

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa



Africa – Looking to the Future

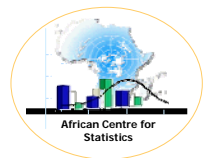
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**10th United Nations Conference on Standardization of Geographical
Names**

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

Outline

- Value/Uses of Place Names
- Issues and Standardization
- Problems and Challenges
- Looking Ahead



PLACE NAMES FOR CROSS REFERENCING LOCATION-SPECIFIC INFORMATION



Our Changing Climate

- Measurements taken at the same location over time with the following result:

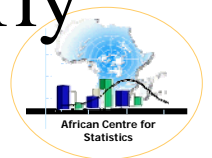


Location-Specific Information

Despite their relatively small size the diminishing glaciers at [03° 03' 59'' S, 37° 21' 02''] are now recognized as symbols of changing climate in Africa. Since 1912 the ice cover has been mapped intermittently, allowing the rate of ice retreat to be calculated periodically over the 95 years from 1912 to 2007. ... aerial photographs taken in 2000 ... revealed that the ice cover had diminished to 2.6 km² from 12.06 km² in 1912, a decrease of nearly

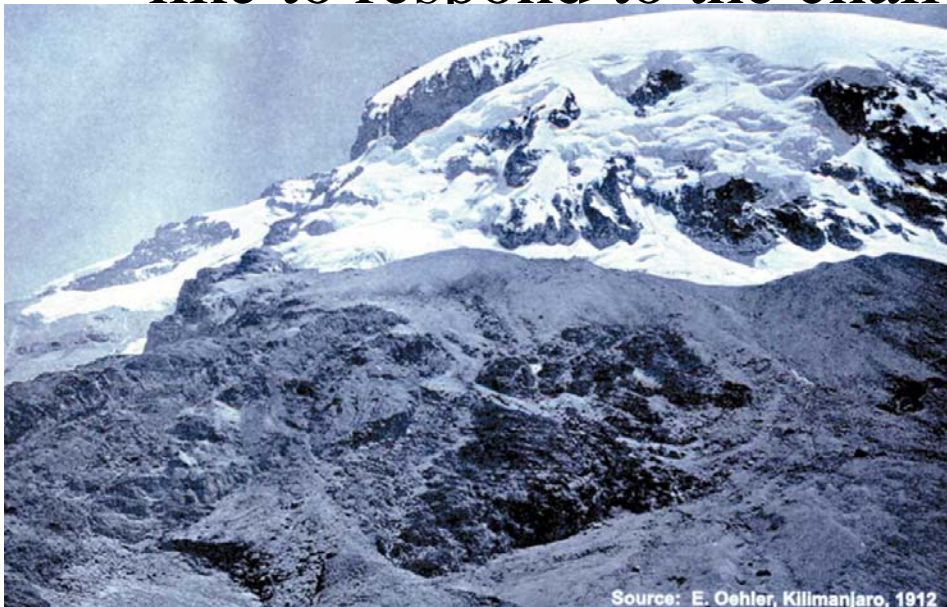


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Where is this Place?

- To a geographer or scientist, the coordinates allow precise location on the map
- But, even with these pictures, that story would NOT speak to policy makers and general public that we would like to respond to the challenges of climate change



Source: E. Oehler, Kilimanjaro, 1912



Same info, but now with a Place Name

Despite their relatively small size the diminishing glaciers of *Kilimanjaro* (specifically on Kibo) are now recognized as symbols of changing climate in Africa. Since 1912 the ice cover has been mapped intermittently, allowing the rate of ice retreat to be calculated periodically over the 95 years from 1912 to 2007. ... aerial photographs taken in 2000 ... revealed that the ice cover had diminished to 2.6

