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Geographical Names**

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Item 4 c) of the provisional agenda *

Reports: Activities on the standardization of geographical names in Africa

Report Of The Task Team For Africa

Submitted by Coordinator of the Task Team for Africa **

Summary:

Like other UNGEGN working groups, the activity of the Task Team for Africa has been very slow over the last two years due to the COVID pandemic.

Nevertheless, several positive results have been recorded, notably those obtained during the GGIM/Africa meeting held in Addis Ababa from 24 to 28 October at the ECA/UN headquarters.

This meeting which saw a strong participation of high officials and decision makers of African cartography has reserved an important part of its agenda to the issue of standardization of geographical names.

Indeed, during this meeting, an important communication was presented on the issue of geographical names in Africa focusing on the difficulties encountered in the effective management of this theme by African countries.

After a rich and lively debate, participants stressed the importance of standardization of geographical names and expressed their desire to revitalize existing structures or to create new ones for countries that do not yet have them.

On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that several countries have set up new very active Toponymy Commissions, like Mauritania and Senegal, to which we have given them all our encouragement and our availability to help them and provide them with all the expertise of UNGEGN, which they need.

Also, several delegations have been contacted, including the representative of Burundi, who informed us that the recent toponymic commission of his country is very active, but nevertheless, this one, due to lack of experience, especially methodological, is experiencing some difficulties for a better efficiency; we have assured him of our availability to also provide all the necessary assistance.

In addition, other countries, which do not yet have a Commission, have committed themselves, that they will proceed as soon as they return to their respective countries, to the creation of structures in charge of toponymic standardization, following the example of

* GEGN.2/2023/1

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Djibouti, Comoros, to whom we have promised to also provide them with all necessary documentation.

Similarly, it should be noted that among the recommendations adopted at the end of the deliberations of the GGIM/Africa, it was decided, after having examined the item relating to the standardization of geographical names and after having taken cognizance of the report of the Chairman of the Task Force for Africa of the United Nations Group of Experts on the standardization of geographical names to promote and elevate the already existing Sub-Working Group on Standardization of Geographical Names in Africa into a Group on the same level as the other four existing Groups at the GGIM/Africa level.

Finally, the Task Team would like to underline that the results we have achieved during the work of GGIM/Africa, are largely due to Mr. André Nouergouma, who spared no effort to bring us all the help and encouragement we needed; may he be thanked here.

REMINDER OF THE ACTIONS OF THE TASK TEAM FOR AFRICA SINCE ITS CREATION IN 2004:

Considering the specificity of Africa and the difficulties encountered there, a Task Team for Africa was set up in 2004 and was in charge of diagnosing the difficulties encountered by African countries as well as proposing adequate solutions for a better management of geographical names in Africa.

Among the operations carried out by this Task Team for Africa/UNGEEN, in addition to a sustained work of sensitization of the different African countries, we can mainly mention the following actions:

- ✓ The holding of the 25th Session of UNGEEN on African soil (Nairobi) in 2009.
- ✓ Organization of several training courses in different African countries :
 - 2003: *Khartoum (Sudan) and Algiers (Algeria)*
 - 2004: *Maputo (Mozambique)*
 - 2006: *Maputo (Mozambique)*
 - 2007: *Tunis (Tunisia)*
 - 2008: *Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)*
 - 2009: *Nairobi (Kenya) organized jointly with the 25th UNGEEN in Nairobi on the initiative of the Task Team for Africa)*
 - 2010: *Yaoundé (Cameroon)*
 - 2013: *Tananarive (Madagascar)*
 - 2014: *Algiers (Algeria)*
 - 2015: *Tunis (Tunisia)*
 - 2016: *Constantine (Algeria)*

Participation in CODI and Codis meetings, organized by UN/ECA and currently in GGIM/Africa meetings.

ACTIONS REGISTERED AT THE LEVEL OF UN/ECA :

This theme of standardization of geographical names has been included very early in the agenda of the UNECA work; indeed, it has always been included in the agendas of CODI and CODISTE as well as during the former Cartographic Conferences for Africa and now in GGIM/Africa:

ACTIONS REGISTERED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH UN/ECA :

- Promotion and encouragement of the use of the toponymic management software called 'GEONYME' established by UN/ECA.
- Training sessions and workshops organized in partnership with the Task Team for Africa and the UNGEGN Training Working Group.
- In 2010, a recommendation from StatCom-Africa, UN/ECA, called for the preparation of a work program, in collaboration with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), to determine a naming policy for African countries.
- At the 26th Session of the UNGEGN, held in Vienna in 2011, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) committed to promoting the standardization of geographical names in Africa.

