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English

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

2023 session

New York, 1 – 5 May 2023

Item 7 of the provisional agenda *

**Social and economic benefits, supporting sustainable development,
measures taken and proposed for the implementation of resolutions**

**Report of the Working Group on Evaluation and
Implementation**

Submitted by the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation **

Summary

The report highlights the activities of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation since the 2021 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. No in-person meetings were held, and the Working Group tasks were discussed in online meetings of the Bureau and implemented by Bureau members and related working group convenors.

The main focus of the Working Group since 2021 has been to implement the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names strategic plan and programme of work 2021–2029, in particular action on items under strategy 3 (effective work programmes). The report also provides information on progress made in reviewing and revising Group of Expert publications, codifying the resolutions and recommendations and reviewing the structure of the Group. The report also covers trends with regard to the implementation of the resolutions and recommendations on the standardization of geographical names in Member States, the maintenance and updating of the database containing the resolutions and recommendations, and the results of the evaluation survey conducted at the end of the 2021 online session.

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Report of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation¹

Work plan of the Working Group

The work plan of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation, broadly guided by the resolutions V/4 and VI/4 of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN), was noted and confirmed at the 2021/second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), including tasks of implementing the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work and the General Assembly and ECOSOC resolutions. The work plan reads as follows:

- ♦ Evaluating the functioning and efficacy of UNGEGN and the implementation of resolutions and recommendations, taking note of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work and the General Assembly and ECOSOC resolutions;
- ♦ Finding ways to involve Member States not currently participating in the activities of UNGEGN;
- ♦ Looking at the needs of Member States to achieve national standardization of their geographical names; and
- ♦ Proposing actions to increase the effectiveness of UNGEGN, its Divisions and Working Groups.

Implementing the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work

The Working Group has been involved in implementing the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work which was adopted by Recommendation 1 of the 2021/second session. Action items tasked to the Working Group and their progress are as the following:

- Action item 3-ii-4. Codify the resolutions and recommendations into a coherent and hierarchical whole:
 - A preliminary study was conducted with 141 resolutions/recommendations grouped by 20 topics.
- Action item 3-ii-5. Encourage experts to refer to the resolutions and recommendations in their work and particularly in preparing working papers:
 - Working papers submitted to the 2021/second session were reviewed with specific focus on their reference to resolutions/recommendations (*see* the next section).
- Action item 3-ii-6. Continue to maintain and update the compendium and database of the resolutions/recommendations:
 - The database was re-designed to include recommendations of the 2019/first and 2021/second sessions (*see* the next section).
- Action item 3-iii-8. Review the documentation guidelines and submission schedule for national/divisional reports and, if needed, elaborate them:
 - Documentation guidelines were reviewed, revised and announced for the 2023/third session. A possible template of the national reports has been discussed.

¹ This working paper pertains to Recommendation 1 of the 2nd session of UNGEGN (Adoption of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029), UNCSGN V/4 (Work performed by the UNGEGN and its future activities) and VI/4 (Working Group on Evaluation).

- Action item 3-iii-10. Monitor and evaluate UNGEGN's work programme regularly including the operation of sessions:
 - Result of the evaluation survey of the 2021/second session was reviewed (*see* the next section).
- Action item 3-iv-12. Elaborate measures to increase the number of Member States that have functioning authorities for geographical names standardization:
 - On-going work

Implementing resolutions

As an on-going focus and mandate, the Working Group has encouraged the implementation of resolutions and recommendations at the country level, as well as in the UNGEGN context. This task is also implementing the action item 3-ii-5 of the Programmes of Work. The documentation guidelines for the UNGEGN sessions request each working paper to indicate the resolution(s) and/or recommendation(s) which relate to its theme.

The degree of reference to resolutions or recommendations, however, is not high. 32 out of 135 working papers (23.7%) submitted to the 2021/second session referred to resolutions or recommendations, decreasing from 25.6% (34 out of 133) at the 2019/first session and 23.9% (42 out of 176) at the 11th UNCSGN. Frequently referenced resolutions included:

- I/4. National standardization: 12 papers
- VIII/9. Geographical names as cultural heritage: 8 papers
- VIII/6. Integration of geographical names data into national and regional spatial data infrastructures: 7 papers
- I/7. Regional meetings: 6 papers
- VIII/1. Promotion of minority group and indigenous geographical names: 6 papers
- VIII/4. Exonyms: 5 papers

The Netherlands, Latvia, New Zealand and the Dutch- and German-speaking Division reported their activities by resolutions or recommendations. New Zealand conspicuously reported its activities implementing recommendations and decisions of the 2019/first session, divided by segments of measures taken, implementation experiences, social and economic benefits and relevance to sustainable development goals/targets.

