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REPORTS OF THE DIVISIONS

Report on the status of standardization of geographical  
names in Africa East Division

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STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
IN THE AFRICA EAST DIVISION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Africa East Division comprises Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles.
- 1.2 Although the Division has not held any meetings in recent years, activities in the field of standardization of geographical names continue at various levels in each member country of the Division. Correspondence from the member countries reveal the status of the standardization of geographical names in the countries.

2. STATUS OF STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN THE DIVISION

2.1 The Republic of Botswana

The Place Names Commission was established in January, 1968 and has since been actively engaged in nearly half of the villages in Botswana.

It meets once a year in six or seven selected villages; the meetings are publicised. Since 1988 it has met over 50 times. It has examined maps at scales 1/50,000, 1/250,000 and 1/500,000 and a number of new reports, charts and maps prior to their publication.

The Commission checks the language, the local pronunciation, the recognized meaning and the historical background. As there are about 80 languages or dialects in Botswana, a recognized Orthography has been published to help in the correct pronunciation of a name.

The Commissioners have worked tirelessly for the last three years and have produced the Fourth Report of the Place Names Commission which is currently being studied by the Cabinet.

The Commission recognizes that it has a mammoth task ahead of it in the standardization of geographical names in Botswana.

2.2 The Government of Socialist Ethiopia

After the Fifth UN Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names the Ethiopia Mapping Agency (EMA) established "The Geographical Names Study and Gazetteer Panel" to assume a divisional level and to be responsible for the collection, transliteration as well as dissemination of geographical names.

The activities of the panel and its contacts with concerned government organizations concerning geographical names will be aimed at creating a National Names Authority. Until then it has set out to producing a preliminary concise gazetteer of Ethiopia and revising the Amharic-to-English transliteration system already in use.

Immediately after the Fifth UN Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names, Ethiopia has been aiming at producing a national gazetteer; a concise gazetteer of Ethiopia based on a 1:1M scale map has been prepared as a preliminary attempt. The gazetteer contains about 2500 geographical names. This preliminary edition is distributed among government institutions for comments and suggestions with a view to publishing the first Concise National Gazetteer.

The main focus is in the production of gazetteer series per Administrative/Autonomous Region based on the 1:50,000 scale topographic map of Ethiopia. These will finally be combined to form the National Gazetteer of Ethiopia with Standardized geographical names.

### 2.3 The Republic of Kenya

The activities of standardization of geographical names have continued in the Republic. It is estimated that over 13,000 place names have been processed by the standing committee on geographical names since the Fourth UN Conference on Standardization of Geographical names. A revision copy of the gazetteer and a card index for new and amended names continue to be maintained for the purpose of publishing the third edition of the gazetteer. And, a small gazetteer has been compiled for the 4th Edition of the National Atlas of Kenya containing approximately 2,000 place names which appear in the atlas.

It is significant to note that Survey of Kenya is currently installing computers at its Ruaraka offices in Nairobi to improve its mapping operations. The use of the computers in the creation of data-bases for geographical names and the automation of the national gazetteer production will certainly be given priority by Survey of Kenya.

### 2.4 The Republic of Malawi

Malawi has not as yet set up any national committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names hence the exercise on the standardizing names has not been embarked upon. The Commissioner of Surveys is however hopeful that he will sensitise his Government to view the formation of a National Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names favourably.

### 2.5 The Peoples Republic of Mozambique

Dinageca, The National Directorate for Geography and Cadastre is the government body that coordinates all activities concerned with toponymy. In this context, Dinageca has been involved in toponimica activities as follows:

- 2.5.1 Description and up-dating of cartographic names and settlements according to the first toponimic file published during the Portuguese administration early in 1973, taking into account the new villages and towns established after independence in 1975.

- 2.5.2 Revision of the toponimic dictionary published during the Portuguese administration period, taking into account the new villages and towns established or those which changed their names after independence and with the new territorial division in 1986.
- 2.5.3 In 1990 one technician was involved in an investigation about population centres changes in each province and district and published the toponymic book "Evolution of the Toponymy and Territorial Division Between 1974 - 1987".
- 2.5.4 Dinageca has exchanged toponimic information with the Commission of Toponymy from National Geographic Institute (IGN) of France and with United States Board on Geographical Names from the Geographic Names Division of U.S.A.