On the margins of this 26 Session of UNGEGN and following this commitment of UNECA, a roundtable discussion was organized in collaboration with the Task Team for Africa, during which participants supported the call of StatCom-Africa, UN/ECA and proposed to deepen and broaden the discussion in the form of a subsequent meeting of African and UNGEGN Experts.

- Following this recommendation, a Workshop, bringing together UNGEGN and UN/ECA Experts, was thus organized in Gaborone in November 2011 with the objective to diagnose and take stock of the situation in Africa, to review the progress, or lack of progress on toponymic activities to recommend the way(s) to follow, including actions for African Institutions, notably UNECA, the African Development Bank, the African Union Commission and finally to recommend specific activities that UN/ECA should consider for the coming years.

At the end of the Gaborone meeting, a roadmap was developed and adopted by the UN/ECA StatCom-Africa III at its meeting in Cape Town/South Africa in January 2012, known as the Gaborone Action Plan (GAP).

"Conclusions and Recommendations of the Third Session of the Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa III) (18-23 January 2012 (Cape Town, South Africa))"

6- Having examined reports on (i) Gaborone Action Plan on Geographical Names Activities in Africa and (ii) Data Collection and Management Proposal for Africa; (iii) Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Africa; (iv) Assessment of the Status of CRVS.

ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

The Statistical Commission for Africa:

- 1. Endorse the Gaborone Action Plan*
- 2. Calls upon NSOs to ensure that coding systems are provided in the assignment and standardization of geographical names and advocate the use of such codes whenever data systems are being developed.*
- 3. Calls upon ECA, AUC, AfDB and other partners to support the work of the Task Team for Africa in particular and geographical names activities in general."*

After having established a diagnosis of the situation in Africa in which it appeared that:

- 1) Few African countries have place name management structures: Out of the 55 member states of the African Union, only 22 countries have a geographical names management structure!

The paradox is that some African countries have been precursors in the establishment of National Commissions for geographical names like Liberia which even before the creation of the Group of Experts of the United Nations, had already in 1955, a National Commission for the standardization of geographical names! Cameroon in 1968, Botswana in 1967 etc.!

- 2) Very low participation in UNGEGN conferences for a better handling of this theme.
- 3)- Lack of awareness on the benefits of standardization of geographical names at the level of decision makers.
- 4)- Lack of training
- 5) - Lack of means

To remedy these dysfunctions in the management of the standardization of geographical names in Africa, the Gaborone plan recommends mainly to undertake the following actions:

- Sensitize politicians, mapping agencies, statistical offices, other government departments on the impact of geographical names.
- Sensitize the public and the media on the benefits of using standardized geographical names.
- Encourage African governments to establish or revitalize national names authorities
- Establish and communicate contacts for and within countries between ministries, universities, etc.
- Organize courses and workshops on standard geographical names
- Encourage partners to sponsor the participation of African Experts in regional workshops and global conferences such as UNGEGN Sessions and UNCSGN
- Organize meetings of African experts
 - Organize meetings of national experts to coordinate activities and share experiences.
- Parallel events of StatCom, CODIST (currently GGIM/Africa) and similar intergovernmental bodies of the ECA and the African Union.
 - At the national level: integrate the theme of geographical names into school and university curricula at all levels.
- Sensitize the media on this subject.
- AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL:
 - Consider the African day on geographical names
 - Include this theme in the agenda of the StatCom and other meetings of similar organizations.
 - Encourage countries to establish or reorganize structures on names authorities
 - UN/ECA should finalize and disseminate in Africa the GeoNyms database management software which is currently in pilot phase in some countries
 - Most geospatial information projects in Africa are funded by development partners: Lobby governments to include this theme in the activities of such projects
 - Improve the funding situation for activities.

CONCLUSION:

In accordance with the UNGEGN strategic plan, it is strongly recommended in partnership with UN/ECA to revitalize the so-called Gaborone plan.

It is also with great satisfaction, thanks to the work of the Task Team for Africa /UNEGN, that we have recorded the creation of new Toponymy Commissions in Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Senegal, Burundi; other countries have also committed themselves to do the same.

Despite these positive results, the road is still long and the commitment of UNGEGN and UN/ECA is still more than necessary to achieve the desired goals.