



**SEMINAR ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES (UNGEGN)
ASIA SOUTH-EAST AND PACIFIC SOUTH-WEST (ASEPSW)**

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**CURRENT STATUS ON ACTIVITIES OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN
MALAYSIA**

By

Mrs Fuziah Abu Hanifah

Director of Malaysian Centre for Geospatial Data Infrastructure (MaCGDI)

Chairperson

Working Group on National Geographical Names Database and Gazetteer

Malaysian National Committee on Geographical Names (MNCGN)

ABSTRACT

Geographical names are used in every day life to describe our surroundings and to tell others where we have been or where we plan to go. It has been widely acknowledged that consistent use of accurate place names is an important element in effective communication worldwide, apart from supporting socio-economic development, conservation and national infrastructure.

Due to the rapid growth in Malaysia, there is an imperative need to develop a comprehensive database containing names of official places that would benefit trade and commerce, population census and national statistics, property right and cadaster, urban and regional planning, environmental management, natural disaster relief, security strategy and peace-keeping operations, maps and atlas production, automatic navigation, tourism, and communication including postal and news services. Therefore, it requires a comprehensive database of geographical names which are consistent and authoritative that can retrieve quickly for the usage by the stakeholders by using the application that can be accessed via internet.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Consistent use of accurate place names is an important element in effective communication worldwide. It also supports socio-economic development, conservation and national infrastructure. Standardization of geographical names has become more important because of reference needs associated with the development of the communications and transport systems, production of high precision charts and maps and others. Standard geographical names can also identify and reflect culture, heritage and landscape.
- 1.2 Malaysia requires a comprehensive database of geographical names which are consistent and authoritative that can be retrieved quickly for the usage by the stakeholders. The current status on activities of geographical names in Malaysia can be described by the participation of three Working Groups within Malaysian National Committee on Geographical Names (MNCGN) which is the key player in the development of geographical names.
- 1.3 The focus of this paper is to inform on the remarkable progress in 2010 is the development of geographical names database using map scale of 1:25,000 and 1:50,000. It also involves updating of geographical names and the development of new modules such as audio, video and arabic (jawi) character in the database. Last but not least, this paper also will touch some implementation issues on activities of geographical names in Malaysia.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Malaysian National Committee on Geographical Names (MNCGN) was formed on 11th September 2002 by the Cabinet to coordinate activities for the determination of geographical names in Malaysia.

- 2.2** Responsibilities of this committee encompass the following matters:
- (a) formulating national guidelines for determination of geographical names;
 - (b) developing the National Geographical Names Database and the National Gazetteer;
 - (c) promoting the use of official names; and
 - (d) coordinating the input of national nomenclature activities with nomenclature activities at international level, including serving as liaison to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), particularly with the Regional Grouping.
- 2.3** This MNCGN is chaired by the Director-General of the Department of Survey and Mapping Malaysia (JUPEM) with its members consisting of representatives from federal agencies and state governments.
- 2.4** There are one (1) technical committee and three (3) working groups at national level to assist the MNCGN as follows:
- (a) National Technical Committee on Geographical Names (NTCGN);
 - (b) Working Group on Policy and Geographical Names Updating (new working group which replaced previous working group, called Working Group on Guidelines for Determination of Geographical Names) of Geographical Names;
 - (a) Working Group on National Geographical Names Database and Gazetteer; and
 - (b) Working Group on Names of Island and Off-Shore Geographic Entities.
- 2.5** Meanwhile, at the State level, the State Committee on Geographical Names (SCGN) was established to coordinate and implement the guidelines and procedures formulated by MNCGN. This committee is chaired by the State Secretary or the Secretary General of the Federal Territories Ministry (for Federal Territories) and its members comprise of representatives from state or federal agencies. At the state level, the State Technical Committee on Geographical Names (STCGN) was also established to assist the SCGN.

