

Geographic Names Standardization Policy for Namibia

United States Board on Geographic Names
Foreign Names Committee



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1. Introduction

This geographic names standardization policy has been prepared as an aid to those geographic names experts who are the working staff for the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) in the standardization of the geographic names of **Namibia** for United States Government use. The BGN and its staff work to effect consistent treatment of geographic name spellings in U.S. Government databases, publications, maps, and charts. The country policies are intended to satisfy, in part, the statutory requirements levied upon the BGN in Public Law USC 80-242 to develop principles, policies, and procedures for geographic names standardization, and to promulgate decisions with respect to the principles of geographic nomenclature and orthography.

2. Languages and Language Policy

a. Demographics

The population of Namibia is estimated to be 2.7 million. The largest ethnic group is the Ovambo, which comprises 50% of the population. A number of ethnic groups to include Kavango (9%), Herero (7%), Damara (7%), mixed European and African ancestry (6.5%), European (6%), Nama (5%), Caprivian (4%), San (3%), Baster (2%), and Tswana (.5%) make up the remainder of the population. The predominant religions of the country are Christianity (97%), and other or unaffiliated (3%).¹

b. Languages

English (ISO 639-3 code 'eng') is established in the constitution as the official language.² There are thirteen recognized national languages:³ Afrikaans ('afr'), English, German ('deu'), Herero (Otjiherero) ('her'), Jul'hoan ('ktz'), Khoekhoe (Khoekhoegowab) (formerly Hottentot) ('naq'), Kwangali (Rukwangali and Rugciruku) ('kwn'), Lozi (Silozi) ('loz'), Mbukushu (Thimbukushu) ('mhw'), Ovambo (Oshikwanyama and Oshindonga dialects) ('kua'), and Tswana (Setswana) ('tsn').⁴ Afrikaans and German continue to be widely used in business.

¹ Namibia: People and Society. CIA World Factbook (2021). <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/namibia>. Accessed December 2, 2021.

² Namibia Constitution.

³ List of Language Spoken in Namibia, namibiahub.com/list-of-language-spoken-in-namibia/; Accessed November 23, 2021.

⁴ The indigenous languages are sometimes also known by their local names (e.g., Oshivambo for Ovambo) and are listed parenthetically above. Additional information about language names taken from Indigenous Languages in Regional Education: A Case of Namibia." Johannes Karambo Kavhura, 2018. Available at: <http://docplayer.net/104020564-Indigenous-languages-in-regional-education-a-case-of-namibia-university-of-eastern-finland-philosophical-faculty.html>. Accessed November 23, 2021.

c. Geographic Names Standardization

There is no identified geographic names authority for Namibia. The Directorate of Survey and Mapping, the national survey and mapping authority, has been identified in the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names list of National Authorities as a point of contact.

3. Toponymic Policies

a. Script and Orthography

Geographic names in Namibia are written in Roman script and orthography. As acceptance of (Khoekhoe and other) indigenous languages grows, feature names using their orthography will increase. At present, only one ADM1, //Karas includes a special character.

b. Romanization

Romanization is not necessary.

c. Diacritics and Special characters

Diacritic marks are still found in German and Afrikaans names from the colonial period. In addition, four characters used to represent click consonants in Khoekhoe names are listed below.

Character Name	Character	Unicode Value
A with dieresis, Latin capital letter	Ä	00C4
A with dieresis, Latin small letter	ä	00E4
E with dieresis, Latin capital letter	Ë	00CB
E with dieresis, Latin small letter	ë	00EB
O with dieresis, Latin capital letter	Ö	00D6
O with dieresis, Latin small letter	ö	00F6
O with circumflex, Latin capital letter	Ô	00D4
O with circumflex, Latin small letter	ô	00F4
U with dieresis, Latin capital letter	Û	00DC
U with dieresis, Latin small letter	ü	00FC
U with circumflex, Latin capital letter	Û	00DB
U with circumflex, Latin small letter	û	00FB
Latin letter dental click	(unknown) ⁵ ;	(unknown); 01C0 ⁶

⁵ No example of a non-IPA dental click character was found.

⁶ For the four click sounds, the Unicode encoding used in Namibian sources is given first (if known), followed by the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) rendering.

Character Name	Character	Unicode Value
Latin letter lateral click	//;	002F, 002F; 01C1 ⁴
Latin letter alveolar click	#; ‡	01C2 ⁴
Latin letter retroflex click	!; !	0021; 01C3 ⁴

d. Generic Terms

A generic is a term in a geographic name that describes a feature (e.g., ‘river’, ‘hill’, ‘lake’). The generic term of a name typically precedes the specific term. If the term does not identify the actual feature, it should be considered a false generic and not be added to the generic field of the Geographic Names Database (GNDB). Generics should be added to the ‘Generic Name’ field according to how they are found in the feature name (e.g., ‘berg’ as in Kamelberg’ (MT); ‘Hochebene’ as found in ‘Hoch Hochebene’ (PLAT)). Generic terms are not collected for populated places. Appendix A contains a glossary of common generic terms.