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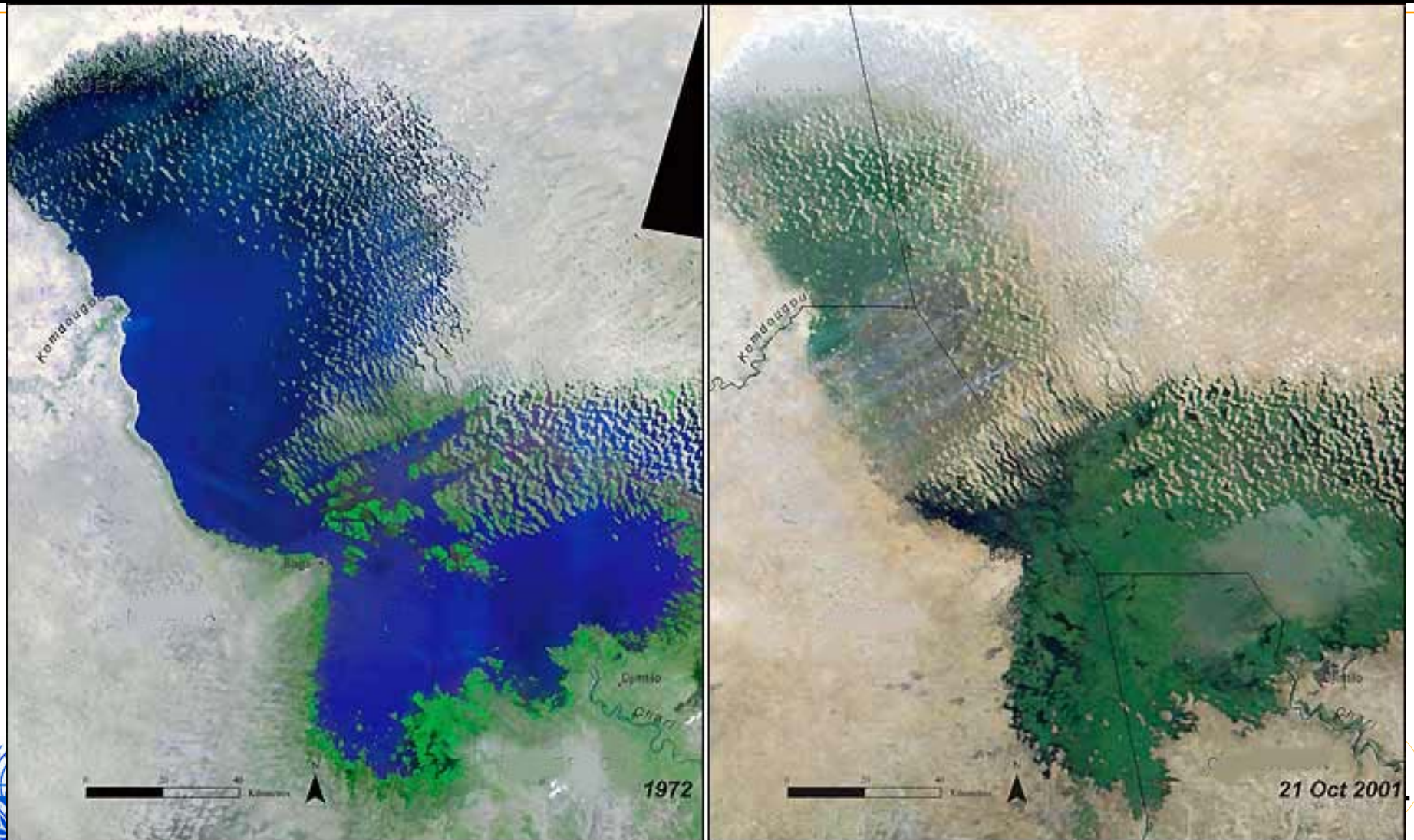
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Where Did All the Water Go?



Disappearing Water



Name the Place



- Lake Chad
- The map is not always enough to create a full mental association for the average human without the place name



