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  on the Standardization of
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REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR
REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON PROGRESS IN THE STANDARDIZATION
OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE FOURTH CONFERENCE

Standardization of geographical names in Ethiopia **

Paper submitted by Ethiopia

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**   Prepared by the Ethiopian Mapping Agency

ETHIOPIAN MAPPING AGENCY

STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

IN

ETHIOPIA

AUGUST 1987

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to the achievements scored in science and technology, improvements in standard of living, education, health condition and transportation had changed life so much. This development is not without its effects which are felt in other important spheres of life. Production and distribution patterns improved, ideas and exchange of views have been made possible, commercial and business activities developed at a rate unheard of before. All these hard won achievements and an unreserved endeavor still for further improvements of life in combination call for the development of comprehensible and standard system of information. Improved information, in turn, demands for improved and integrated system of data collection, compilation and analysis. It is here, therefore, that standardization of geographical names becomes necessary and important.

This is so because names of places, apart from being mere object of study, could also be useful means in the effort of revealing past environmental facts and influences of the later on the naming process. Simple observation of place names in Ethiopia, for example, provides ready evidences as to the role played by environmental factors as wind, water, vegetation, topography, climate and socio-economic variables (see Annex I).

The problem of standardizing geographical names is one of the life aspects seeking solution. The need for standardization had been felt since long time ago that the solution to the problem, like in other spheres, required concerted effort of all concerned. To this effect, the international community has been working hard. Many conferences held so far, bear witness to the efforts made to arrive at practical solutions and the applications of the results achieved in geographical names. The support given and committments made in the subsequent years by all member states for the realization of the resolution passed by various conferences the UN indicated the willingness of nations to work for a common goal.

Ethiopia also being one of the member states of the UN bears the responsibilit: of standardizing geographical names within its own borders. In recognition of the need, the country has made repeated attempts since recent past and is still doing so. But, because mapping and geographical research activities are recent phenomena in the country, the consideration given to standardization of geographica names remains at its minimal level. Thus the development in this sphere, despite

some sporadic past efforts, is still lagging behind.

This short account on standardization of geographical names tries to survey the attempts made, achievements scored and future plans devised to attain further progress in the area within the context of Ethiopia.

Status of Standardization of Geographical Names in Ethiopia

Standardization of geographical names in the past was not known to the people of the early days. It seems, probably, lack of geographical knowledge in its proper sense together with lack of interest might have counted for the ngligence and the absence of recorded documents on the subjects. Nevertheless, attempts to deduce relevant facts about mapping activities with particular emphasis on geographical names will be made here after from historically important materials.

It is, however, impossible to think of early civilizations of Ethiopia without surveying, mapping and geographical activities. Measuring mechanisms and engineering works either explicitly or implicitly involved. Accounts of so many battle fields, trade centers and routes, mountains, rivers, castles and monuments on engraved stone tablets and facts of architectural importance of Axumite, Lalibela and Gonder civilizations still surviving bear living evidences and are of interest to geographical research works. For instance, resemblance of names still surviving in the country to names of neighbouring states and places across the Red Sea, more or less, indicate the exogenous influence of language on the naming process of names in the old Ethiopia. *

The records of place names and geographical features of the European travellers and explorers between the fifteenth and mid twentieth centuries are also of a particular interest to the study of geographical names.

Mapping and geographical activities worked out during Menilik's period and W.W.I. by Italians constitute early efforts made to produce indigenous maps for practical purposes. In all of these maps, geographical names appeared only to serve the objectives of showing location of places without

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* see comment under annex I

any consideration for standardization. For example, names on Italian produced
map, at a scale 1:1, 000, 000 , were spelt in line with the rules of Italian
language. While it still serves as reference material, invites confusion and
misunderstandings when used along with recently produced maps. However, geographi-
cal place names in the offical language are unique and unambigious.

Nevertheless, mapping and geographical research activities in general and
standardization of geographical names in particular in their proper sense started
recently after the establishment of the Mapping and Geography Institute (renamed
now Ethiopian Mapping Agency) in 1952.

The production of various scale maps already in progress together with the
developed transliteration system (see annex VI) clearly indicate the emphasis
and importance being given to mapping and geographical works.

The future also, holds out for geographical and mapping development promising
prospects. The materialization of the necessary organization together with the
completion of the various levels of gazetteer production will raise the status
of standardization of geographical names one more step.

Achievements

However, later developments of gazetteer production, although far from
complete, could be cited as a good start for a country like Ethiopia where there
wasn't one. Under the title " Classification and Codification of the Administration
Sub-Division of Ethiopia" produced by the then Ministry of Land Reform in 1960
and the subsequent effort of the American Board of Geographical Names hold
significant place in the development of gazetteer production and geographical
research.

