



UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr. LIMITED E/CONF.69/L.78 16 August 1977 ENGLISH ONLY

Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names Athens, Greece 17 August - 7 September 1977

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

REPORT BY NIGERIA

In Nigeria, the authority for the standardization of geographical names is the National Committee on the Standardization of Maps and Geographical Names. This Committee, of which the Director of Federal Surveys is the Chairman, includes all the Surveyors-General of the States, representatives of Federal Government departments and agencies interested in geographical names and maps like Agriculture and Forestry, Geological Surveys and Statistics; representatives of the surveying and geography departments and related disciplines in universities and institutions of higher learning, historians and linguistics. A similar committee also exists at the State level with the Surveyor-General as Chairman, but the State Committee also includes representatives of Local Governments, Education Authority and organizations for the promotion of the local languages and culture. It may be mentioned that until the end of 1975 the Federation of Nigeria consisted of 12 States but early in 1976 more States were created to bring the number of States up to 19. Some of the newly created States have not yet established their local Committees on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

The Federal Surveys, the national mapping agency, is charged with the responsibility of compiling the geographical names since the names are required primarily for mapping. This is done in close collaboration with the Survey Departments of the States. The country is virtually covered with maps on the scale of 1/50,000 and the standardization of geographical names is based on this map series. The Standardization of Geographical Names is, however, not confined to the names of settlements and features appearing on the 1/50,000 map series. It extends to names on large scale maps including maps for cities and towns.

Before Nigeria attained independence, the spelling of geographical names was based on the system of the United Kingdom Royal Geographical Society. This necessitated the use of digraphs and, as a result, some of the names were anglicized. Some of the names were also wrongly recorded, due possibly to the lack of knowledge of the local languages by the collectors of names. The standardization of geographical names is now based on local names, and the collection of names is being undertaken by those with local knowledge of the particular area being dealt with and the names are further cross-checked by the local government authority. This has, however, created problems because of the variety of languages spoken in Nigeria. At present the number of Nigerian languages already identified lies between 380 and 390. This number may slightly alter as either new languages are discovered or

as it becomes possible to join several speech forms together as dialects of one and the same language. But it has been claimed that whatever happens the ultimate number of Nigerian languages will not be less than 350, excluding the dialectal variations within a language. Of this large number of languages only a very small percentage have been adequately studied to the extent that it could be said that there is a practical orthography available for each of them. Another problem resulting from the large number of languages is that of different spelling conventions for different languages. It is known that there are records of literary activity in well over 70 different Nigerian languages. In the circumstances, the task of standardization of geographical names is far from easy. It has, however, been agreed, in accordance with the principle already adopted by the United Nations Conference on Geographical Names to continue with the romanization of place names and that where it was considered necessary to resort to the use of diacritical marks.

A third edition of the Gazetteer of Geographical Names for Nigeria was produced and printed but it has to be withdrawn because it was caught with the decision to adopt the names used by the local inhabitants and not those anglicized or adopted by our former colonial masters. There were also the major administrative changes due to the creation of additional States in the country. The Gazetteer has now been completely revised and the names are based on the 1/50,000 topographical maps series. It is now at the final stage of processing for publication.