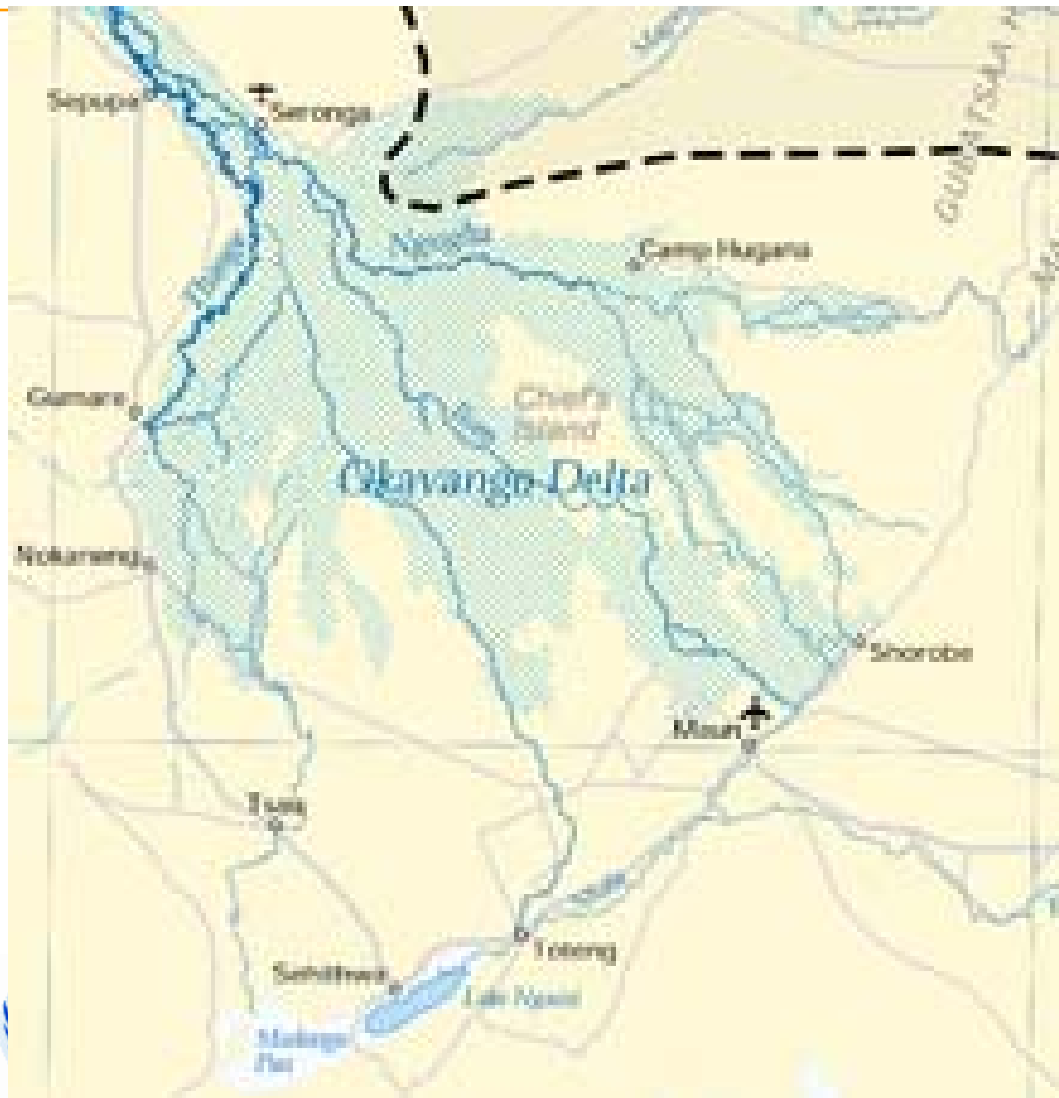
Rock Churches



Lalibela



Okavango Delta



Masai Mara

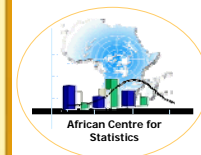


PLACE NAME AS CULTURAL IDENTITY

THE SELEKA/TUMASERA STORY

Once Upon a Time in the Central
District of Botswana ...



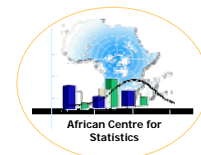


- There was a village called *Seleka*
- With three neighbouring villages called:
 - Tupyia
 - Malete
 - Rasesa
- Each had its traditional court and headman; distant appellate court
- These three used facilities from the biggest, Seleka
- Then higher jurisdiction court was set up to serve all four
- Neutral location, with neutral name *Tumasera*, coined from the four names



Place Name and Identity

- Question: Do the villages lose their individual identities?
- Residents of Tupyia, Malete and Rasesa willingly adopted the name of the new court as their new identity
- But residents of Seleka wanted to keep their identity
 - Separation between name of appellate court jurisdiction and village
- Some government departments tried to impose the name Tumaseria to all residents
- Seleka went to court and won in 1995
- Refused to be counted in 2011 census as Tumaseria
- Moral: People decide what to be called



