

06 April 2025

English

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

2025 session

New York, 28 April – 2 May 2025

Item 4(c) of the provisional agenda *

Reports: Activities on the standardization of geographical names in Africa

**Initial steps made in standardization and creation of a uniform
system of administering geographical names in Zambia ****

Submitted by Zambia

* GEGN.2/2025/1

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At independence in 1964, Zambia inherited a system of street addressing from the British colonial government which consisted of street name signage and house numbering. On the Copperbelt for example, mining companies provided housing for miners, who made up the majority of residents. However, following privatisation and liberalisation of the economy after 1991, the construction of infrastructure such as housing fell in the hands of private players who cared less about organised addressing. As a result, the rapid growth of populations led to chaotic organisation in urban settlements.

In the recent years, stakeholders in the national administration of geographical names identified an urgent need for an inclusive and comprehensive national addressing policy in Zambia that includes postcode and digital addressing integrated into a geographic information system. As a result draft street naming and addressing policy now awaits final approval. The policy shall ensure that the Zambian population has access to a wide range of services that are dependent on street addressing. It seeks to help resolve the challenge of residents' limited access to some goods and services on account of an inadequate addressing system, as well as stimulate and foster growth and investment in service delivery. Further, it will promote the creation of adequate addressing infrastructure in the country. Some of the policy's objectives include leveraging on resources available from cooperating partners for street addressing; providing for standardized street addressing in conformity with international practice, and ensuring the development and maintenance of a national address database. The policy also proposes provision of funding for street naming and addressing from the national budget and from other cooperating partners and seeking technical support for effective implementation.

A programme which predates the policy formulation and resonates with some of UNGEGN's aims, the National Addressing and Postcode Project (NAPP), which was launched in 2012, is a quest to fulfil the government's goal to promote universally accessible postal and courier services that are responsive to consumer needs. Implemented by the Zambia Information and Communications Technologies Authority (ZICTA), the NAPP's aim is to establish a comprehensive national addressing system. In addition to developing a public, web-based database of addresses, the project involves the actual installation of addressing infrastructure including street name signage and house numbers in collaboration with local authorities.

The Group of Experts is invited to provide input, guidance, and support in the government's unprecedented endeavour to implement uniform guidelines for the standardization and general administration of geographical names in Zambia. The Zambian government should also be encouraged to consider converting the ad hoc committee which formulated the draft place name policy into a national authority on geographical names, as the committee was representative of stakeholder institutions.

ZICTA fully funded the National Addressing and Postcode Project (NAPP). The NAPP is ongoing. However, because the national addressing was not completed, the project remains incomplete. About 15 neighbourhoods in Lusaka have been addressed. Notably, some neighbourhoods are defined as illegal settlements, barring ZICTA from assigning postcode addresses to those areas.

ZICTA engaged community authorities such as ward councillors, technical officials from municipal councils, and members of the community. After reaching consensus, they would pick themes for a particular area.

The draft place name policy was submitted to the Ministry of Local Government in 2021/2022.

The NAPP had two major components, (i) street addressing and (ii) creation of postcodes.

i. Addressing

The addressing component, a function of local authorities, included street naming and house numbering, typically assigning even numbers on one side of a street and odd numbers on the other. According to the NAPP's methodology, this was the first aspect before creation of postcodes. It is not easy to code a street which has no name.

ii. Postcodes

This was ZICTA's mandate and interest. Though the authority was motivated by the prospects of playing a leading role in enhancing e-commerce in Zambia through creation of standardised addressing, they had to wait for local authorities to assign street names and addresses before they could assign postcodes. This is because the schedule in Statutory Instrument (SI) No.4 of 2017, which gave ZICTA the mandate for addressing required completion of addressing for the entire country before assigning postcodes.

PILOTING

Livingstone was one of the pilot cases with a target of standardising addressing before Zambia hosted the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UN-WTO), which was held in the city in 2013 and co-hosted with Zimbabwe.

In the capital Lusaka, some neighbourhoods were piloted with a criteria to represent low-, medium- and high-densely populated communities. Examples of selected neighbourhoods were Northmead (low density), Kamwala (medium density) and Kalingalinga (high density).

Challenges in Implementing the NAPP Project

1. Forming Multistakeholder Team

A major challenge was coming up with a multistakeholder team to include members from the Zambia Statistics Agency (formerly Central Statistical Office), the Electoral Commission of Zambia, the Lusaka City Council, Ministry of Lands, and water utility companies. Each of these were legally mandated to perform different functions. For instance, while the Ministry of Lands named entire/large pieces of land, the local authorities subdivided plots of land and named streets.

2. Financing

The change of political administration came with major policy changes which adversely affected the project. The new administration required quasi-government institutions to submit all their income to the national treasury before they could apply for government to fund their respective activities, attaching respective budgets. With this new system, the main funder of the NAPP, ZICTA, had fewer resources due to reduced funding. At the same time, the government has questioned the duration of the project (about 13 years) and whether it is ZICTA's mandate to provide financing.

3. Legal

The ongoing NAPP has fully addressed about 15 neighbourhoods in Lusaka. However, some neighbourhoods such as Misisi and John Laing, despite being populous, are defined as illegal settlements, barring ZICTA from assigning postcode addresses to those areas.

4. Unstable Currency

The fluctuating value of the Zambian Kwacha against the United States Dollar and other major convertibles has seen the constant increase of many contractors' invoices while ZICTA's funding in the nation's official currency remains constant.

5.

Thus the project which should have been concluded in five years has dragged on until the present. ZICTA numbered some areas which the Lusaka City Council had not yet named.

The Postal Services Act of 2009 had no mention of addressing.

The NAPP project has been included in the Eighth National Development Plan, and the Postal and Courier Services Act of 2021.

ZICTA has been engaging the Ministry of Justice to change the SI to allow for the implementation of their new methodology. The new post coding methodology, which is seen to be more progressive, is not based on street names, but on wards.

The authority seeks to develop digital addressing, following ten by ten metre grids, assigning unique codes to each of these grids. This digital addressing approach ignores the absence of physical addressing and advantages everyone, regardless of socio-economic status.

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