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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 Tenth
Conference (for distribution only).**

Botswana Geographical Place Names

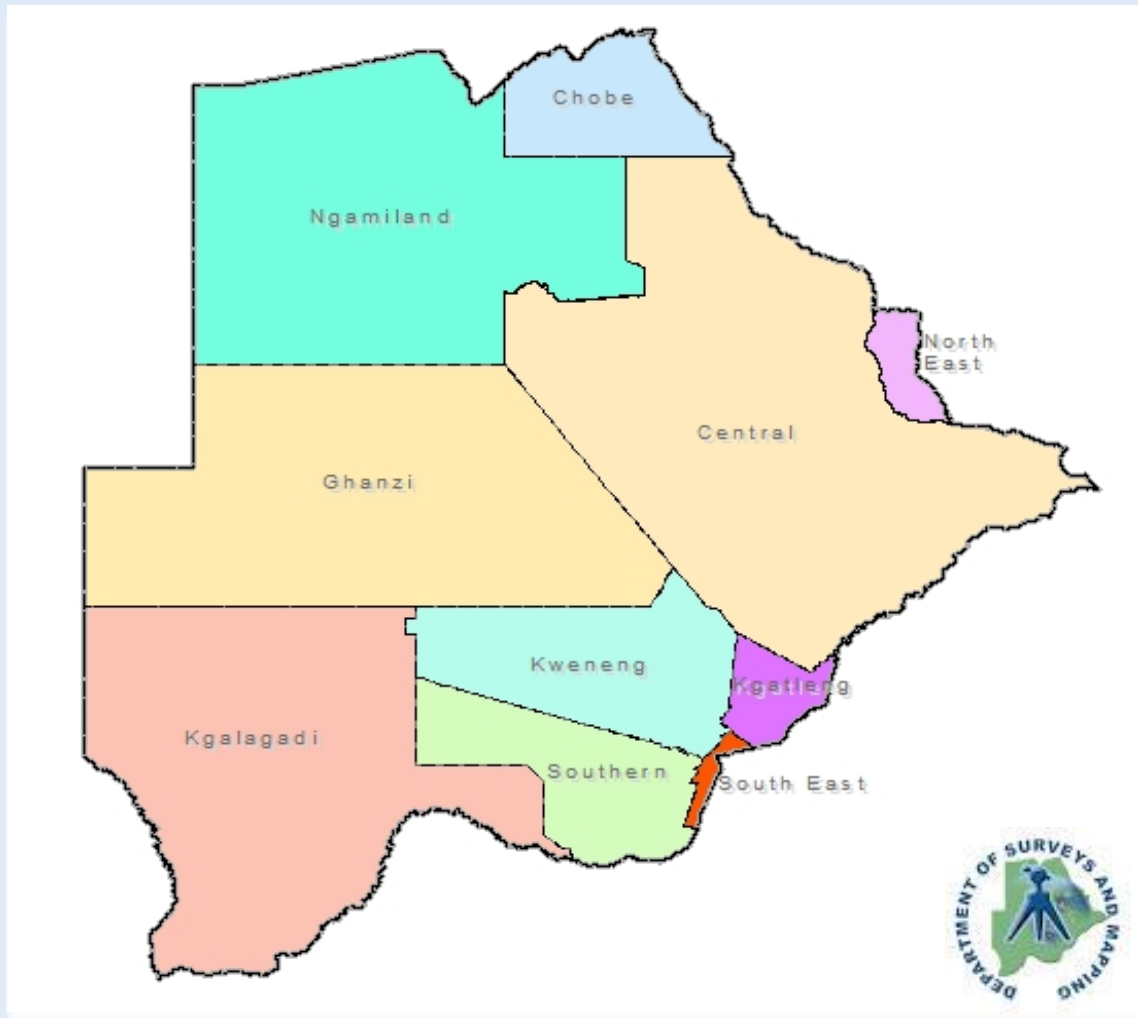
Submitted by Botswana **

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Botswana Geographical Place Names

Introduction/Background

Botswana is amongst the first few countries in Africa to be responsive to the United Nations Resolution 1/4 of 1967 calling for establishment of geographical names authorities or committees by member states. The country had its statutory committee on geographical names- Botswana Place Names Commission (PNC) established in October 1967 by a Presidential Directive CAB.51/67.

