

12 February 2019

Original: English

**United Nations Group of Experts
on Geographical Names
2019 session**

New York, 29 April–3 May 2019

Item 6 (b) of the provisional agenda*

**Cooperation and liaison with other organizations:
Economic Commission for Africa and Committee of
Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management**

Report of the Economic Commission for Africa

Summary**

The full report outlines the activities carried out since the thirtieth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. It includes actions taken as follow-up to adopted resolutions and other activities considered of interest to Member States and partners.

Activities, areas of work and achievements

The African gazetteer project has been part of the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) for many years. Since it began, several major steps have been achieved:

- Development of a standard web-based application (GeoNyms) for recording and validating geographical names.
- Testing and deployment of the GeoNyms application in some Member States, including Madagascar (adoption), Botswana, Egypt and Ethiopia (data recording), Senegal (testing) and Cameroon and Kenya (expression of interest).
- Elaboration of the Gaborone Action Plan on Geographical Names in Africa, which outlines the areas where there is a need for a concerted effort by national, regional and international stakeholders to enable geographical names to be stored and reused in mapping, statistics, census operations and geographic information systems, and for other purposes relating to the government and the private sector.

* GEGN.2/2019/1.

** The full report was prepared by Andre Nonguierma, Economic Commission for Africa. The report will be available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/1st_session_UNGEGN.html, in the language of submission only, as document GEGN.2/2019/58/CRP.58.



- Recognizing and emphasizing GeoNyms as a one of the key pillars of the work of the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Africa.

However, for more than five years, progress has been slow, mainly because of the lack of financial resources to implement some of the activities that have been identified. Recent achievements include:

- Promotion of the significance of geographical names by putting the standardization of geographical names on the agendas of relevant meetings and conferences organized by ECA.
- Presentations and awareness-raising for Member States on the activities of the Task Team for Africa during the most recent meeting of the Regional Committee.

Perspectives, outlook and future plans

ECA has developed a plan to revamp the African gazetteer project and reinvigorate activities in the following domains:

- Face-lifting of the current version of the GeoNyms application to produce a ubiquitous system that meets the requirements of a web-based software tool.
- Organization of regional training workshops to appraise the application and refine its functionalities and data set requirements, and further increase the capacity of Member States to use the tool.
- Assistance to countries through technical advice to test, deploy and adopt the application for the recording and validating of geographical names (toponyms).

Matters and issues for consideration

Although geographical names are critical in tracking and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals, the contribution from African countries to the activities of the Group of Experts is almost insignificant. There is a need to develop strategic guidance on enhancing capacity-building efforts in Africa, together with increased advocacy and public outreach. Activities include:

- Sponsoring the participation of African countries in regional and international workshops and meetings on geographical names.
- Encouraging Member States to consider creating national authorities on geographical names as soon as possible.
- Establishing a task force on geographical names within the existing Working Group on Fundamental Datasets and Standards of the Regional Committee.