An interdisciplinary committee was set up on the initiation of the Ethiopian
Mapping and Geographical Institute consisting of professionals from various
ministries, agencies and educational institutes. The primary task of the committee,
at first, centered on the screening of fourteen Ethiopian names which had both
national and international importance at the time of the survey (see annex V).
The ultimate objective however, was the establishment of the transliteration
system on the basis of the names selected.

Despite the inherent shortcomings, the establishment of the transliteration system was welcomed as a step forward in the process of the search for practical solutions. As viewed from this point, the transliteration system developed was then accepted and thus approved by the 1963 UN Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa in Kenya.

At the moment, the establishment of a section meant for geographical names and gazetteer production in the Research and Development Service of the Agency is believed to be one more achievement. The section from the outset has already developed its work programme scheduled as short, medium and long terms. The programme designed to carry out the production of advanced name index is slready in progress, particularly, for Menagesha Awraja in Shewa administrative region.

Constraints

The main constraint, so far, remains to be breaks in the development and enforcement of standard system. Among the shortcomings the important ones requiring attention are absence of organization, lack of trained manpower and consciousness.

The provision of reliable information essential for integrated and comprehensive socio-economic development depends on accurate maps, precise statistical and demographic data. To be able to provide information in the form required organizational shortcoming has to be resolved beforehand. Therefore, the absence of organized body with defined national responsibility remains to be a serious set-back at the moment.

The founding of such a responsible organization rests on the availability of trained manpower and resource. Lack of this basic human component in the field under consideration, so far has retarded geographical research.

No less important a role is played by lack of consciousness in dragging implementation of systems developed. Unawarness of the need for standardization of geographical names and the resultant absence of cooperation on the part of the public at large and the specific users in particular have been bottlenecks to the diffusion and execution of the already developed transliteration system.

The gross effect of all these bottlenecks, therefore, counted for some of the practical problems still prevalent in geographical names. The problems still unresolved are:-

1. Double naming and universality of some names as resulted from factors which initiated internal migration (see annex III).

2. Lack and absence of syntax to proper approach of names in local languages as had been used in several maps and publication in foreign languages bear the essence of the problem. Ras Dashen and Magdela, for instance, are good representatives with each in five different forms (see annex IV). On the other hand, Abijata (lake), Addis Abeba & Asmera (cities), Wello and Wellega (administrative regions) are wrongly spelt as Abiyata, Addis Ababa, Asmara, Welo and Welega or Wollega respectively in foreign languages.

Conclusion

Ethiopia, being a multi-lingual country, consists of more than seventy major languages. This widely varied country with its multiple tongues has to put in more effort in order to secure a far-reaching transliteration system to foreign languages that could be of a great service to names in other local languages as well.

In addition to Amharic, the official language, fifteen other major languages appeared to the forefront especially after the launching of the national literacy campaign. Since then these languages have become important tools in the development of literature and have been serving as media of instruction in their respective localities.

The government of Socialist Ethiopia, being a member of the UN, is committed to take into action the adoptions and resolutions of its conference. To this effect, it is still resolutely working hard to be able to excute the decisions passed within its teritiorial sovereignty and is ready to do it in the furure too.

In light of the urgency and, above all, the pressing necessity for standard system, the need for organizing a body that can handle national responsibility is being seriously considered at the moment. The type and nature of the organization may vary from country to country depending on the nature of

human components constituting the body to be formed. The founding of such a body, therefore, may, undoubtedly, help prevent not only wastage of time and money but will play decisive role in curbing the confusing situation still prevalent in most research works.

Annex I Example of Names of Places after Environmental and Human Variables

a. Names of Places after Water

Arba Minch	(forty springs)
Bahir Dar	(sea shore)
Chew Bahir	(salt sea)
Mai Chew	(salty water)
Mai Idaga	(water market)
Mai Tsemir	(muddy water)
Mai Nebri	(water of leopards)

b. Names of Places after Wind

Nefas Mewcha	(exit of wind)
Nefasit	(windy)

c. Names of Places after climate

Dega Ebenat

Dega Melza

Kola Ebenat

Woyna Dega

d. Names of Places after Vegetation

Addis Abeba	(new flower)
Adi Dare	(home of oak)
Adi Arkai	(home of bamboo)
Dembidolo	
Mai Seraw	

e. Names of Places after Topography

Lalai Adiabo	(Upper Adiabo)
Lalai Mai Chew	(Upper Mai Chew)
Tahtai Adiabo	(Lower Adiabo)
Tahtai Mai Chew	((Lower Mai Chew)

f. Names of Places after Cave

Birhan Washa		(bright cave)
Chelema	"	(dark cave)
Lam	"	(cow's cave)
Lesan	"	(sound's cave)

g. Socio-Economic Variables used as Prefixes in Names of Places

Adi (place of)

Debre (monastry of/ church of)

Edaga/Idaga (market place)

Emba/Amba (the mount of, fort of)