2.6 The existing organizational structure of MNCGN is as shown in **Diagram 1** below:

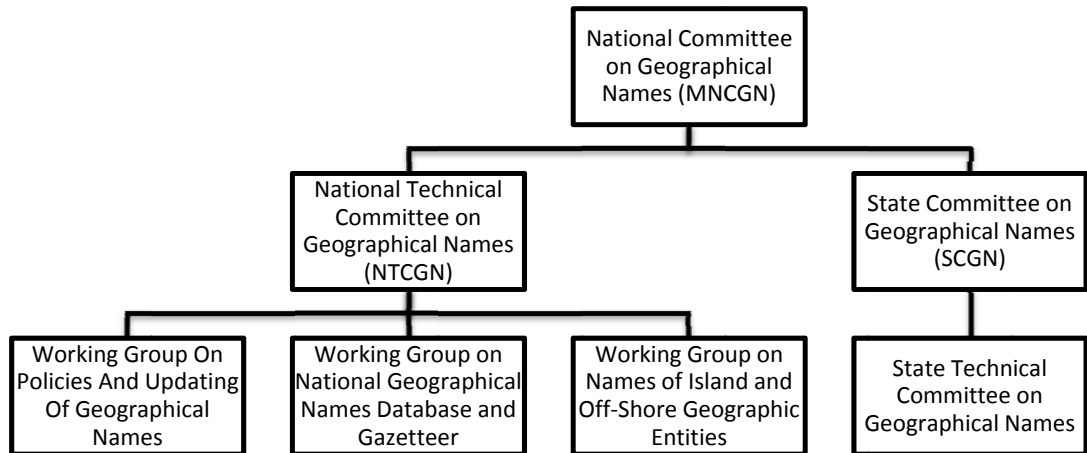


Diagram1:Committeesand Working Groups of Geographical Names

3. ACTIVITIES OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

3.1 Publishing of Guidelines for the Determination of Geographical Names

Guidelines for the Determination of Geographical Names has been published by JUPEM in 2005 and has become a Malaysian Standard and known as MS 2256: 2009 Geographic Information - Guidelines for the Determination of Geographical Names, as shown in **Diagram 2**. This guideline was prepared to represent Malaysia's effort to meet such a need and as part of national geospatial data infrastructure development initiative.

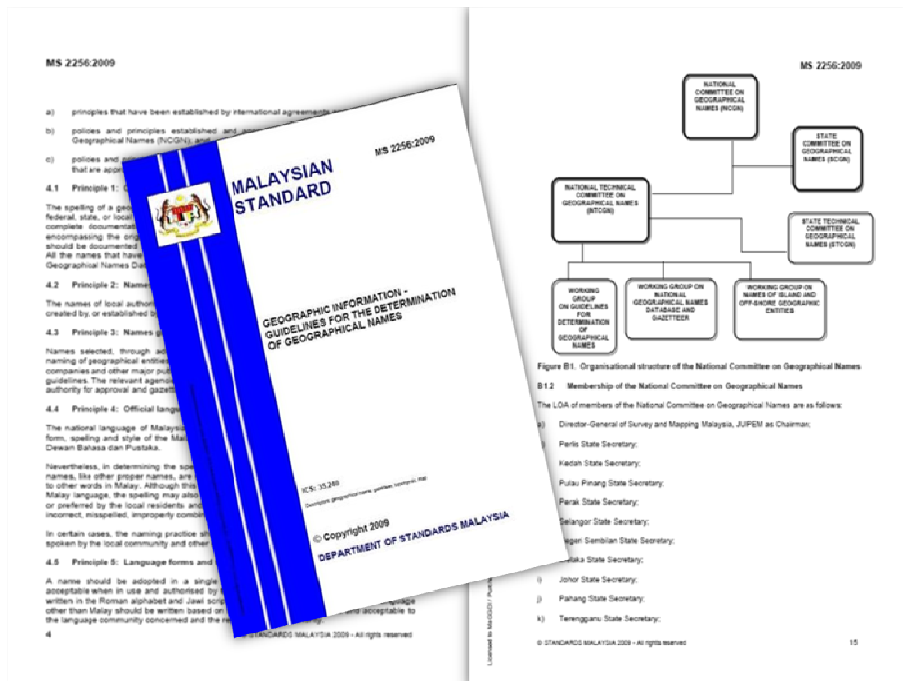


Diagram2:MS 2256: 2009 Geographic Information - Guidelines for the Determination of Geographical Names

