How to collect names information: office preparation, multilingualism

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Manual for the
national standardization
of geographical names

United Nations Group of
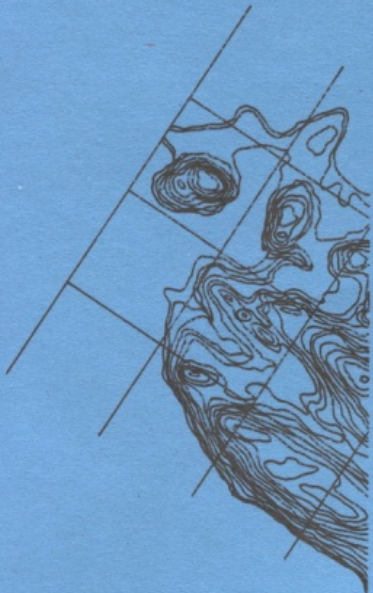Experts on Geographical Names

Economic & Social Affairs

United Nations

VIII
Researching
name
problems

IX Field
collection of
names

GUIDE TO
the field collection
of native
geographical names

Canadian Permanent Committee on
Geographical Names

Provisional Edition

-Preparing the interviews

-Understanding changing traditions

-Conducting the interviews

Office preparation prior to fieldwork:

- Sources
- Features
- Policies
- Practical considerations
- Language aspects
- Pronunciation
- Multilingual aspects

1 Sources

- Study existing files from previous fieldwork
- Study existing maps and aerial photographs
- Compare previous aerial photographs with new imagery
- Study statistical sources (Census material)
- collect complaints from customers and

  collect reactions from government workers as to mistakes and inconsistencies

inconsistencies

a) More than one name exists in local oral usage for the same feature (allonyms)

b) local oral usage applies the same name to two or more different features (homonyms)

c) there is local disagreement in the spelling of the name

d) local records differ from local oral usage

e) names in topographic maps differ from local usage

f) maps apply the names to features different from the one to which the name is applied locally

2. Feature classification

■ One has to know what topographic features need names on the map! For instance:

-Settlements

-Other man-mad objects

-Traffic infrastructure

-Terrain features

-Hydrography

-administrative areas

-physical areas

-conservation areas

2. Features

- Feature classification necessary
- Each category should be well-defined
  - ◆ streams vs. canals
  - ◆ swamps vs. marshes
- Good practice to prepare a glossary of generic terms* prior to going into the terrain (*see UNGEGN glossary)
- Such a glossary could also contain recurrent non-generic elements (like north, south, upper, lower, small, large, old, new, etc.)
- Avoid feature distinctions based on size (because it will be difficult in the field to assess the relative size):
  - ◆ creeks vs. rivers
  - ◆ hills vs. mountains

3.Practical considerations

- Awareness of orthographic rules

- Awareness of office practice of using hyphens in names, or in breaking off names

- What to do with *allonyms**, *homonyms**?

- How to deal with *abbreviations* or *composite names**?
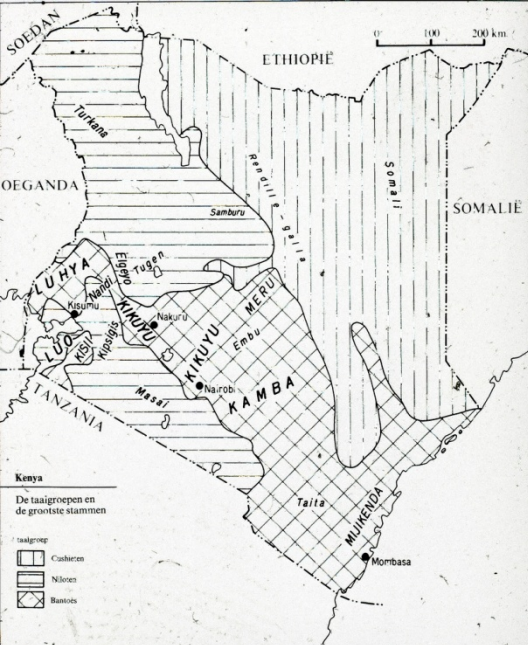
- When to use capitals instead of lower case letters?