Enda/Inda (house of/ living place of)

Annex II.
Names Bearing Religious and Cultural Influence

a. **Biblical Names**

   Debre Zeyt

   Nazareth

b. **Religious Names**

   Agere Mariam   (the country of Mary)
   Agere Selam   (country of peace)
   Fisha Genet   (pleasure of Heaven)
   Mekane Selam   (place of peace)

Annex III:-

Names Reflecting Universality

Kombolcha   (in Wello region)
    "   (in Bale   ")
    "   (in Hararge   ")
    "   (in Wellega   ")
Borena   (in Wello   ")
    "   (in Sidamo   ")

Annex IV:- Example of the Same Names
Spelt in Different Forms

Ras Dascian   Megdela
Ras Dajan   Mekdala
  " Dashan   Meqdela
  " Deschan   Megdala
  " Dejan   Meqedela

Annex V Fourteen Place Names Considered by
the Committee

Addis Ababa	Dessie	Haile
Adowa	Dire Dawa	Harar
Asmara	Eriterea	Massawa
Assab	Ethiopia	Selassie
Denakil	Gonder	

ETHIOPIAN MAPPING AGENCY

Amharic — To English — Transliteration — System

Annex VI

1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
Ha	Hu	Hi	Ha	He	Hi	Ho
Le	Lu	Li	La	Le	Li	Lo
Ha	Hu	Hi	Ha	He	Hi	Ho
Me	Mu	Mi	Ma	Me	Mi	Mo
Se	Su	Si	Sa	Se	Si	So
Re	Ru	Ri	Ra	Re	Ri	Ro
Se	Su	Si	Sa	Se	Si	So
She	Shu	Shi	Sha	She	Shi	Sho
K'e	K'u	K'i	K'a	K'e	K'i	K'o
Be	Bu	Bi	Ba	Be	Bi	Bo
Te	Tu	Ti	Ta	Te	Ti	To
Che	Chu	Chi	Cha	Che	Chi	Cho
Ha	Hu	Hi	Ha	He	Hi	Ho
Ne	Nu	Ni	Na	Ne	Ni	No
Nye	Nyu	Nyi	Nya	Nye	Nyi	Nyo
a	u	i	a	e	i	o
Ke	Ku	Ki	Ka	Ke	Ki	Ko
He	Hu	Hi	Ha	He	Hi	Ho
We	Wu	Wi	Wa	We	Wi	Wo
a	u	i	a	e	i	o
Ze	Zu	Zi	Za	Ze	Zi	Zo
Zhe	Zhu	Zhi	Zha	Zhe	Zhi	Zho
Ye	Yu	Yi	Ya	Ye	Yi	Yo
De	Du	Di	Da	De	Di	De
Je	Ju	Ji	Ja	Je	Ji	Jo
Ge	Gu	Gi	Ga	Ge	Gi	Go
T'e	T'u	T'i	T'a	T'e	T'i	T'o
Ch'e	Ch'u	Ch'i	Ch'a	Ch'e	Ch'i	Ch'o
P'e	P'u	P'i	P'a	P'e	P'i	P'o
Ts'e	Ts'u	Ts'i	Ts'a	Ts'e	Ts'i	Ts'o
Ts'e	Ts'u	Ts'i	Ts'a	Ts'e	Ts'i	Ts'o
Fe	Fu	Fi	Fa	Fe	Fi	Fo
Pe	Pu	Pi	Pa	Pe	Pi	Po

Diphthongs

Kwe	Kwi	Kwa	Kwe	Kwi
Gwe	Gwi	Gwa	Gwe	Gwi
K'we	K'wi	K'wa	K'we	K'wi
Hwe	Hwi	Hwa	Hwe	Hwi

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

VOWELS

1st form	e	as in English	Met
2nd	u	" " "	You
3rd	i	" " "	Mayne
4th	a	" " "	Father
5th	e	" " "	May
6th	i	" " "	Sin
7th	o	" " "	On

CONSONANTS

G	as in	Good
J	" "	John
Ny	" "	Señor
Zh	" "	Measure

SOUNDS NOT FOUND IN ENGLISH

Letters followed by an apostrophe (') require explosive enunciation (Example K', T', Ch', P', Ts')

SPECIAL NOTES

(1) Sounds identical to fourth form sound

(2) The vowel of the 6th form "i" is eliminated in spelling except when needed in Pronunciation (Mengisti = Mengist)

NAME (as spelt on original map or manuscript)

————————————————————————————————

TRANSLITERATED NAME ————————————————

NAME IN AMHARIC ————————————————————

LOCATION
- ADM. REG. ————————————————
- AWRAJA ————————————————
- WEREDA ————————————————

COORDINATES : LAT. —————— LONG. ——————————

DEFINITION ————————————————————————

SOURCE ————————————————————————————

REMARKS ————————————————————————————