There are 21 principles which are intended to serve as guides for the standardisation of geographical naming process in Malaysia towards a more accurate and consistent use of geographical names. In general, the determination of names should adhere to the following principles:

- i) Official or approved names
- ii) Names under statutory authority
- iii) Names given by other agencies
- iv) Official language
- v) Language forms and translation
- vi) Spelling and pronunciation
- vii) Forms and character of names
- viii) Uniformity in the spelling of names
- ix) Names in general public use
- x) Use of personal names
- xi) Naming a geographical entity based on identified geographical extent
- xii) Considerations in naming unnamed geographical entities

- xiii) Duplication of names
- xiv) Name changes
- xv) Use of qualifying elements
- xvi) Names of minor geographical entities
- xvii) Generic names
- xviii) Variant or unofficial names
- xix) Names in the forms of abbreviations and numbers
- xx) Off-shore hydrographic geographical entities
- xxi) Names of foreign countries

3.2 Geographical Names Database and Production of Web Gazetteer

The Malaysian Geographical Names Database consist of amongst others local names, location, historical background and gazette notification that have authoritative records available for government and public use.

The Working Group on Geographical Names Database and Gazetteer, chair by the Malaysian Centre for Geospatial Data Infrastructure (MaCGDI) was given the responsibility to develop the Malaysian Geographical Names Database and Web Gazetteer. The roadmap of development of the database and gazetteer and other activities as shown in **Table 1** below:

Table 1: Roadmap of Development of the Database and Gazetteer

| ACTIVITIES | YEAR |
|---|------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 1 - Development of Geographical Names Database and Gazetteer • Data collection / compilation from the state maps of the Peninsular Malaysia. (Scale of 1:100 000) | July 2004 – July 2005 |
| <p>Validation of Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The data was sent to the state with the template for validation and updating. | Aug. 2005 – Sept. 2006 |
| <p>Data Testing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure the data fulfilled the specification. | Oct. – Dec. 2006 |

| ACTIVITIES | YEAR |
|---|------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection, validation and data tested for Peninsular Malaysia(Scale of 1:25 000). • Development of the geographical names database and gazetteer for Peninsular Malaysia (Scale of 1:25 000). • Based on topographical maps of Peninsular Malaysia (700 sheets). | Jan – Aug. 2008 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the Module on Verification of Geographical Names and delivered to every state. | July 2008 -Oct. 2009 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase II - Data collection, validation and data tested for the state of Sabah and Sarawak. (Scale of 1:50 000 & 1:25 000) • Development of the geographical names database for the state of Sabah and Sarawak (1:50 000 & 1:25 000). • Based on topographical maps of Sabah and Sarawak (Sabah - 218 sheets and Sarawak - 271 sheets) | Sept. – Dec. 2008 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection, validation and data tested for naming of an island and offshore geographical entities. • Development of the geographical names database for islands and offshore geographical entities. • Data for islands and offshore geographical entities downloaded into MyGeoName by the Working Group on Names of Island and Off-Shore Geographical Entities. | Oct. 2008 - March 2009 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validation of geographical names from State Committee on Geographical Names (SCGN) before being publish into MyGeoName • SCGN will validate within 3 months after the Module on Verification of GeographicalNames being delivered to the state. | Dec. 2008 – Dec. 2010 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Arabic (<i>Jawi</i>) Module • Development of Arabic Module completed. Jawi spelling was then send to National Authority for Linguistics for validation. | Jan – Dec 2010 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of Audio Module • Development of audio module for Malay Language and related dialect. | May – Oct 2010 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of State Gazetteer • Production of state gazetteer based on the validation process. | Mei – Dec 2010 |

