Everyone Benefits

Place names can identify and reflect culture, heritage and landscape. Correct use of accurate place names can provide benefits to local, national and international communities engaged in:

- trade and commerce;
- population censuses and national statistics;
- property rights and cadastre;
- urban and regional planning;
- environmental management—sustainable development and conservation;
- natural disaster relief, emergency preparedness and receipt of aid;
- security strategy and peacekeeping operations;
- search and rescue operations;
- map and atlas production;
- automatic navigation;
- tourism;
- communications, including postal and news services.

Consistent Use of Place Names

Consistent use of accurate place names is an essential element of effective communication worldwide and supports socio-economic development, conservation and national infrastructure.


UNGEGN promotes consistent use worldwide of accurate place names.

Looking Ahead

To encourage the consistent use worldwide of accurate place names, UNGEGN is involved in:

- outreach to countries that do not have name standardization mechanisms, databases (digital or manual) or national gazetteers;
- supporting the development of single romanization systems;
- dissemination and wider use of nationally authorized names;
- development of communication and training tools.

How to Progress

Success of UNGEGN programmes is largely dependent upon the implementation of national and local activities by individual countries. Members of UNGEGN act as catalysts to facilitate the required developments and changes to place name infrastructures.

More Information

For more information about UNGEGN programmes and publications, please contact:

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How Consistency Helps

National programmes to standardize names of cities, villages, and land and water features offer many benefits. Trade and the provision of essential services are improved at national and international levels. Accurate use of place names assists in resolving political pressures and in promoting peace among nations.

For example, imagine the obstacles in expanding a product or service into a country which uses a different alphabet, has many locations referred to by several names in different languages, or does not have a centralized national place name register accessible internationally.

Consider the difficulty in delivering food quickly to a town in a war-torn country or a natural disaster area if the town is known by different names and recorded in different languages on international, national and local maps and legal documents. In such cases, relief organizations, the media and local administrators cannot share the same frame of reference.

Consistent place naming can make a difference.

Making It Happen—UNGEVN

The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names includes names experts, cartographers, geographers, historians, linguists, planners and surveyors.

Members are responsible for developing and promoting UNGEVN programmes and activities.

Did you know that Cape Town, Kaapstad, Ekapa, Le Cap and Kapkaupunki are all names for the same place? Standardization helps to reduce the confusion that can result when such variations are used interchangeably across different language texts.

UNGEVN Programmes

UNGEVN has developed programmes to:

- stimulate the establishment of an authority in each country for national name standardization, giving particular attention to issues associated with multi-lingual areas and names used by indigenous peoples;
- provide or encourage training for countries wishing to form national names authorities, or to create place name registers;
- promote the application of nationally standardized names on maps and in documents;
- encourage dissemination of standardized names through publication of national gazetteers (alphabetical lists of names with coordinates and other data);
- promote development of national automated data processing capabilities and international technology exchange;
- encourage collaboration between countries on the standardization of names for transboundary features;
- promote the use of standardized terminology in connection with place names.

UNGEVN place name activity supports United Nations goals, including:

- maintaining international peace and security;
- developing friendly relations among nations;
- achieving international cooperation in solving economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems;
- harmonizing the actions of nations to achieve these ends.