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English

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

2023 session

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Item 8 of the provisional agenda *

**Monitoring and evaluation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work
2021-2029, and of the work of the Group of Experts**

**Implementation of the United Nations Group of Experts
on Geographical Names strategic plan and programme of
work for 2021–2029 during the period 2021–2023**

Submitted by the UNGEGN Bureau **

Summary

The report provides a summary of the implementation of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names strategic plan and programme of work for 2021–2029 during its first two years and a preliminary assessment of the progress and future tasks to be focused on in the remaining period. Each of the five strategies has been allocated to Vice-Chairs and relevant working group convenors for regular monitoring and coordination, with the further involvement of Member States and Divisions, as well as the Bureau and all the working groups.

Despite the restrictions resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, a series of online meetings was organized and discussions were held to activate the action items of each strategy, i.e. on the advancement of technical aspects, cooperation with United Nations and non-United Nations bodies and publication, along with other discussions on the substance of names standardization. There are, however, items for which no progress has yet been demonstrated. A spreadsheet shows the status of the 51 action items under the five strategies.

Amendments are proposed for a few action items that need some clarification. It is also proposed that the agenda of future Group of Experts sessions be restructured in alignment with the strategies.

* GEGN.2/2023/1

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Implementation of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 during the period of 2021-2023¹

Background

The 2021/second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), held virtually from 3 to 7 May 2021, adopted Recommendation 1 which addressed the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 (SP&PoW). It was subsequently approved by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as its decision 2021/69 of 22 July 2021. The decision is as follows:

Recommendation 1

The Economic and Social Council:

- (a) Recalls its decision 2019/230 of 23 July 2019, by which it decided that the Bureau of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names should undertake the development of a draft strategic plan and programme of work for the new Group of Experts, and notes that the Bureau of the Group of Experts has taken into consideration and fulfilled all the conditions as requested in decision 2019/230, including conducting three global consultations and a virtual webinar prior to the second session of the Group of Experts;
- (b) Welcomes the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names strategic plan and programme of work 2021-2029 submitted to the Group of Experts and adopted at its second session;
- (c) Approves the adoption of the strategic plan and programme of work, recognizing that it is a living document, with the provisions that it shall be evaluated periodically by the Group of Experts for its implementation and updated and amended as appropriate and when necessary;
- (d) Encourages the Bureau of the Group of Experts to assess its structure of subsidiary bodies to allow for efficiency in the implementation of the strategic plan and programme of work, and if needed, propose its reorganization;
- (e) Encourages Member States, divisions, working groups and task teams of the Group of Experts to report on their activities to implement the strategic plan and programme of work at the sessions of the Group of Experts.

In accordance with this recommendation, the UNGEGN Bureau first formulated an organizational structure to monitor and coordinate the implementation of the SP&PoW. As there are five strategies as a higher level framework, it was straightforward to designate a coordinator for each strategy among the Bureau and Working Group Convenors who has functional affiliation with the relevant strategy (Table 1). The two Vice-Chairs were invited to serve as overall facilitators of the governance of implementation. The progress of implementation has regularly been updated and discussed in the meetings of the Bureau and Working Group Convenors (or Expanded Bureau).

¹ This working paper pertains to Recommendation 1 of the 1st session of UNGEGN (Development of a draft strategic plan and programme of work), Recommendation 1 of the 2nd session of UNGEGN (Adoption of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029), UNCISG resolutions V/4 (Work performed by the UNGEGN and its future activities) and X/10 (Support for the work on the standardization of geographical names).

Table 1. Coordinators for the Implementation of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work

Strategies	No. of objectives	No. of action items	Coordinators	
1. Technical expertise	3	10	Pier-Giorgio Zaccheddu	Convenor, WG on Geographical Names Data Management
2. Relationships, links and connections	3	10	Susan Birtles	Vice-Chair
3. Effective work programmes	4	12	Sungjae Choo	Vice-Chair; Convenor, WG on Evaluation and Implementation
4. Culture, heritage and language recognition	4	12	Annette Torensjö	Convenor, WG on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage
5. Promotion and capacity building	4	7	Peder Gammeltoft	Convenor, WG on Publicity and Funding
Overall facilitating			Sungjae Choo Susan Birtles	Vice-Chairs
Total	18	51		

Summary of Progress

For the first two years or a quarter of the planning period, there was noticeable progress in implementation notwithstanding the restrictions caused by the pandemic. The following items are brought to the Group of Experts' attention as items of notable progress (parenthesis at the end shows the number of action item):

