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STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN NIGERIA

Paper submitted by the Government of Nigeria

STANDARDISATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria the national mapping agency, the Federal Surveys, which now forms part of the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing, is responsible for the Standardisation of Geographical Names. This is done in close collaboration with the Survey Departments of the States of Nigeria. It might be mentioned that each State in Nigeria has a Survey Department responsible for large scale and cadastral mapping with the Federal Survey Department responsible for topographical mapping and geodetic surveys and also for co-ordinating the survey activities of the State.

Before Nigeria attained independence the spelling of geographical names was based on the R.G.S. II System of the United Kingdom Royal Geographical Society. This created a problem because the spelling of some names on published maps did not agree with the local spelling e.g. Idogo and Sawonjo were shown as Idawgaw and Shawanjaw respectively. This problem was later solved by adopting the local spelling for all geographical names on published maps.

Nigeria is already covered by a map series on a scale of 1/500,000. This map was originally published in 1924 and it is a compilation from data supplied by Military Intelligence Officers, Administrative Officers, Explorers' Sketches and from the then existing records of the Survey Departments of Nigeria. It was on this map which cannot be relied upon to

be accurate that the compilation of the first edition of the Gazetteer of Place Names in Nigeria was based.

Some parts of Nigeria have been mapped on a scale of 1/100,000 but the whole country is now being accurately mapped on a scale of 1/50,000 and it is from these maps that other smaller scale maps are compiled. The standardisation of geographical names is now based on these map series.

The National Committee on the Standardisation of Geographical Names, of which the Director of Federal Surveys is Chairman, includes all the Surveyors-General and representatives of the surveying and geography departments and related disciplines of universities and government ministries and agencies interested in maps. A similar committee also exists at state level with the State Surveyor-General as Chairman.

All geographical names are obtained in the field and are based on the local spelling. The names are then submitted to the Surveyor-General of the State in which the area lies and through him to the State Committee on Standardisation of Geographical Names. The names are then certified before they are accepted for publication on maps.

A second edition of the Gazetteer of geographical names was published in 2 volumes in 1965. This gazetteer is based on the 1/50,000 and 1/100,000 map series. As soon as each

map sheet is published the names are extracted and, through automatic data processing, are arranged for publication. Work on the revision of the gazetteer was suspended during the Nigerian civil war. A third edition of the gazetteer is now in print and will soon be published.