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REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

Report of the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy

Report on the Fourth United Nations Training Course in
Geographical Names in South Africa

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Submitted by Dr L A Möller, Chief Researcher, Human Sciences
Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa.

Report on the Fourth United Nations Training Course in Geographical Names in South Africa

The fourth United Nations Training Course in Geographical Names was held from 1 to 10 July 1996 at the Department of Geography, University of Pretoria, South Africa. It was organized and jointly presented by the Names Research Institute of CAUSE Academy, the Human Sciences Research Council, the Department of Geography of the University of Pretoria and the Topocadastral Information Services of the Municipality of Pretoria.

Twenty two participants from five countries namely Lesotho, Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and the Sultanate of Oman attended the training. The first four of these are member countries of the Africa South Division of the UNGEGN. Trainees came from a wide range of occupational fields, e.g. cartographers, administrative officers from municipal topocadastral services, demography and census fieldworkers from statistical information services, commercial map makers, town councillors, advisors to ministerial and national survey offices, geography students, educational and environment planners. No specific language or entry requirements were set, but participants on the whole had either worked in the field of geographical names in some form or another, had a specific interest in toponymy and some basic grounding in geography.

The modules included an introduction to standardization of geographical names; the rationale for establishing a national names authority and standardization of names; the role and function of the UNGEGN; an introduction to the nature of geographical names with theoretical definitions and toponymic terminology explained; preparation for and the field collection of geographical names; toponymic research methods and utilization of sources and documents; compilation of names lists and gazetteers; discussion of the prerequisites for computerization of lists (datafiles) and gazetteers according to UNGEGN resolutions; the office treatment of names with data capture and verification of data; the staff composition of a national names authority, with a special workshop on problems and challenges in the Southern African situation; introduction to GIS and a practical workshop of two days on the computers experiencing the creation of datafiles and GIS mapping of toponyms. The training course was concluded with an evaluation of both the participants (through examination), and the contents and presentation of the course in general by means of a questionnaire and verbal discussion.

A one-day preparatory workshop for field collection was held at the Mamelodi Teachers Training Centre, where participants afterwards had the opportunity to do field collection of geographical names and have discussions with local inhabitants in the township itself. Three ward councillors of the selected fieldwork area were participants of the course and assisted trainees in making contact with community leaders and interpreters in the community, and to guide them through the territory. The specific toponymic problems the community

experienced with administrative procedures and structures in certain no-name areas was noted. Valuable information on the problems encountered during field collection of names was collected by the trainees and discussed in the ensuing workshop and evaluation phase of the course.

The training material comprised handbooks and lectures used in previous training courses in South Africa, e.g. the manual *United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names: Training in Toponymy for Southern Africa*; the *Introduction to Toponymy* by Prof. N. Kadmon; the *United Nations Documents on Geographical Names* by P.E. Raper and a handbook of new lectures compiled by P.E. Raper and L. A. Möller which will be published later this year. A number of topographic and topocadastral maps, atlases, street maps, and examples of satellite imagery and other photogrammatic material was on display and used for lecture and exercise purposes. As part of the presentation visual graphs and transparencies were used to elucidate the contents of lectures, especially the aspects of computerization, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and utilization of the Internet; for setting up work stations for computerization and GIS units, as well as for fieldwork preparation and the rationale for standardization of a country's names. Visual material was also used to illustrate the components of data files, maps and atlases, as well as the elements of gazetteer production. A demonstration of the research procedure and technical aspects of a commercial map maker was given, and a display of maps produced by various government departments from various countries.

At the conclusion of the course a mock committee meeting was held in which most trainees participated. It consisted of an agenda and a draft questionnaire form for the consideration of geographical names from various languages. Some of the trainees acted *inter alia* as chairman, secretary and rapporteur, and as representatives of linguistic and geographical areas. The trainees were asked to comment on the content and correctness of the draft questionnaire which would, in future, serve as a data capture form for the National Place Names Committee.

For the final day trainees were grouped into six working groups and had to draft a law on the treatment of geographical names. They were also asked to formulate a policy and define principles according to which this policy would be implemented. The participants were encouraged to critically discuss and evaluate the drafted resolutions, policy and principles of each group. Some practical and valuable contributions were tabulated which member countries of the Africa South Division of the UNGEGN, e.g. Lesotho, Namibia and Zambia would consider implementing when establishing national naming authorities in their countries.

The response to the training course was very positive, especially since the course for the first time addressed matters "in Africa for Africa". Participants expressed the need for further developing UNGEGN training courses in toponymy for the future, so as to find solutions for specific Southern African "situation bound" toponymic problems. The recommendation was accepted that more town councillors from all areas and towns

become engaged in future UNGEGN training in toponymy; to be prepared for the official and administrative procedures pertaining to the standardization of geographical names, and enabling community leaders to manage their toponymic environments more efficiently.

The trainees were issued with an accredited certificate of the Department of Geography of the University of Pretoria, based on their examination results, the quality and number of exercises completed, as well as their active participation in the fieldwork excursion, the workshops and the mock committee meeting.