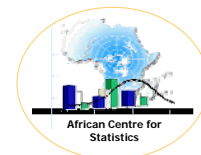
PLACE NAMES AS LANDMARKS FOR NAVIGATION

Especially where there are no street addresses



A true direction to somewhere in Africa

Drive passed the Village Market in the direction of **Limuru**. Keep going, pass the **Runda** turn off, and you will see a junction and road off to the right, this is the old Limuru Road, passing through **Banana Hill**, leading on to **Tigoni** and ending up in Limuru. It is in a straight line from this junction. Proceed along this road, through Banana Hill, then another small settlement, pass the **Norbrook** (veterinary products) factory, keep on the same road don't turn off, you now see coffee and tea growing on your left. Continue on for another 300m and you will see a large Bata sign (where the road bends) on the right hand side and mature trees on the left. The turning to the house is here on the left directly opposite this big Bata sign. If you miss the turning you will reach the **Kentmere Club** 400m further on ...



PLACE NAMES AS PERMANENT MENTAL RECORDS

**Especially with Predominance of
Oral Traditions**



“Permanent” Record of ...

- Heroics or other characteristics of original founder(s) or settlers
- Ecological dating of the original settlement
- Geographic or environmental peculiarities of place
- Belief or other spiritual significance
- Historical events worth remember
 - Events to be proud of (or past mistakes to avoid)



PERTINENT ISSUES



Naming Rights

- Who determines the name?
- As established by the Botswana courts, the people should determine their name
 - Residents of Seleka kept their original name
 - Residents of the other three villages adopted the new name, with implications on identity
- Same applies to natural features:
 - Usually named by the controlling group



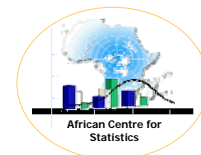
Multiple Names

- Sometimes a feature or place is of significance to more than one group
 - E.g., Streams for water supply, forests for firewood and hunting, hills at the boundary of two communities
- Multiple (alternate) names may be used reflecting each group's stake (language, history, belief, perception, etc.)
 - And then there are exonyms



Contextual Misunderstanding

- “Babakiueria” phenomena (Barbeque area)
- Naming authority asks the wrong name question and misunderstands the answer
- E.g., Lake Nyasa = Lake Lake, now Lake Malawi
- One theory of the meaning of Kilimanjaro is that “Kilima” means “mountain”
 - ∴ *Mount Kilimanjaro* is tautological
- Nyasaland versus Malawi



Phonetic Misspelling

- Naming authority spells the name phonetically as it sounds to their foreign ears
 - E.e., Sebina versus Chizwina
 - Parakarungu versus Mbalakalungu
- Or simplify pronunciation
 - E.g., Enugu versus Enu-ugwu (top of the hill)
 - Ibo versus Igbo



“Wrong” History

- Place names as historical documentation
- Whose history?
- Heroics of explorer may not represent memorable history for the “discovered” people
- E.g., Rhodesia versus Zimbabwe
- There was even Northern Rhodesia



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



“Standardization”

- UNGEGN Glossary:
 - standardization, geographical names
 - “The prescription by a names authority of one or more particular names, together with their precise written form, for application to a specific geographical feature, as well as the conditions for their use.”



Benefits of Standardization

- National planning strategies
- Environmental management
- Emergency services coordination
- Utility infrastructures
- Peacekeeping operations
- On-board navigation systems
- Global media
- Tourism
- Map and atlas production
- Trade and commerce
- Property rights and cadastre
- Security strategy
- Communication systems
- Cultural heritage promotion



Problems and challenges in Africa

- **Lack of statutory naming authorities** in many countries, that would provide the institutional framework needed to support the standardization effort.
- **Weak names authorities** – some countries have names authorities, but they do not function well.