## 2.6 Swaziland Government

Swaziland has a Place Names Committee which has not met for years.

The Surveyor General's office has had for sometime plans to reconstruct the thirty one sheets of 1/50,000 scale mapping. The names on these maps were compiled in the early 1950's by the British Directorate of Colonial Surveys. The Surveyor General has no information as to the sources of these names. They are very obviously incomplete and out of date and do not conform to modern spelling. However, they have continued in use with only minor changes through the various editions of the map series until the present time.

It is hoped that the Place Names Committee will be revived.

## 2.7 United Republic of Tanzania

Since the Fourth Conference at Geneva in 1982, the Surveys and Mapping Division of the Ministry of Lands, Natural Resources and Tourism has managed to put through Parliament an Act for the establishment of a National Geographical Names Standardization Committee - Act No. 23 of 1982. The first committee consisting of 18 members was established with effect from 13th June, 1983; it had a term of three years. At the Fifth Conference in Montreal, Canada, it was reported that the second committee was in the process of being formed.

The report of the work of the first committee has so far not been published so it is not possible to provide full details of its activities. And, it is hoped that the second committee has been formed and it is now working well.

## 2.8 The Republic of Uganda

Regretably, since the last conference in Athens in 1977, Uganda has been passing through a difficult political era which has not been conducive to undertaking any constructive mapping programme. However, it is hoped that in the near

future the District Standing Committee on Standardization of Geographical Names will be revitalized as the Department of Surveys and Mapping launches new mapping programmes.

## 2.9 The Republic of Zambia

Zambia has not done much in the area of the Standardization of Geographical Names but the government appointed a standing committee in 1978 whose terms of reference were to advise the government on matters relating to geographical nomenclature in Zambia. The committee is composed of surveyors, geographers, cartographers, historians, linguists and administrators.

Ever since the committee was appointed much of its work has been confined to the revision of the National Gazetteer which was lastly published in 1966; it has also been working towards the direction of re-organizing the local sub-committee at both provincial and district levels in order to effectively formulate the policies of the standardization of names in the country. The committee's work, it has been regrettably observed, is being retarded due to lack of enthusiasm on the part of the appropriate authority towards its effectiveness.

However, the Surveys Department is making effort to sell the aims of the committee to the higher authorities.

According to the standing committee's plans, it is to increase the names from the present 35,000 contained in the 1966 Edition of the National Gazetteer to about 45,000 names.

## 2.10 The Republic of Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has a Geographical Names Standing Committee (GNSC) of which the Surveyor-General is the Chairman.

The situation of the standardization of Geographical names in Zimbabwe will be adequately covered by the Chairman of GNSC when giving his country's national report to this session.

## 2.11 Mauritius Government

There is no established list of geographical names of the island.

However, a compilation of a preliminary list of the main geographical names of the island and its territories extracted from the toponymy of the new 1:25,000 map series is expected to be prepared. It will consist of official names that are approved by the government. These names usually originate from official records, including maps and some of them have a strong historical background.

It is apparent that there is no established committee charged with the responsibility of processing geographical names in Mauritius.

2.12 Other Member countries of the Division

No information has been received from other member countries of the Division, namely, Lesotho, Madagascar and Seychelles, but it is expected that activities in the field of standardization of geographical names is still continuing.

3. TRAINING

There is an urgent need to hold a training course or a seminar in the Africa East Division to start nurturing a nucleus of experts in the field of standardization of geographical names. In this regard Kenya is still interested in hosting a toponymic training course for the Division as per Resolution 21 of the Fifth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in Montreal from 18th to 31st August, 1987.

4. CONCLUSION

The standardization of geographical names has reached varying levels within the Division: some member countries have well established functional committees while others have none. And, at the heart of it all is lack of recognition by policy makers with the result that no funds are allocated for its sustenance in a society with many competing needs.

It is also significant to point out that not many people in government in the developing countries appreciate the importance of standardization of geographical names. It is thus incumbent upon the United Nations to publicise the importance of standardization of geographical names. One way is by holding regular training courses or seminars in the Division; and, the other by regularly sending newsletters, circulars and documents to the member countries for information and appraisal on issues regarding standardization of geographical names.

It is the hope of the Republic of Kenya that member states of Africa East Division will exert more effort in working together in seeing that the existing organs dealing with Standardization of Geographical Names are strengthened or revitalized in order to achieve the desired goals.