published in 1969 contains 36,000 names. The publications are prepared as per the laid down procedures in Standardization of Geographical Names. The general quality of the names in the gazetteer is rated very good due to comprehensiveness of the information included, conformity to the local usage and to the resolution of the very difficult problem of standardizing place names from languages that lack established orthographics. The basic name coverage corresponds to the topographical base maps at the scales of 1:50,000 for the southern and south western parts of the country and 1:100,000 for the northern and eastern parts.

Standardization of GNs is complete (*There are 42 dialects in Kenya but romanization of the GNs is harmonized in Swahili*). Some exonyms in the first edition were changed and standardized to reflect the local usage. Entries include standardized names of first, second, third and fourth order administrative units; populated areas of all sizes, cultural entities and a variety of physical features.

**Goals and National Programmes:** (*Preparation of third edition of the official standard gazetteer in digital format*)

The Department of Surveys has district offices distributed all over Kenya and are answerable to the Director of Surveys at the Headquarters. These offices act in liaison with all other stake holders within their respective areas of jurisdiction and collect authentic geospatial information, GNs included. The stakeholders include the local administration, statistical, environmental and agricultural scientists and community groups. The names are entered in standard SCGN forms and are subsequently forwarded to the committee for approval. The activities of the mentioned groups require harmonized names as they concern matters of mutual interest between the local communities and the service providers.

Since the publication of the second edition in 1978, high population increase and a lot of developments have taken place resulting in creation of so many new place names and administrative units. Also, the advances in technology and communications have presented many challenges to the custodians of the gazetteer since many users require accessing standardized

geographical names. In this regard, Kenya is in the process of preparing a third edition of the Official Standard Names Gazetteer digitally.

A work plan and a time schedule has been prepared within which the preparation of the gazetteer will be finalized. It is anticipated that the gazetteer will take five(5 years) and will be prepared in the following phases:

- i. Conversion of all analogue records to digital format.
- ii. Capacity building and Human resource development.
- iii. Planning and design of the digital format.
- iv. Sensitization of the relevant user groups. (to include local communities, researchers, archivists, county administration officials, etc.)
- v. Organizing forums between the communities and the data collection teams.
- vi. Name entries and maintaining a national names database.
- vii. Prepare a graphics framework that supports visual display of names in accordance with the results of step (iii) above.
- viii. Forward the names to the SCGN for approval and authentication of the names variant with the existing ones.

## **Challenges, Problems, Solutions and Achievements.**

### **Challenges:**

- Urgent need to compile a new gazetteer to include the new administrative units and populated areas that have come up since the last gazetteer was published.
- Creation of the database is slow as it is dependent on the pace of creation of a topographical base data.
  - Lack of training for the data collection teams as no full course on toponomy is available in local institutions for the task.

### **Problems**

- Lack of awareness by various users on the need to use official geographical names leads to use of unofficial names and subsequently causing disputes among communities.
- Lack of updating the gazetteer to include new place names has made private mapmakers use names that are not standardized hence misleading the local communities.

### **Solutions**

- Courses in standardization of geographical names can be introduced with the help of UNGEGN. There are several institutes in Kenya that offer courses in surveying and mapping fields and avail an opportunity to provide basic training in standardization of names. The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) syllabus for Diploma in cartography has a topic in standardization of geographical names though it might be technologically out of date. (*Kenya Institute of Surveying and Mapping (KISM) is an Institution in the Department of Surveys, Ministry of Lands, which teaches Diploma and Higher Diploma courses in Surveying and Mapping. It also conducts short courses in emerging technologies e. g. GPS, GIS, Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing and attracts participants from the Africa East and Southern Divisions of UNGEGN.*)
- To increase funding to adequately cater for collection and processing of names simultaneously with creation of topographical data framework. It is proposed to prepare a digital topographical data framework to include all standardized names of first, second, third and fourth order administrative

units; populated areas of all sizes, cultural entities and a variety of physical features at the scale of 1:2,500.

### **Achievements**

The preparation of the digital version of the gazetteer has commenced by digitizing about 38,000 existing geographical names cards in excel format. The names and all attributes have been captured including the details on meaning, languages and any history indicated on the cards. Checking and data entry cleaning is in progress and expected to be completed by end of May 2012. Since the end result is expected to be linked to the official map, the department is in the process of studying how this can be achieved. It calls for training and evaluation of the open software by United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), an effort that can be achieved with the assistance of UNGE and UNECA.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Preparation of the national gazetteer is an enormous exercise that requires a lot of resources and mobilization of the various interest groups who would be impacted upon by the gazetteer in one way or another. This calls for a lot of collaboration and cooperation at local, national, regional and global level in order to successfully achieve the goal of having standardized names.

Maps are the best way to visualize the wordy format of a gazetteer. Names retrieval and referencing against others easily creates a locational picture in the mind of what and where features

### **References**

1. Survey Act, Chapter 299 (articles 34 and 35) of the laws of Kenya.
2. Survey Manual Section II (part IX )
3. Kenya: Official Standards Names Gazetteer, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition published in 1978.
4. Kenya: Official Standards Names Gazetteer, 1<sup>st</sup> edition published in 1964