The evaluation survey conducted at the 2021/second session shows that resolutions are useful for promoting the standardization of geographical names (20 'very useful' and 13 'useful,' accounting for 94.3%) and implementing them is important in each country's work on geographical names (18 'very important' and 15 'important,' accounting for 94.3%). Suggestions were made to ensure wider coverage at global and national levels, to render it obligatory to include analyzing of the implementation of resolutions in national and divisional reports, and to review resolutions and change those outdated.

UNCSGN resolutions and UNGEGN recommendations database

The database of the UNCSGN resolutions has been extended to include recommendations of the new UNGEGN sessions. The first page guides users to choose from these two groups and then from each Conference and session. However, the searching device operates on both groups combined, currently composed of 211 resolutions and 9 recommendations, respectively. The database, now available in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Korean, is maintained by the National Geographic

Information Institute of the Republic of Korea, and linked through the UNGEGN website: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/confGeneral.html>.

Evaluation of the 2021/second session

Thirty-five responses to the evaluation questionnaire were received from the participants of the 2021/second session which was held as an online meeting. The session in general was rated successful (12 very high and 19 high, accounting for 88.6%). All but one respondent indicated that it had met their expectations. The most expected aspect in participating in the session was ‘learning from other countries’ experiences (34 responses),’ followed by ‘learning of updates on standardization issues (31)’ and ‘informing others of his/her country’s accomplishments (22).’

This success is partly explained by the advantages of the virtual meeting. Satisfactory aspects included no expenses and no organizational issues for travel overseas, participation of more countries, easy to attend, no additional time, format of written statements, chat box conversation during the meetings, etc. There was also an assessment that the session was more streamlined and more focused than previous sessions. However, such unsatisfactory aspects as lack of personal conversations, limited number of speakers, restriction of written statements were also mentioned. The positive assessment remained when dividing into each item of the operating modalities.

A number of suggestions were offered for improvement, including efficient allocation of discussion time, alignment of the agenda to strategic plan, encouraging participation of more countries, etc. (*See Appendix 1 for more details*). These suggestions functioned as useful sources for preparing the current session.

Evaluation for the 2023/third session will be conducted through an online survey. The link for the survey will be provided during the meeting.

Future of the Working Group

In the situation that no in-person meetings could be held during the past three years, all the tasks of the Working Group have been conducted online with the Bureau. Most of them have been aligned to implementing the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work and this will be the same in the future. The framework of discussing the implementation and monitoring of the Programme of Work has been stabilized, e.g. working online, email discussion, regular virtual meetings of the Bureau and working group convenors.

However, some tasks that are now routine should still continue. These include evaluating the implementation of resolutions, recommendations and other decisions; maintaining the resolutions/recommendation database; and creating and reporting on the results of the survey for evaluating sessions, as documented in this report. These tasks can be continued between UNGEGN sessions, without the necessity of in-person meetings, which seem unlikely in the immediate future.

In consideration of the current circumstances and the organizational restructuring of UNGEGN, the Convenor puts forward the following three options, of which the first one with a Coordinator is recommended:

1. Replace the Working Group with a Coordinator who will steer the tasks with the Bureau;
2. Combine with the Working Group on Publicity and Funding to create a new working group mandated to assist the operation of UNGEGN; or

3. Maintain the Working Group in its present form.

Points for discussion:

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the report and progress made by the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation; and
- (b) Express its views on the way forward concerning the Working Group's future and the proposed change to a Coordinator for the functions that continue to be needed.

APPENDIX 1. Results of the Evaluation Survey of the 2nd Session, Virtual, 3-7 May 2021**1. Overall Assessment****Question 1. What were your expectations on participating in this session?** (Choose all that apply)

	Selection	%
Informing others of your country's or organizations accomplishments	22	62.9
Learning from others countries' or organization's experiences	34	97.1
Learning of updates on standardization issues	31	88.6

Additional Comments

1. Contributing ideas towards ongoing improvement of names standardisation concepts and how UNGEGN operates in the future
2. Community and cooperation building, Promoting new projects and standards

Question 2-4

Question 2	Yes			No		
Did the session meet expectation specified above?	34 (97.1%)			1 (2.9%)		
Question 3	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low	Very High and High (%)
How would you rate the success of the session?	12	19	4	0	0	88.6
Question 4	Yes		Moderately Yes	No		Yes and Moderately Yes (%)
Do you think the meeting modalities of the virtual meeting worked well?	19		15	1		97.1

Additional Comments

1. There was of course no possibility for networking and speaking informally, exchanging ideas and reflecting on the issues discussed during the session.

