

10 April 2023

English

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

2023 session

New York, 1 – 5 May 2023

Item 4(a) of the provisional agenda *

**Reports: Governments on the situation in their countries
and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names**

National Report of South Africa

Submitted by South Africa **

Summary:

The SAGNC has made significant achievements to change the spatial legacy of apartheid. This is possibly the most complicated and contested sphere of our society since 1994. There is a mistaken notion that name changes are aimed at obliterating the culture and heritage of certain sections of South African society. This is not so. This is about social transformation and realizing the ideals contained in the Freedom Charter that says that ‘South Africa belongs to all who live in it’. On a quarterly basis the six provincial representatives, appointed by the Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture convene for a meeting to present the provincial report in terms of progress about name changes and standardisation, legislation, policies, guidelines and strategies, work plans and programmes. This ranges from correction of offensive, derogatory names and misspelt names and storage to dissemination and use of names. It is worth noting that the South African government continues to fully fund this mandate through the allocation from national fiscus and managed by the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture.

Amongst the geographical names of historical significance that were standardized during this period is the name change of *Port Elizabeth to Gqeberha¹ pronounced as Gqeh-be- rhah* in the Eastern Cape Province. This was based on the need for names to transform South Africa’s heritage landscape. The place is seen as a symbol of social cohesion and proved to the apartheid government that people of divergent backgrounds can live together in harmony as one community.

The other place of cultural significance for intangible cultural heritage that was standardized was *the renaming of Pomeroy to Solomon Linda* in KwaZulu-Natal province (*who was* a musical giant and contributed immensely and positively to South African music, particularly in the development and popularisation of the *isicathamiya* music genre. His works form part of the popular Disney film and Broadway musical *Lion King*. This will promote the use of the new names at the national and international levels.

* GEGN.2/2023/1

** Prepared by Palesa Kadi, Chairperson, South African Geographical Names Council

¹ <https://www.sahistory.org.za/place/gqeberha-was-known-port-elizabeth-nelson-mandela-bay>

Full National Report

In accordance with the provisions set out in resolution V/7 of the Fifth United and the Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the South African Geographical Names Council - SAGNC hereby submits the national report as resolved in the Divisional Bureau meeting held on 9th December 2022 and February 2023.

Background information

As aligned to the 6th session of UNGEGN and the laws in South Africa, the SAGNC was established through the South African law in form of the South African Geographical Names Act of 1998 (Act No. 118 of 1998). Section 6(2)(b) of the Act states that “the Department of Arts and Culture should establish and maintain a research section and the necessary infrastructure, incorporating a computerized database, a library, reference material and document archives”. This necessitated the need to develop a Geographical names data management system as a form of compliance with the Act.

In late 2019, the Department developed specifications for the development of South African Geographical Names System (SAGNS). The objective was to develop a system that complied with section 6(2)(b) of The Act. The department launched the SAGNS in September 2022, A system that enable the government to store manage and analyse geographical names data.

Capacity building

The SAGNC has facilitated the establishment of six provincial committees in nine provinces. The Department and the SAGNC took it upon themselves to drive capacity building and awareness campaigns in six of nine provinces in order to build capacity for provinces to be able to enforce the policies of the SAGNC at the provincial level and local levels.

Capacity building focuses on public participation which revolves around the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (PAJA) and the process to be followed when applying for standardization of geographical names which is regulated through the Handbook on geographical names.

The strategic plan and programme of work, 2021–2029, in relation to strategy 2, on relationships, links and connections;

(a) Statistics South Africa

The Statistics Act of 1999 (Act No 6 of 1999) provides for a Statistician-General as head of Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), who is responsible for the collection, production and dissemination of official and other statistics to among others “develop and maintain registers or lists which may be of use in producing statistics”. In achieving its mandate, the organisation relies heavily on the compilation, integration and quality assurance of feature hierarchies of Geospatial Information Frame (GIF), namely dwelling frame, enumeration areas and place names.

Since 1996, Stats SA has developed and maintained a national place name dataset that serves as a reference point showing how South African cities, townships, and villages had changed over time in terms of demographic makeup and access to services.

The place names are captured as part of the EA attribute data, captured in a GIS system, enabling Stats SA and other GIS users to display data thematically by whatever geographical layer they wish. Users can combine them to form whatever new layers they choose to form as well as enable them to do research on interdependency, hierarchies, economics, size, networks and the like.

All standardised place names by the South African Geographical Council (SAGNC) are updated and published per release.

(b) National Geospatial Information (Dept: Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development)

The South African National Mapping Agency known as the Chief Directorate: National Geospatial Information – CD NGI (Land Survey Act 8 of 1997) is responsible for the creation and updating of spatial information (topographically significant features are collected and shown on the map series).

This puts the organisation in a unique position to be able to collect on-the-ground information during the cyclical process of updating the map series. Smaller scale maps are updated as part of a related revision cycle (1:250 000, 1:500 000, Provincial maps, as well as the 1: 2 000 000 country map).

All name changes are implemented as part of the revision process for inclusion in the next edition map during the process in map updating.

(c) Topographical Data Management

In addition to the hard copy map, CD:NGI distributes the topographical data from its iTIS database (Integrated Topographical Information System). An electronic database of names is part of the map data dataset. This feature class is updated immediately on the notification that a name has been changed/corrected and all related gazetting objections have been dealt with. As many organisations use the CD:NGI datasets as source material for their own mapping endeavours, this results in revised names being semi-automatically distributed.

Achievements

SAGNC Data Management System

Aligned to the of the session, the South African government invested in data management system. The SAGNC GIS Solution was based on ArcGIS software. However, all datasets in the SAGNS are stored in MS SQL Relational Database Management System (RDBMS), within a single enterprise geodatabase. The geodatabase contains all relevant SAGNC data items, along with supplementary datasets obtained. Data stored within this database is served out to the web via web services.

The SAGNS offers users (both internal and external) a web page experience that enables them to share the organization's portal's authoritative GIS data with other departments/stakeholders more easily, even if they are not used to working in the GIS. Users get access to documents, and maps and can load geographical names standardization applications on the site. The system can be accessed in any browser through this to URL: <https://www.sagns.gov.za>.

The SAGNC is assisted by its own Provincial Geographical Names Committees, as well as Local Municipalities (mostly Metros) and the Government entities of National Geospatial Information and Statistics South Africa for spatial verification and research.

Conclusions and recommendations.

In conclusion, the SAGNC intends to have periodic meetings to maintain a regular dialogue and identify other opportunities for discussion on matters of mutual interest or collaboration including the engagement of Google Maps.

The SAGNC will always be sensitive to the wishes of communities, but equally, going forward will be decisive in providing the necessary support that communities need.