

**SOUTH AFRICAN GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES COUNCIL (SAGNC)**  
**PRESENTER: MR IRWIN LANGEVELD**

**SOUTH AFRICA'S EFFORTS TO SUPPORT GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
AS CULTURAL HERITAGE**



**sport, arts & culture**

Department:  
Sport, Arts and Culture  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**Inspiring A Nation Of Winners**

# INTRODUCTION

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- Grateful for the opportunity to talk about **SA's contribution to the Working Group efforts** to raise awareness of **the importance of safeguarding geographical names as intangible cultural heritage**.
- Humbled by the Working Group's **acknowledgement of the ongoing efforts of South Africa in contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage in our communities** and by this invitation to highlight our practice
- In participating we are **keen to learn even more about key aspects of geographical names as cultural heritage**
- Highlight the **technical, economic, social, and cultural benefits** of standardization of geographical names
- South Africa is deeply **committed to redressing historical imbalances and celebrating cultural diversity** through **geographical naming**.

# GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES AS CULTURAL HERITAGE

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- The field of **geographical names standardization** in South Africa has experienced **major transformation over the past 30 years of democracy**.
- This transformation has been **underpinned by recognition of indigenous and marginalized cultural heritage** through geographical names standardization.
- **Indigenous peoples have the right to** revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places, and persons.
- **Colonial and apartheid** naming practices often **erased indigenous identities**.
- The right to use one's own language and geographical names is a **basic human right, ratified by the leading groups such as UNESCO**.

# POLICY, LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

- **The Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture plays an important role in preserving South Africa's cultural Heritage through the standardization and transformation of geographical names.**
- This responsibility is **executed via the South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC)**, an advisory body established under the South African Geographical Names Council Act (Act No 118 of 1998).
- The Department **provides secretarial services** to the South African Geographical Names Council, an advisory body that facilitates name changes by consulting with communities to advise the Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture.
- The **SAGNC's mandate includes standardising geographical names and advising the Minister on related matters to ensure that place names (geographical names) reflect South Africa's diverse cultural heritage.**



# SOUTH AFRICAN GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES COUNCIL ACT (ACT NO 118 OF 1998)

- Emphasizes **inclusivity, consultation, and restoration** of indigenous names.
- Names must reflect the **linguistic and cultural heritage of all communities**.
- Serious **gaps were identified** in the current legislation.
- The **proposed amendment in the Bill** seeks to (amongst others), **empower Ministers in nine provincial governments to establish a provincial committees** with delegated powers, appoint members **through a public nomination process** and establish an **independent Ministerial Appeals Tribunal** which will adjudicate all appeals.
- A nationwide **public consultation** process on the **Draft Bill** is being conducted across all provinces (with eight [8] out of nine [9] provinces visited so far) to solicit inputs and comments, which is a legislative requirement when amending legislation.
- A **Technical Team** is established to **review and assess public comments** received and present the amendments from the public consultations process, before a **portfolio committee in Parliament**.

# PUBLIC CONSULTATION

- Public consultation is **mandatory**.
- **Multi-stakeholder engagement:** local communities, traditional leaders, municipalities, linguistic experts.
- Names are **vetted and approved at national level and gazetted** by the National Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture.



# SOME PROGRESS IN STANDARDIZATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAME FEATURES

- **Post-1994**, geographical naming became a **tool for transformation, healing, and nation-building**.
- The number of geographical names changed and standardized **since the SAGNC legislation** was promulgated in 1998, is **1 525**.
- **Major towns and cities** across many provinces have been **transformed to reflect the country's diverse languages and heritage**.
- The Department of Sport Arts and Culture has successfully facilitated the **establishment of nine Provincial Geographical Names Committees (PGNCs)** in the nine provinces.





# CASE STUDIES

- **Mbombela** (formerly Nelspruit) – Embracing **Siswati heritage**.
- **Gqeberha** (formerly Port Elizabeth) – Recognition of **Khoisan and isiXhosa culture**.
- Restoration of indigenous names ***Chief Dawid Stuurman International Airport*** change of name from ***Port Eizabeth Airport***.
- Chief Dawid Stuurman was a **Khoi-San activist during the wars of dispossession**.
- He was **imprisoned of Robben Island where he escaped thrice** and subsequently **sent to Australia where he worked without pay and later died and buried in an unmarked grave**





# CAPACITY BUILDING AND AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

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- Capacity building and awareness raising working with the PGNCs and Municipalities **to enable implementation of the policies of the SAGNC at the provincial and local levels.**
- The objective of the public awareness campaign is **to inform the public about the names standardisation process** whose objective is **to address offensive names and names that do not reflect local community values** and the name application process.
- Another objective is **to strengthen internal capacity** of the provincial committee members **in understanding the SAGNC application and governance processes.**
- Most of the **geographical names** in need of revision are under the **custodianship of municipalities and traditional authorities.**
- The **municipalities and traditional authorities are encouraged through these campaigns to start discussions in their areas** of jurisdiction regarding the desirability of the names of their village, town or city to be changed to reflect the languages, culture, and heritage of the previously marginalized communities.

# SOCIAL, CULTURAL, ECONOMIC & TECHNICAL BENEFITS

- **Empowers** communities, restores **dignity**, promotes **multilingualism and diversity**, encourages **local pride** and education about **place-based histories**.
- Geographical names are standardised by authorities throughout the world **to avoid misunderstandings and confusion** caused among others by the following:
  - People tend to give **the same name to different places**.
  - Names may **sound the same** or the **spelling of one place name may be very close** to that of another.
  - Names can be **spelled in different ways**.
  - In a **multilingual country** such as South Africa, **places often have more than one name**.
- Standardising names **affirms a country's history and national identity**.
- It is important to standardise names for purposes such as **trade and commerce, transportation, communications, regional and environmental planning, social services, science and technology, elections and censuses, tourism, disaster management and search and rescue operations**, etc.
- Those who **prepare maps and gazetteers of geographical names**, both nationally and internationally, **depend on** the geographical names authorities of countries to provide them with **standardized names**. .

# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- **Balancing diverse viewpoints** in **contested spaces**.
- **Continuous need** for **broad public education** to increase understanding and reduce resistance.
- Importance of **maintaining naming records** and **historical context**.



# OPPORTUNITIES AND FORWARD VISION

- Greater collaboration with **academia and civil society**.
- **Digital platforms** to archive and showcase naming histories.
- Strengthening **continental and global dialogue on decolonial naming**.



# CLOSING

- Geographical names are **not just labels** - they are **living symbols of identity and belonging**.
- South Africa is **proud to contribute** to this **collective effort to preserve and protect cultural heritage through place naming**.



# THANK YOU...



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