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Item 8 (a) of the provisional agenda*

**Culture, heritage and language recognition: geographical
names as culture, heritage and identity**

Addressing culturally and socially sensitive geographical names: a framework for standardization

Summary**

The standardization of geographical names increasingly requires careful consideration of cultural sensitivity and social justice implications. In the report, four key categories of sensitive names are examined: culturally sensitive names, socially sensitive names, offensive names and culturally derogatory names. Evidence-based methods for their standardization are proposed.

In the proposed framework, emphasis is laid on systematic documentation and research, incorporating both traditional archival sources and oral histories. That approach recognizes that many culturally significant place names have been preserved through oral tradition rather than written documentation. The methodology requires standardized protocols for gathering and validating historical information, thereby ensuring consistency across geographical contexts.

Stakeholder engagement represents a crucial component, extending beyond simple consultation to meaningful participation in decision-making processes. In the framework, emphasis is laid on establishing formal consultation mechanisms that respect traditional decision-making processes while incorporating modern participatory approaches. That includes regular community meetings, formal hearings and ongoing dialogue channels.

The implementation guidelines establish clear protocols for handling sensitive names, including comprehensive documentation systems that maintain temporal records of all geographical names, including those that are modified or replaced. That preservation of naming history serves academic research purposes and maintains cultural continuity. Digital archives track name changes, including the rationale for

* [GEGN.2/2025/1](#).

** The full report was prepared by Peder Gammeltoft (Norway), Norwegian Language Collections, University of Bergen. The report will be available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/4th_session_2025/, in the language of submission only, as document GEGN.2/2025/13/CRP.13.



modifications and the historical context, ensuring that the information remains accessible for future reference.

Key recommendations include:

- Adopting systematic approaches to identifying and addressing sensitive geographical names
- Implementing standardized consultation processes with affected communities
- Developing clear criteria for the evaluation and modification of problematic names
- Establishing monitoring and reporting mechanisms
- Sharing best practices through United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names working groups

The success of geographical names standardization depends on balancing contemporary sensitivities with historical preservation while ensuring comprehensive documentation of both current and historical names. That approach supports both social progress and cultural preservation, serving as a bridge between past understanding and future development.
