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**THE COLLECTION AND STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL
NAMES**

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of Geographical Names**

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**By
Mulugeta Yilma**

Ethiopian Mapping Authority

The Collection and Standardization of Geographical Names

Abstract

Geographical names constitute one of the major components of maps. No map is readable without geographical feature names depicted on it. Besides, place names are items of research for various studies and applications. Realizing this fact, EMA has given a great emphasis to the collection of place names and to the systematic data handling and management both in analogue and digital database formats.

In Ethiopia, there is no other organization that collects and compiles place name data for reference or research purposes. It is the Ethiopian Mapping Authority(EMA) which carries out such activities mainly for cartographic purposes. In recent years, however, a new dimension to the names collection activity has been added by EMA. With the establishment of a consolidated place names collection and compilation activity in the organization the names data which were only used for cartographic purposes are now being compiled to organize a place name document. In this regard, a card-catalogue system and PC-based database activity has been introduced which has given a satisfactory result so far. This paper, therefore, gives a brief highlight on the geographical place names collection activities of EMA and the methods of data handling.

1. Geographical Names Collection and Compilation Activity

Geographical names can be obtained from two major sources, primary data from the field and secondary data from documents. In the preparation of topographic maps, however, it is preferable to collect place names data from the field.

The largest scale topographic map being produced by EMA is the 1:50,000 scale map series. Therefore, it has become desirable to collect place names direct from the field- a primary data from the major source i.e. the local people in the concerned areas. Experts and technicians with photogrammetric background have been assigned for the collection since they are capable of reading and interpreting aerial photographs. The geographical names collected from the field are listed on forms prepared for the same purpose. These lists and field maps are used for the preparation of the topographic maps. To date, a little over 760 map sheets of about 756Km² each have been printed. This constitutes

nearly 50% coverage of the country.

The name lists in combination with the printed maps are now being used for compiling place name documents. In order to compile such a document two methods have already been put into practice, a card-catalogue system and a PC-based database creation activity.

1.1 Card-catalogue System

A card-catalogue system was devised in order to organize a place name document. The catalogue includes information such as the feature name, attribute to which the name applies, the region where it is found, its national grid reference, geographical coordinate to the nearest second, elevation of certain geographical entities (mountains and hills) and the map sheet from which the place name is obtained.

Though Ethiopia is a multi-lingual country, the script of the working language of the Federal Government, which is Amharic, has been used in the field collection of the geographical names. However, the 1:50,000 scale topographic map series and almost all other maps being produced by EMA do not carry place names in Amharic script. Therefore, the place names are written in Latin script using the Amharic-to-English transliteration system adopted by EMA for this purpose. The cards, however, carry place names both in Amharic script and its transliterated version in Latin script. Using the card-catalogue system we have records of over 48,000 place names collected from 420 map sheets. This adds up to give about 55% of the printed map sheets.

With the introduction of computers at EMA, a PC-based database of the geographical names has now been established.

1.2 The PC-based database activity

A card-catalogue system is space consuming and is a rather obsolete practice. This fact has led EMA to bring into practice a better means of handling place name data. Therefore, we have started a PC-based place name data entry. However, we are still carrying out both exercises side by side but with more consideration for the PC-based database entry. In the database we have, so far, over 28,000 entries which were collected from 240 map sheets of the 1:50,000 map series. As in the card-catalogue system, the information contained in the database include the feature name, its designation, regional affiliation, its point

position (geographical coordinate) and the map sheet from which the information is obtained. However, unlike the card-catalogue, altitudes of certain features, their grid reference and the district where the feature is found are not recorded.

The computer software used is dBASE IV. Based on this we have written an application programme to facilitate easier querying of information. The programme is not yet fully developed, but as we continue to gain experience improvements will be made. The gradual shift to the PC-based system will result in smoother data handling and savings in storage space.

2. Standardization of Geographical Names

Standardization has to be preceded by the collection and Romanization of the geographical names. EMA has already started the collection and compilation of Geographical names. The collection has been for cartographic purposes while the recent compilation exercise is to have a well organized geographical name document. So far, the place name document we have in the card-catalogue and those entries in the computer database are Romanized. On the cards the place names have been recorded both in Amharic and Latin script.

As stated earlier, it is only the EMA that has been collecting place names mainly for cartographic purposes. The maps being prepared by the organization carry transliterated place names using the Amharic-to-English transliteration system which has been in use for nearly three decades.

Standardization requires the establishment of a national body responsible for geographical names. In this regard, a coordinated effort is necessary for the establishment of such a body. The place names that appear on maps produced by EMA could be taken as standardized because EMA, as far as possible, maintains consistency in the orthography of the place names written in Latin script. However, the transliteration system in use is now subject to revision in order to have an easy means of transliterating the name written in Amharic script to Latin script. Once the revision is completed, the orthography of place names in Latin script could be taken as standardized.

3. The Preparation of Gazetteers

EMA has not only recorded the geographical names on cards and computers. There has also been an attempt to produce a concise national gazetteer of Ethiopia. To realize this we

prepared a gazetteer of Ethiopia that contained about 2,500 place names collected from the 1:1,000,000 and the 1:2,000,000 scale maps. This preliminary attempt of the gazetteer prepared in 1990 was distributed for comments to higher institutions and government ministries. We had responses from many of them with constructive suggestions. Since this preliminary edition was not published for circulation, revision of the gazetteer was found necessary in accordance with these suggestions and the changes in the administrative structure of the country and thus the changes in the administrative affiliation of the place names. On the other hand, we are in the process of preparing gazetteers in different volumes based on the 1:50,000 scale topographic map series. This aims at taking place names in phases considering blocks of areas between ranges of latitude and longitudes. In this respect, it is hoped that it will be possible to compile a volume that contains about 20,000 entries.

4. Conclusion

The activities in place name collection and compilation to produce a reference document is the first of its kind undertaken by EMA. The total coverage of the country will follow the coverage of 1:50,000 scale topographic map of the country. The effort to strengthen the activities of producing a well organized place name document will continue at increased pace. However, we require exchanges of information with countries participating in the current United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa to know how each country is dealing with this activity. Particularly, the experience of each country in the digital place name database aspect will be of particular importance to help us in our efforts in this regard.