Strategy 1. Technical expertise

- A discussion paper "On geographical names data modelling and transfer related standards, manuals, or guidelines" has been prepared, which includes ideas for geographical names data modelling and transfer related standards, manuals, or guidelines. Details will be reported in GEGN.2/2023/99 (1-i-2).
- The UNGEGN World Geographical Names Database (WGNDB) has been redesigned and readied for re-launch. It will be reported in GEGN.2/2023/111 (1-i-5, *formerly* 5-ii-3).
- A survey on free, accessible and open geographical names data was conducted and replies from more than 25 countries were collected. The results will be presented in GEGN.2/2023/74 (1-iii-8).
- Two webinars were held; "[Developing digital gazetteers using free and open-source software](#)" on 10 May 2022 and "[Linked Open Data](#)" on 30 September 2022 (1-iii-9). Details will be reported in GEGN.2/2023/75. The results of the latter one were reported in UNGEGN Bulletin 64 (November 2022).

Strategy 2. Relationships, links and connections

- Involvement in several ECOSOC activities, e.g. participation in the ECOSOC Coordination Segments in February 2022 and February 2023, contributing to the ECOSOC Review of its Functional Commissions and Expert Bodies over the period of October 2021 to March 2022.

Details will be reported in GEGN.2/2023/4 (2-i-1).

- Participation and reporting in the 11th and 12th sessions of United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM). Details will be reported in GEGN.2/2023/4 (2-i-2).
- An initiative of strengthening collaboration between UNGEGN and UN-GGIM continued and is currently under discussion. A progress report GEGN.2/2023/115 will be presented (2-i-2).
- Participation in the meeting of UN-GGIM Regional Committee for Africa in October 2022 with invitation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Details were reported by the Task Team for Africa in UNGEGN Bulletin 64 (November 2022) (2-i-3).
- A webinar on "Geographical names standardization supporting national development" was organized and convened on 31 August 2021 with UN-GGIM Americas/CARIGEO² and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Details were reported by the Secretariat in UNGEGN Bulletin 62 (November 2021) (2-iii-9, *also* 5-i-1).

Strategy 3. Effective work programmes

- UNGEGN publications were reviewed; a call for contributions for new texts complementing the *Manual for the National Standardization of Geographical Names* (2006) was announced through UNGEGN Bulletin 63 (June 2022); A rationale for Part 2 of the *Technical reference manual for the standardization of geographical names* (2007) was provided by the discussion paper on the action item 1-i-2 (Details will be reported in GEGN.2/2023/99); *Media Kit* has been updated and revised (3-ii-2).
- Updating *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names* was discussed at the meeting of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology in September 2022. Details will be reported in GEGN.2/2023/31(3-ii-2).
- An article "How toponymic guidelines support the dissemination of standardized geographical names" was published in UNGEGN Bulletin 63 (June 2022) (3-ii-3).
- A preliminary study was conducted to codify the resolutions and recommendations into a coherent and hierarchical whole. Details will be reported in GEGN.2/2023/87 (3-ii-4).
- The UNCSGN resolutions database has been re-designed to include recommendations of the new UNGEGN. Details will be reported in GEGN.2/2023/87 (3-ii-6).
- Three meetings of the Bureau and Division Chairs were held to share divisions' roles and activities, and suggest responsibilities of Chairs. Meetings were in November 2021, December 2022 and March 2023. Details will be reported GEGN.2/2023/4 (3-iii-7).
- A review of the current organizational structure of working groups and task teams was initiated and facilitated discussion is in progress amongst members of the Bureau and Working Group Convenors. It is anticipated the review will happen in stages, with initial recommendations adopted or proposed by Convenors/Coordinators as required (3-iii-7).

² Caribbean Geospatial Development Initiative

Strategy 4. Culture, heritage and language recognition

- Six focus groups were created under the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage and discussion is in progress regarding how to activate those focus groups and connect them to action items of Strategy 4.
- Experts participated in the IGU/ICA³ Commission on Toponymy in Paris, July 2022 with the theme "Place names as (positive or negative) brands" and the results were reported in UNGEGN Bulletin 64 (November 2022) (4-ii-7).
- Working Group on Exonyms held a meeting in Ljubljana, August-September 2022 and continued discussion on exonyms. Details will be reported in GEGN.2/2023/106 (4-iii-10).