* See Glossary on the UNGEGN web site.
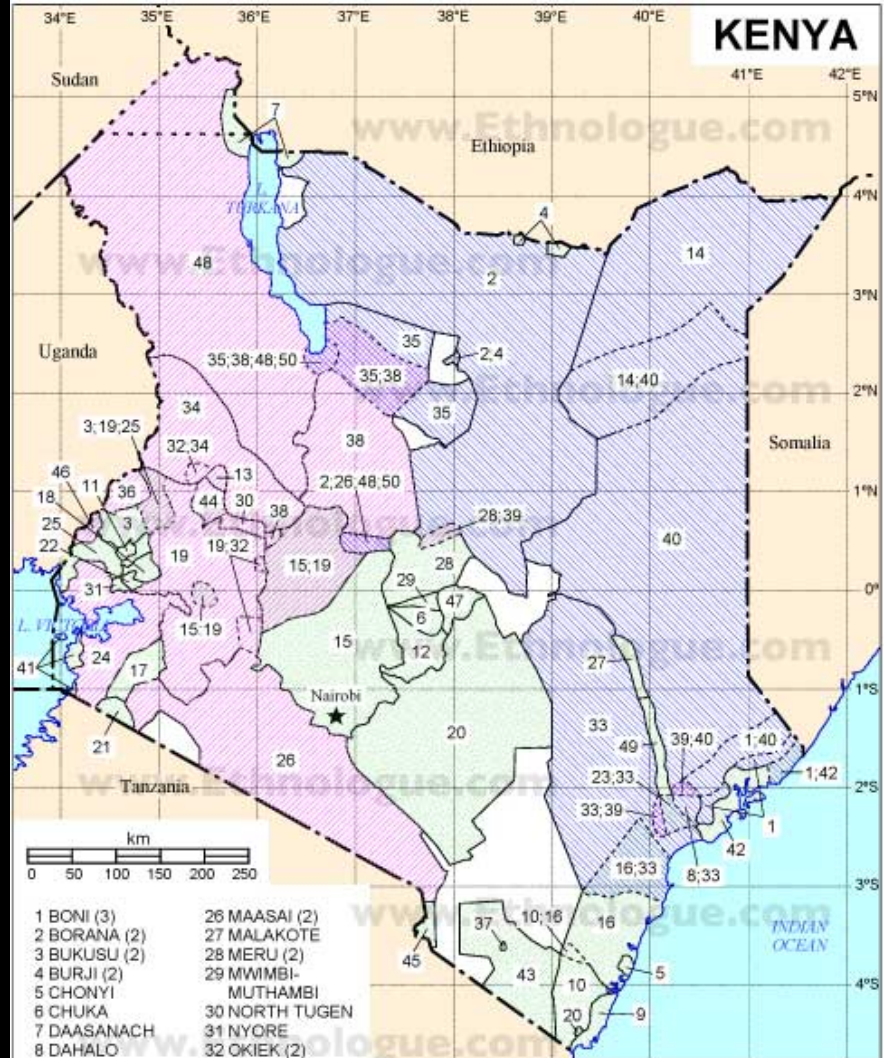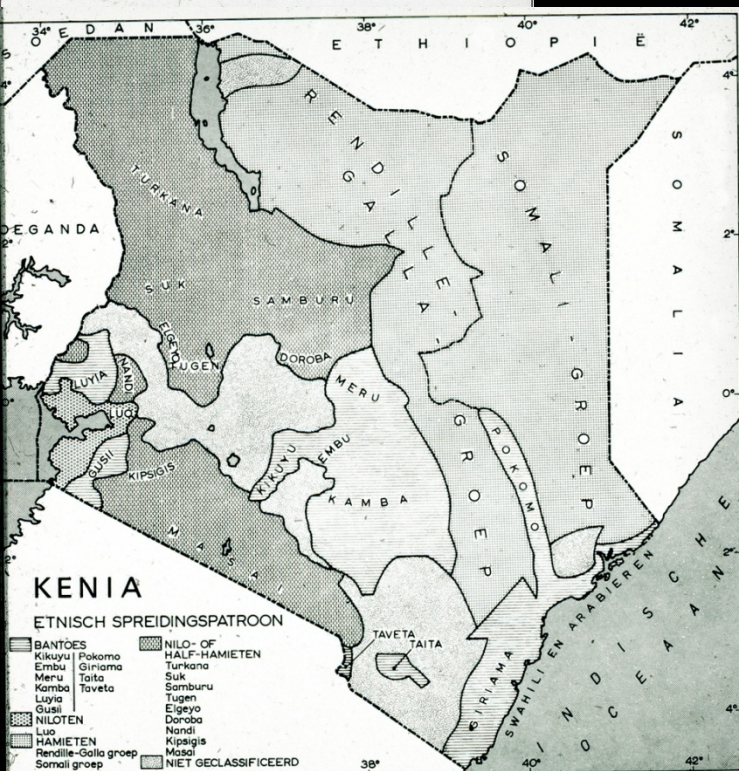
4. Policies to decide on in advance:

- Avoid names publicizing brands or products
- Only name features after people already dead
- What to do if names change over time? (in certain parts of the world villages might be named for their chief: a new chief would mean a new name.)
- What to do with local variation in dialects? Render local pronunciation or standard orthography?
- Local generics or official generics? (The official word for *river* in the Indonesian language is *sungai*. But local languages might have local words for *river*.)
- What to do when no names exist?
- What to do with unwritten languages/special scripts?

5. Language aspects

- Study location of linguistic boundaries in your area on a Language map
- Language boundaries shown in maps should not be taken for granted.
- Linguistic assistance required! Hire an interpreter if needed. Also for assessing the meaning of the word, which might help in finding the correct orthography
- Linguistic assistance needed to assess correct word form (without prepositions, in definite nominative case or locative, etc)
- Gender aspects

Language maps

6. Representation of pronunciation

- How to record pronunciation?

- Potentially confusing phonemes – those being similar to the toponymist's ears – should be identified.

- Choose a standard notation of pronunciation!

- Concentrate on (combinations of) letters that represent more than one phoneme (*Enschede* contains the vowel *e* three times but their pronunciations are not similar. The first *e* is pronounced like *e* in *men*. The second *e* is like *e* in *wonderful*, and the third one is like *ay*

7. Multilingual areas

- In principle, all other factors being equal, each linguistic community has the right to have its names recorded on the map.

- From the language map find the concentration of the language communities

- Try to assess their relative numbers

- Try to represent the linguistic pattern with the name forms selected

- Even if not incorporated on the map the toponymic heritage of all linguistic groups should be preserved.

Preparatory work

- Study instructions for surveyors meant to collect names (see e.g.Chapter VIII, IX in the UNGEGN manual)

- Know what name categories should be collected (+ definitions of those categories)

- Know what sources have to be consulted

- Instruct on the way the names have to be rendered on the name model

- Sometimes, height data have to be included on maps

8. Preliminary logistics

- Prepare cartographic material, with question marks for issues to deal with

- Check administrative boundaries, for introduction to local officials (permits/cooperation)

- Prepare fill-in name forms, recording equipment, recording computers/handhelds or field notebook

- Try to locate informants in advance, and inform local officials in advance