

KSA National Committee on Geographical Names: Challenges and Opportunities

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The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia acknowledges the high importance of geographical names, as they are considered one of the main components of geospatial information that supports and enables many different sectors. In view of the multiplicity of government agencies concerned with place names in the Kingdom, in addition to the presence of a number of researchers and those interested in geographical names, it was important to unite the efforts between these agencies, ministries, and other relevant stakeholders

Accordingly, the National Committee on Geographical Names was established in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and based in the General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information (GEOSA) as the latter assumes the task of supervising the National Committee for Geographical Names by virtue of specialization and regulates the survey, geospatial information, and imaging sector in the Kingdom. The committee aims to unite the efforts related to geographical names in the Kingdom in terms of writing, validating, spelling, and All aspects related to its national standard, and preparing their database.

The National Committee for Geographical Names consists of 21 government agencies, responsible for standardizing geographical names in the Kingdom, collecting and publishing geographical names, and preparing their database and a national index dictionary. The National Committee for Geographical Names represents the Kingdom in local and international conferences and meetings regarding geographical names.

The National Committee for Geographical Names in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia strives to strengthen its relations with international organizations, committees, and technical teams to

ensure the achievement of common strategic goals, which in turn are reflected in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A review of the activities made by the National Committee on Geographical Names shows that the committee is achieving its objectives. With the General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information as a headquarters for both the national committee for geographical names and the national geospatial center, staff members of both entities will be working at the same authority. Since the geographical names are supposed to be an indispensable element in the database for national places, they need to be in controlled and rigorous databases made by the government agency hosted in the national geospatial center. We would like to emphasize that making an inventory of geographical names in a database is a starting phase due to be followed by other phases, which is the role played by other government agencies represented in the national committee.

There are some challenges facing the National Committee on Geographical Names, including:

- The National Committee on Geographical Names is still in its infancy;
- KSA occupies a very big area;
- Academic references are limited and professionals in documenting geographical names are lacking in number;
- The common Arabic system (Romanization) for sign and boards of roads, streets, squares, etc. is applied;
- English has been in use for writing names in indexes and databases for decades

To meet these challenges, the National Committee on Geographical Names, in collaboration with its member government agencies, is preparing a governance process for the rules regulating the use of geographical names in the Kingdom, as well as reaching out with the academia and the industry to enhance the technical capabilities and build the national capacities specialized in collecting and documenting geographical names. As well as continuing the development of the Romanization which has been approved at the UN experts' group on geographical names in its meeting held in 2017.