Strategy 5. Promotion and capacity building

- A webinar on "Geographical names standardization supporting national development" was organized and convened (5-i-1, *see* 2-iii-9).
- Representatives of UNGEGN participated in the UN Maps Conference in Valencia, Spain, March 2023, to promote UNGEGN to wider UN community (5-i-1).
- A list of special feature themes for future editions of the UNGEGN Bulletin was prepared and agreed on by the Bureau and working group convenors (5-ii-4).
- Discussion on social-media presence has begun (5-iii-6).

Further details regarding the total 51 action items are listed in the Appendix.

Evaluation

Since the 2019/first session of UNGEGN when consensus was reached on the need for a strategic plan as a basic guide for UNGEGN's future functions, it has been a big challenge to establish one and have progress in its implementation. First, UNGEGN has not previously pursued a planning document common to all components of UNGEGN – its Bureau, Working Groups, Divisions and even Member States. Second, the worldwide pandemic prevented thorough planning and monitoring sessions via face-to-face meetings for the duration of this effort.

It was fortunate, however, to achieve progress thanks to technical supports. A series of business meetings, webinars and workshops were facilitated online to implement action items, substantially as well as procedurally, as described in the previous section. Online discussion forums were sometimes more efficiently functioned by transcending time and space and thus saving expenses. In particular, meetings of the Bureau and Division Chairs held each year provided good opportunities to involve divisions in the SP&PoW, as well as to share their experiences.

Substantial topics which require in-depth conversation and more focused face-to-face discussion require further attention. It is expected more emphases on these topics can be achieved via in-person meetings, seminars and workshops in the remaining years to come. This also includes matters that are being actioned incrementally, such as:

- The function and operation of Bureau, Working Groups and Divisions to consider any further change in operations and organizational structure of UNGEGN (3-iii-7).

³ IGU is International Geographical Union; ICA is International Cartographic Association.

- Elaborating relevant aspects of UNGEGN to the goals and targets of sustainable development and find ways to develop them in its work programmes (3-iii-11 and general alignment of Strategies to UN Sustainable Development Goals as mentioned in the SP&PoW, and also implied in Recommendation 2 of the 2021/second session).
- Considering the broad and complex situation of geographical names as cultural heritage and elaborating on the action items of Strategy 4 .

Recommendation 1(e) of the 2021/second session emphasizes the involvement of all components of UNGEGN in the implementation of the SP&PoW. It is anticipated to share reports of Member States and Divisions as well as of Working Groups on their activities regarding the SP&PoW in future sessions including the 2021/second session.

There is also growing need to align discussions of the UNGEGN sessions with the focus areas of the SP&PoW. The Bureau proposes a new format of the agenda with this perspective which will be applicable to the 2025/fourth session.

Amendments proposed

In the process of monitoring implementation of the Programme of Work, two issues have been raised and the following amendments are proposed.

Amendment 1. Revising action item 2-iii-10

(2-iii-10) "To enhance the understanding of the aims and work of UNGEGN, to provide advice on geographical names use or on accessibility of data and contacts, there should be an effort to reach out to a wider world of potential geographical names users and to encourage their participation at UNGEGN Sessions. This would include UN and non-UN bodies that may be unfamiliar with UNGEGN's purpose."

This action item describes in such a detailed way, not being harmonized with other items, and thus could unintentionally be binding. A simplified sentence proposed is:

(2-iii-10) "Reach out to a wider world of potential geographical names users, both inside and outside the United Nations, and encourage their participation at UNGEGN Sessions."

Amendment 2. Revising "Actors/Responsibility" and "Output and Time Frame" entries of the Programme of Work tables

In the process of implementing 51 action items, there emerged the need to adjust outputs between them. For example, "re-develop UNGEGN World Geographical Names webpage" as an output of 5-ii-3 (UNEGN Website development and maintenance) is more suitable to be included in 1-i-5 (Promote and support the establishment of an authoritative international database/gazetteer of geographical names to be disseminated to the public through UNGEGN) when considering its nature and scope. Responsible actors and time frame for producing outputs also need to be adjusted after two years of progress.

Revisions are noted in the Appendix and proposed as such.

Points for discussion:

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the efforts UNGEGN has made toward implementation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 during the first two years;
- (b) Take note of the two amendments proposed by the Bureau;
- (c) Express its views on priorities to be made in the implementation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work; and
- (d) Contribute to the continued implementation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work.