Question 5. Could you specify what was satisfactory and what was not satisfactory about participation in this virtual meeting?

Satisfactory was:	Not Satisfactory was:
No expenses and no organizational issues for travel overseas	Lack of personal(unofficial) aside conversations
Chat box conversation during the meetings	Lots of audio and connection problems
Being able to have the meeting though the pandemic	Repeatedly preferencing certain countries over others when it chooses times for side events or global conversations
More countries have the chance to participate	Written statements are not able to replace the active exchange
Easy to attend, no additional time	A limited number of speakers

2. Programs and Contents

Question 1. How useful was each of the following for you?

	Very useful	Useful	Moderately Useful	Of little use	Not Useful	Very useful and Useful (%)
Written statements through UNGEGN website	12	15	8	0	0	77.1
Chat box conversation during the meetings	20	8	5	0	2	80.0
Side events (Pre-sessional meetings, Working Group/Division meetings, special meetings)	14	16	2	2	1	85.7

Additional Comments

1. It would be better if written statements could be placed in the same "virtual shelf" as documents they are related to.
2. Development of an online platform for meetings in the period between UNGEGN session.
3. The Chatbox is a very useful tool. Unfortunately only the active participants were able to read and write. Therefore, in some sessions, it was not easy to follow the ongoing discussion.
4. Many side events are useful. Especially, various WG and Divisional meetings are all very useful for this purpose.

Question 2 (To first-time participants)

Question	Yes	No	Not applicable				
Did you attend the orientation briefing held on 27 April, 8:00-9:30?	8 (22.9%)	11 (31.4%)	16 (45.7%)				
Question	very useful	useful	moderately useful	of little use	not useful	Not applicable	very useful and useful (%)
If yes, how useful was it?	5	6	1	0	0	23	31.4

Additional Comments / Suggestions

1. For future sessions, a group of experienced delegates might consider getting together to prepare content and then offer parallel introductory sessions in different languages.
2. Alternatively, still run the main orientation in English and have speakers available to translate key points or questions/answers if required.
3. Take into account the time of other countries and form groups as the times coincide.

Question 3. Compared to previous meetings (Conferences and sessions), do you recognize any changes (positive or negative) in this session? If yes, please specify. (To more than one-time participants)

1. Much more streamlined, more focused sessions (there were no long and unfruitful "political" dialogues).
2. The written statements were very good and I think the chat made the discussions faster and simpler, compared to having to ask for the floor and waiting for everybody's turn to speak, one at a time. Take into account the time of other countries and form groups as the times coincide.
3. The most striking negative aspect is that interpersonal relationships are much harder to develop in a virtual format. Such interchange is so important in events like that.
4. Negative - mental and physical fatigue due to timezones and excessive screen time.

Question 4. Please make suggestions for special presentations, workshops and panel discussions for the next UNGEGN Session (topics, presenters, organization, logistics, etc.).

1. Make sure to have more participation from African countries.
2. Topics: Experience of geo-names standardization respecting dialectal peculiarities in different countries (e.g. Norway, Estonia...).
3. Topics: The role of GIS and Artificial Intelligence technology for further improving geographical names collection, standardization, archiving, maintenance and distribution.
4. Comparison on the good practices adopted by the various toponymic Authorities, aimed at creating a document that summarizes the main rules to be placed at the basis of the standardization activities.
5. Use of exonyms x endonyms, discussion of alternatives to help rules and regulations on geographical names be respected and reinforced, how to encourage more countries to join in and participate in the work of UNGEGN.
6. Workshop on: 1) Linked Data, 2) Inclusion, 3) Crowd-sourced geographical names.

Question 5. Please evaluate the following matters in reference to the 1st (2019) session of UNGEGN.

	excel- lent	good	adequate	poor	very poor	excellent and good (%)
Duration of the meetings(5 days)	13	18	4	0	0	88.6
Allocation of time to agenda items and working papers	8	20	7	0	0	80.0
Distinguishing between papers for presentation and for information	10	20	5	0	0	85.7
Discussions in response to papers and presentations	7	17	6	5	0	68.6
Way of considering national reports	10	20	5	0	0	85.7
Way of considering divisional reports	9	22	3	1	0	88.6
Summarizing groups of documents by topic or by agenda item	12	19	3	1	0	88.6
Recommendations and decisions developed by the session	10	19	5	1	0	82.8
Cooperation with GGIM	8	18	8	1	0	74.3
Cooperation with otherbodies	9	16	9	1	0	71.4

Additional Comments / Recommendations

1. It would be good to find a way in which UNGEGN could activate the participations of other bodies in the Session. Might be- with special presentations they should make, or papers they could submit or oral "interventions".
2. Next session must be in Asia to compensate our colleagues the agony they went through for disrupting their daily routines.
3. Cooperation with other bodies seems to change with each session - would help to have some more clarity/explanation around those relationships.
4. The agenda might need review, seems to be some gaps and overlaps already, and will need to align better to strat plan.
5. Discussion time allocation should be improved.