It is worth noting that the Office of the Surveyor General requested the government to consider setting up a committee to deal with place names earlier in May 1965 so that there could be an 'Authoritative Source of Information' on geographical names for mapping purposes to ensure that published maps were not the subject of criticism as a result of unauthoritative spelling of place names due to various language problems (about 80 dialects) even within one district.

PNC

Since PNC's inception The Department of Surveys and Mapping (DSM) has been the secretariat with the Director as an ex-officio member being the chairman of the commission whilst other members were selected basing on their historical knowledge of the country, merit of languages spoken in the country.

The PNC was mandated to collect geographical names in the country, examine and verify their correct spelling but not tempering with those names that stood the test of time and the names were to be determined in their mother language i.e. local orthography.

The PNC had its first meeting in January 1968 in Gaborone and the main objective was to discuss the approach on the method to be carried out in the standardization of geographical names especially that the original memorandum laid no terms of reference. Initial work of the PNC was confined to dealing with geographical names on the maps.

In 1970 and after 26 meetings the first list of geographical names containing over one thousand names was published and approved under Presidential Directive CAB.56/70 and Bill No. 36 of 70. As the work progressed the terms of references were drawn and these were approved in June 1974.

Since then the work of the PNC steadily progressed with meetings held throughout various districts in the country to discuss names. District Commissioners, Tribal Authorities, Village Development Committees and village elders attended these meetings organized in the public gathering places(Dikgotla). A great achievement had been made as more than 3000 names were discussed though not all approved. The PNC

managed to produce four reports between 1970 and 1984 and these still form the basis for geographical names in the country.

The PNC had its activities suspended for more than twenty years. This was due to the concerns over inconsistencies and disputes among different ethnic groups within same localities/settlements with regard to the spelling, origins and true meaning attached to the names.

Recent/Current Activities

It has been observed that the Africa as continent is not doing well in matters of geographical names standardization authorities. Botswana being one of few countries in Africa which had a Geographical place names authority was selected to host the 'Future Orientation of Geographical Names in Africa Conference' in 2011 conducted by United Nations Economic Commission for Africa(UNECA) and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names(UNGEGN). It was on this conference where the Gaborone Action Plan(GAP) was conceived. The recommendations drawn here were meant to encourage African countries to set up or have operational geographical place names authorities and availability of valid geographical names data much as the continent is prone to natural or man-made disasters. Botswana also was nominated 'Interim Chair for the UNGEGN Africa South Division' to date.

DSM as national mapping agency has that responsibility of ensuring that names appearing on the maps are spelt correctly and accurate and it is critical to have a proper/authorized names in its geographical names database but it has been a challenge since the suspension of the PNC.

Tough the suspension of the PNC was not attributed to lack of act the department (DSM) has been working towards the enactment of geographical names act since 2008 with a view of;

- Making provision for the Standardization of Geographical Place Names
- Allowing for registration of geographical place names and compilation of geographical names gazetteers.
- Providing legal basis for existence of the PNC and allow it to operate with a clear legal mandate

DSM has established an interim committee comprising of stakeholders from various departments and the University of Botswana to look into the possible interventions on the issue of geographical names in the country whilst still awaiting the reinstatement of the PNC.

The resolution to resuscitate the PNC was passed in September 2014 at Ministerial Leadership Forum. The Interim Committee on Geographical Place Names has since been working towards the realization of the resolution.

The following recommendations were made and submitted to Ministry of Lands and Housing:

- To draft Cabinet Memorandum
 - The purpose of the Cabinet Memorandum is to request Cabinet to enact the drafting of a Geographical Names Act. The main aim of the act is to make provision for standardisation of Geographical Names for naming of places, the registration of place names and compilation of Geographical Place Names Gazetteer.
- To draft Terms of reference for the commission
- To propose new geographical place names commission structure.

The drafts for the above recommendations have been prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Lands and Housing for consideration.

Conclusion

Despite all efforts made by the Geographical Place Names Interim committee, the Commission has not yet been resuscitated and relevant authorities have been engaged.

It should also be noted that though the PNC is inactive the country continues to receive United Nations invitations and support to attend United Nations Conferences on Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN), UNGEGN sessions and toponymic training courses.

It is worth noting that 2017 marks the 50th Anniversary of the PNC and it is still with great expectation that the PNC would be resuscitated to continue the task of geographical names standardization in the country. This is very important to address the demand for official/standardized geographical names by different systems at national and international levels.

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