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Reports by Divisions on the Situation in their Regions
and Countries and on the Progress made in the Standardization
of Geographical Names since the Sixteenth Session

Report of the Africa South Division

Addendum:

Section: Botswana

BOTSWANA PLACE NAMES COMMISSION

INTRODUCTION

The Place Names Commission of Botswana was established on the 4th October 1967 by the Presidential Directive Cab 51/67. Mainly to focus on the use of Geographical names and their standardization.

Ever since its inception in 1967 the Place Names Commission has held 155 meetings in various villages in the country. Currently over 10,000 names has been discussed.

THE WORK OF THE PLACE NAMES COMMISSION

The Place Names Commission assesses the authenticity of a name and its correct pronunciation by taking into consideration the language of the people living in that particular area, the topography of a place and its historical association.

The Commission's work is based on its Terms of Reference. The following criteria has been adopted ie. the language from which the name derives, local pronunciation, recognized meaning, historical background of a place and orthography.

Although they are about 8(eight) major tribes in Botswana, Setswana is the single principal language used. It is estimated that there exist over thirty different languages and dialects in the country. The Place Names Commission does not profess to be conversant with all the diverse languages spoken in Botswana. The Commission's recommended spellings, are based on the Setswana Orthography. The Place Names Commission has also during its operation not tampered with names that have stood the test of time, more especially as the dialects from which they originally came have become near extinct.

The commission has received information from the public by visiting several villages in the country obtaining the best evidence available.

The initial work of the Place Names Commission is confined to the study of the existing maps at scale 1:50,000, 250,000 and 500,000 including the census maps, so that some standardization of spelling could be achieved. As development work continues in Botswana new maps are produced and new names are obtained and these need to be investigated by the Commission. However there has been agreed that where possible all editions of maps should be subject to toponomy verification prior to publication.

In the year 1993 the Commission was faced with a major task of settling disputes over the change of names in Northern Botswana. This was sparked off by differences of the ethnic groups of the Basubia, Basarwa and Batawana. However the Commission stressed the importance of standardization of Geographical names.

Conclusions

In general terms the Place Names Commission's work has been a success. Members who attended conferences on standardization of geographical names were able to pick up new ideas which we are currently applying in our investigation of names.

The Department of Surveys and Mapping has started a mapping programme that is aimed at providing the wide public and authorities with large scale topographic maps in Botswana, as a result a database of cartographic names, intended as a national database is still in progress.

However the Place Names of Botswana is in the process of organising the basic Toponymy course for Local Authorities.