e. Hyphenation, Capitalization, and Spelling

The first letter of each word element, except for articles and prepositions, are capitalized. Hyphens are occasionally found in feature names, most commonly for cultural features (e.g., Hadi-Aus (PPL)). Usage in physical feature names is almost exclusively for Variant names (e.g., Sylvia-Höhen (V); Sylvia Hill (N)(HLL)). In these cases, omit the hyphen from the ‘Generic Name’ field entry. Hyphens are retained as found.

f. Long and short forms

Administrative division names are accorded long and short forms. Short-form names are ranked as the primary approved name and the long form as the secondary approved name. For Namibia, short forms may also be found for stream names.

g. Numbers

According to the BGN Numbers policy⁷, cardinal and ordinal numerals that occur in geographic names should usually be spelled out completely in BGN approved names.

4. Political Geography Policy

a. Country Name

Approved short-form name	Namibia
Approved long-form name	Republic of Namibia

⁷ Approved at FNC meeting 406 (June 8, 2021).

b. Capital Name

Approved name Windhoek

c. First-order Administrative Divisions

Namibia is composed of 14 regions. The regions are divided into 121 constituencies, which do not seem to have any administrative function. Local government is provided by municipalities and cities. The demarcation and number of regions and constituencies are proposed by delimitation commissions to the National Assembly subsequent to the national census. The next census is planned for August 2022.⁸

	Name	GEC	GENC	Seat
1	Erongo	WA29	NA-ER	Swakopmund
2	Hardap	WA30	NA-HA	Mariental
3	//Karas ⁹	WA31	NA-KA	Keetmanshoop
4	Kavango East	WA40	NA-KE	Rundu
5	Kavango West	WA41	NA-KW	Nkurenkuru
6	Khomas	WA21	NA-KH	Windhoek ¹⁰
7	Kunene	WA32	NA-KU	Opuwo
8	Ohangwena	WA33	NA-OW	Eenhana
9	Omaheke	WA35	NA-OH	Gobabis
10	Omusati	WA36	NA-OS	Outapi
11	Oshana	WA37	NA-ON	Oshakati
12	Oshikoto	WA38	NA-OT	Omuthiya
13	Otjozondjupa	WA39	NA-OD	Otjiwarongo
14	Zambezi	WA28	NA-CA	Katima Mulilo

d. Conventional and Anglicized Variant Names

Conventional Names

Name	UFI	UNI	Designation
Zambezi	-2587638	20081247	STM
Zambezi River	-2587638	-3560479	STM

Anglicized Variant Names

None

⁸ The Namibian (<https://www.namibian.com.na>) and UN Statistics Division Census Dates <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/census/censusdates/>.

⁹ A variety of spellings may be encountered (e.g., Kharas, ||Karas).

¹⁰ In addition to serving as the seat of Khomas Region, Windhoek is the national capital.

International Features¹¹

Name	UFI	UNI	Designation	Countries
Cunene	-2583344	-3551986	STM	AO, WA
Kalahari Desert	-1397448	-2005428	DSRT	BC, SF, WA
Name	UFI	UNI	Designation	Countries
Namib Desert	-2868841	-4725713	DSRT	AO, SF, WA
Odila	-2865341	-4008738	STM	AO, WA
Okavango River	-2584721	-3556878	STM	BC, WA
Orange River	-1269756	-1847319	STM	SF, WA
Xakumba Island	10919961	11996449	ISL	BC, WA
Zambezi River	-2587638	-3560479	STM	AO, BC, MZ, WA, ZA, ZI

e. Unique Geopolitical Situations

Efforts to change colonial-era geographic names and the orthography used to spell them, like in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere, has been a source of some controversy.

For the latest country-specific boundary dispute information, consult the U.S. Department of State, Office of the Geographer and Global Issues at internationalboundaries@state.gov.

¹¹ Other minor, international features also exist, largely streams and other hydrographic features.

5. Source Material

The primary source of geographic names are the topographic maps published by the Directorate of Survey and Mapping (DSM).

Appendix A. Glossary of Common Generic Terms

Generic	Designation	Description
Baai, bucht	BAY	Bay
Berg, berge	HLL, MT(S)	Hill, mountain
Duin, duine	DUNE	Dune(s)
Gebirge	MT(S)	Mountain(s)
Hochbene	PLAT	Plateau
Hügel	HLL	Hill
Kaap	CAPE	Cape
Kop, kuppe	HLL, MT	Hill, mountain
Myn	MN	Mine
Omuramba	STMI	Dry river bed
Pütz	WTRH	Water hole
Quedas	FLLS	Waterfall(s)
Rivier	STM, STMI	Stream, intermittent stream
Rücken	HLL, MT	Hill, Mountain, Ridge
Spitz	PT	Point
Stein	MT	Mountain
Strand	BCH	Beach, shore
Vlakte	PLN	Plain
Vliet	PAN	Salt pan