Gaborone Action Plan on Geographical Names Activities in Africa

StatCom-Africa III
Cape Town, South Africa
18 – 23 January 2012

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Outline

• Recall StatCom-Africa II resolution on geographical names
• Why should statisticians be interested in geographical names standardization
• Geographical names standardization outlined
• Findings of the Gaborone consultative workshop
• Recommended actions
• What we request of StatCom-Africa
StatCom-Africa II
Recommendation (A-d)

• ECA to prepare a work programme, in collaboration with United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGE GN), that will lead to authoritative national databases, which will be consolidated into a continental database and feed into the global geographical names database.
Geographical Name Defined

• UNGEGN defines a geographical name as a name applied to a feature on earth
• In general:
  – A proper name (e.g., specific word, combination of words or expression)
  – Used consistently to refer to a particular place, feature or area having a recognizable identity
• Examples:
  – Populated areas (cities, villages)
  – Civil divisions (districts, states)
  – Natural features (streams, mountains)
Why of Interest to Statisticians

- … important mechanisms for linking location-specific statistical data to meaningful identifiers
- Particularly census taking, dissemination of statistical products, and general communication
- Standardization is essential for the cross-referencing and sharing of location-specific data and information to enhance the development of location-based applications and services
“Standardization”

- **UNEGGN Glossary:**
  - standardization, geographical names
  - “The prescription by a names authority of one or more particular names, together with their precise written form, for application to a specific geographical feature, as well as the conditions for their use.”

- **Authority**
  - apply some official status to names – written form
  - how name is applied
  - how used
  - romanization (?)
Standardization means -

- Avoiding –
  - Duplication of names
  - Poorly recorded names
  - Confused applications
  - Lack of quick and
  - Easy access to data
Everyone benefits

- National planning strategies
- Environmental management
- Emergency services coordination
- Utility infrastructures
- Peacekeeping operations
- On-board navigation systems
- Global media
- Tourism
- Map and atlas production
- Trade and commerce
- Property rights and cadastre
- Security strategy
- Communication systems
- Cultural heritage promotion
Lack of standardized data ...

- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
  - Earthquake in Pakistan, 2005
    - problem of delays in providing assistance to remote villages
    - difficult to obtain - standardized names, coordinates of villages, gazetteers, population statistics, maps
Other examples

• Duplication of names in an area
  – Confusion of address for emergency services
    • led to wasted time and loss of life

• Delivery services
  – More efficient with clear and
  – unambiguous place names
    • savings of time and money

• Name changes
  – Lack of information causes confusion in communication (e.g. airline/railway timetables)
The Road to Gaborone

• Following StatCom-Africa II, ECA and UNGEGN’s Task Team for Africa organized a roundtable during 26th Session in Vienna
• Supported StatCom-Africa’s call and proposed more discussion in the form of a meeting of experts
• Government of Botswana agreed to host the Consultative Workshop in Gaborone
FINDINGS OF THE CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP
Status of geographical names activities in Africa

- 16 out of 54 countries have a names authority
- 18 have an institution serving as contact on geographical names without the proper legal mandate from Government.
- No information on remaining 20 countries.
Problems and challenges

- Lack of statutory naming authorities that would provide the institutional framework needed to support the standardization effort.
- Weak names authorities - some countries have names authorities, but they do not function well.
- Model for a names authority - not many countries have taken the initiative to develop their own from good examples that exist.
Problems and challenges (contd)

• Lack of awareness on the value of geographical names standardization to higher levels.
• Weak or non-existent knowledge transfer at national level.
• Low participation in international meetings.
• Little or no geographical names products.
Big Misconception

• It is usually assumed that geographical names standardization is the sole concern of the mapping community
• But it is for everybody
  – Usually coordinated by inter-disciplinary (inter-ministerial or departmental) body
• And now we have the initiative on Global Geographic Information Management (GGIM)
  – Spearheaded by UNSD
• UNSD is also the secretariat of UNGEGN
KEY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED
Improve National Institutional Arrangements

• Increase awareness among politicians, mapping organizations, statistical offices, other government departments on how geographical names impact on their work
• Sensitize the public and media on using standardized geographical names
• Encourage governments of African countries to establish or re-vitalize national names authorities
• Establish and communicate contacts for countries; and within countries between government departments, universities, etc
Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing Activities

- Courses and workshops on geographical names standardization – concepts, skills, etc.
- Encourage partners to sponsor participation in regional workshops and global conferences and events, such as UNGEGN sessions and UNCSGN.
- Organize meetings of national experts to coordinate activities and share knowledge.
- Side events of StatCom, CODIST and similar intergovernmental bodies.
Cooperation and Coordination at all Levels

• National: incorporate into learning programmes at all levels; media campaign

• Regional:
  – Consider African Day on geographical names
  – Include on agenda of StatCom and other relevant meetings of appropriate organizations
  – Encourage countries to establish or revamp names authorities

• Global: Sponsor active participation in relevant international events
Advances in Technology and Communication

- UNECA to finalize and disseminate Africa GeoNyms gazetteer software – undertake pilot projects first
- Ensure GeoNyms adopts international standards for interoperability
- Assist countries to use appropriate ICT to ensure easy access to geographical names by all users
Other Issues

• Also addressed issues specific to revamp and operations of the Botswana Place Names Commission

• On request by ECA, proposed specific items for ECA’s 2012-2013 work programme
WHAT WE ASK OF STATCOM-AFRICA III
Recommendation Proposals

- Endorse the Gaborone Action Plan
- Refer and recommend this Action Plan to CODIST and the Committee of DGs for consideration
- Call on National Statistical Offices to participate actively in the work of their national committees, commissions or appropriate geographical names coordinating bodies
- Call on ECA, AUC, AfDB and other partners to support the work of the Task Team for Africa in particular and geographical names activities in general
Looking to the future … for improved communication and a world at peace

unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo
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