3. Resolutions and General Work of UNGEGN/(former)UNCSGN

Question 1. How useful do you think it is for managers of geographical names, including yourself, to refer to resolutions of the former UNCSGN and recommendations of new UNGEGN in promoting geographical names standardization?

Very useful	Useful	Moderately Useful	Of little use	Not Useful	Very useful and Useful (%)
20	13	2	0	0	94.3

Question 2. How important do you think it is to implement UNGEGN/(former) UNCSGN resolutions in each country's work on geographical names?

Very important	Important	Moderately important	Of little importance	Not important	Very important and Important (%)
18	15	2	0	0	94.3

Question 3. What would you suggest in order to improve the implementation of resolutions/recommendations?

1. To include analyzing of the implementation of the resolutions as obligatory in national and divisional reports - this would help to focus on the resolutions.
2. Resolutions should be reviewed and those outdated should be changed.
3. Targeting countries that have not yet been able to standardize geographic names due to bureaucratic difficulties.
4. Wider coverage at global and national level.
5. Make UNGEGN more prominent in each country.
6. Closer communication of national names boards with authorities in their countries.

Question 4. What are the most important work items that you would like to see UNGEGN undertake before the 2023 Session, when considering strategies and action items of the 2021-2029 UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work?

1. National standardization and implementation of standardized names.
2. Liaison, contacts, consultations, collaboration with other bodies working with geo-names or with geo-names related issues.
3. Communicate with top global interactive map producers (Google, Bing ESRI etc) and highlight the importance of using authoritative geographical names.
4. Data integration methods - linked data, unique identifiers.
5. Geographic names and their link to cultural identities.
6. UNGEGN desperately needs to review working group arrangements in line with its strategic plan. Some groups have very important mandates but are not active, there are multiple groups with overlapping actions in the programme of work, and there are important strategies that have no clear leadership under the current arrangements. There is also no clarity on who is involved in working groups, which limits awareness or accountability.

Question 5. Do you receive the UNGEGN Bulletin published semiannually?

Yes	No
30 (85.7%)	5 (14.3%)
If Yes, what sections are useful to your work? (Choose all that apply)	
Special feature	19 (63.3%)
From the Divisions	18 (60.0%)
From the Working Groups	25 (83.3%)
From the Countries	21 (70.0%)
Education and Training	18 (60.0%)
Special Projects and News Items	22 (73.3%)
Upcoming Meetings	17 (56.7%)

What special feature topics would you suggest for future bulletins?

1. Liaison, contacts, consultations, collaboratoion with other bodies working with geo-names or with geo-names related issues, time by time- insigts in fieds of their their work, what influence(or can influence) geo-names.
2. The use of exonym on international forum; rules of standardization of names of such features as streets, squares, bridges, railway stations, airports, harbours, etc.
3. Usage of modern technology such as GIS and Artificial Intelligence (AI) for further improving geographical names collection, processing, maintenance and distribution.
4. Importance of naming authorities and ways to convince the governments to create them and reinforce their decisions.
5. Data integration methods, Linked Data.

Question 6. Does your country need assistance in establishing a geographical names standardization program?

Yes	No
17 (48.6%)	18 (51.4%)
If Yes, what type of help do you want? (Choose all that apply)	
Training Course	9 (52.9%)
Expert Visit	1 (5.9%)
Publication of Material	8 (47.1%)
Knowledge Exchange	1 (5.9%)

Question 7. Do you have any other comments you wish to make?

1. Next session must be in Asia to compensate our colleagues the agony they went through for disrupting their daily routines.
2. We have to continue to work systematically, in order to promote authoritative geographical names usage globally.
3. UNGEGN has to redouble effort to make sure all member states have a geographical name.
4. With this virtual session it became more obvious than ever that wide regions of the world (Africa, South America, larger parts of Asia, also eastern Europe) are present, but contribute near to nothing to the discussions.