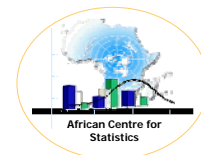
Problems and challenges (contd)

- **Lack of awareness** on the value of geographical names standardization at higher levels of government
- **Low participation in international forums** to learn from global best practices and ensure that Africa's needs are understood and reflected in guidelines and standards



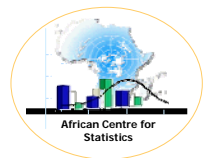
Big Misconception

- Usually assumed that geographical names activities are the sole concerns of the mapping community
- Emphasis therefore on the technical function of recording place names on maps, without considering the full cultural, social, economic and other contexts of first determining what names to record
 - Need multi-stakeholder approach



Continuous Efforts

- From days of Cartographic Conference for Africa
- Discussed repeatedly at ECA's CODI (now CODIST)
- Training sessions and workshops organized Task Team for Africa and other UNGEGN Task Teams
- Still little progress



LATEST INTERVENTION

Consultative Workshop on Future
Orientation of Geographical Names
Activities in Africa,
Gaborone, Botswana,
November 2011



The Road to Gaborone

- 2010: Second StatCom-Africa recommendation for ECA to prepare a work programme, in collaboration with United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), that will lead to authoritative national databases, which will be consolidated into a continental database and feed into the global geographical names database.

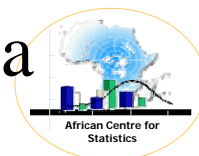


Road to Gaborone (contd)

- Following StatCom-Africa II, ECA and Task Team for Africa organized a roundtable during 26th Session in Vienna
- Participants supported StatCom-Africa's call and proposed more discussion in the form of a meeting of experts
- Government of Botswana agreed to host the Consultative Workshop in Gaborone

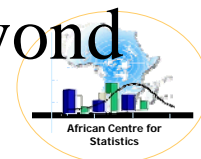


— Co-funded by ECA and Government of Botswana



Objectives of the Workshop

- Review the situation in Africa
- Review the progress, or lack thereof, on geographical names activities
- Recommend way forward including actions for African institutions
 - Notably: UNECA, African Development Bank, African Union Commission
 - Specific activities for ECA to consider for statistics sub programme for 2012-2013 biennium and beyond



Summary of Findings

- 16 out of 54 countries have a names authority
- 18 have an institution serving as contact on geographical names without the proper legal mandate from Government
- No information on remaining 20 countries



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORKSHOP



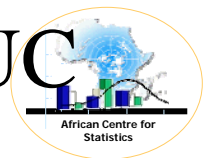
Improve National Institutional Arrangements

- Increase awareness among politicians, mapping organizations, statistical offices, other government departments on how geographical names impact on their work
- Sensitize the public and media on using standardized geographical names
- Encourage governments of African countries to establish or re-vitalize national names authorities
- Establish and communicate contacts for countries; and within countries between government departments, universities, etc.



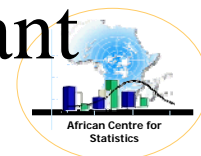
Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing Activities

- Courses and workshops on geographical names standardization – concepts, skills, etc
- Encourage partners to sponsor participation in regional workshops and global conferences and events, such as UNGEGN sessions and UNCSGN
- Organize meetings of national experts to coordinate activities and share knowledge
- Side events of StatCom, CODIST and similar intergovernmental bodies of UNECA and AUC



Cooperation and Coordination at all Levels

- National: incorporate into learning programmes at all levels; media campaign
- Regional:
 - Consider African Day on geographical names
 - Include on agenda of StatCom and other relevant meetings of appropriate organizations
 - Encourage countries to establish or revamp names authorities
- Global: Sponsor active participation in relevant international events



Advances in Technology and Communication

- UNECA to finalize and disseminate Africa GeoNyms gazetteer software – undertake pilot projects first
- Ensure GeoNyms adopts international standards for interoperability
- Assist countries to use appropriate ICT to ensure easy access to geographical names by all users



Result so Far

- Expanded audience beyond the mapping community, to include statistical fraternity
 - Need to keep up the contact and extend to other professional communities and stakeholders
- GeoNyms now being piloted in some countries



What can You Do to Help?

- Most geospatial information projects in Africa are funded by development partners
- Impress on your governments to include geographical names activities in such projects
 - Increase awareness among our policy makers
 - Improve funding situation for activities
- Support ECA's GeoNyms development
 - Study tour for ECA's lone developer to increase his skills
 - Short term staff secondment to African country or ECA



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The End