| ACTIVITIES | YEAR |
|---|----------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase III - Data collection, validation and data tested from Town Maps of Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. (Scale of 1:3 000 – 1:12 500) • Development of the geographical names database for map. (Scale of 1:3 000 – 1:12 500) • Total of 160 sheets. | Jan – Dec 2011 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase IV - Data collection, validation and data tested from Klang Valley Maps. (Scale of 1:500) • Development of the geographical names database. (Scale of 1:500) • Depends on availability of the data provided by JUPEM | Jan – Dec 2012 |

The Working Group on Geographical Names Database and Gazetteer has appointed a Liaison Officer from each state to verify existing or propose any new names. In conducting this task, reference has to be made to gazettes, gazette plans, and circulars issued by all State Secretaries concerned, as they are the authorities for the naming of the geographic entities within their jurisdictions. In addition, those names will also need to be referred to the National Authority for Linguistics (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka) for approval. Finally, geographic names that are proposed to be used must be tabled at the SCGN meeting before being officially approved and adopted.

3.3 Naming of Islands and Off-Shore Geographical Entities

The Working Group on Names of Islands and Off-Shore Geographic Entities was established on 20th June 2006 and is chair by the National Hydrography Centre (NHC).

The tasks of this Working Group are as follows:

- i) Carrying out surveys and researches as well as identifying and proposing the naming of islands and off-shore geographic entities which has no names. The proposed names will have to relate to the characteristics of hydrographic entities.

- ii) Identify and collect all related information of islands and off-shore geographic entities including from charts, gazettes, maps, agreements and related documents;
- iii) Documenting and updating the list of islands and geographical entities, the example of volume 1 of the document as shown in **Diagram 3**; and
- iv) Propose new names for existing islands and off-shore geographic entities related to the characteristic of geographical entities in accordance with the guidelines for the Standardization of Undersea Feature Names produced by the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO).



Diagram3: Front page document of Names of Island and Off-shore Geographical Entities Volume 1

The status on documentation of Names of Islands and Off-shore Geographical Entities for each state is shown in **Table 2** as follows:

Table 2: Status on documentation of Names of Islands and Off-shore Geographical Entities

| Status | Document | State |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|---|
| Published | Volumel | Kedah, Johor, Kelantan, Pahang, Terengganu, Labuan and Penang |
| | Volumell | Selangor, Perak, Melaka, Perlis and Negeri Sembilan |
| Waiting for State authorities actions | Volumelll | Sabah |
| | VolumellV | Sarawak |

3.4 Workshop of geographical names

Workshops of geographical names have been carried out as scheduled. The objectives of the workshops are to disseminate information on the Guideline on naming of Geographical Names and to understand the procedure to use Geographical Names Database. The workshops were also intend to help participants understand the importance of coordinated geographical naming and to populate the Geographical Names Database. These efforts are expected to support the implementation of the Malaysian Geospatial Data Infrastructure (MyGDI) initiatives which is undertaken by the Malaysian Centre for Geospatial Data Infrastructure (MaCGDI).

The content of the workshops include presentation from the committees, working groups and agencies related to geographical names as follows:

- i) Briefing on National Geographical Names Database and Gazetteer by MaCGDI
- ii) Briefing on Guideline for the Determination of Geographical Names by JUPEM
- iii) Briefing on Names of Island and Off-Shore Geographic Entities by NHC

- iv) Briefing on role of National Archives of Malaysia in development of National Geographical Names Database and Gazetteer by National Archives of Malaysia
- v) Briefing of procedures on collection of geographical names in the publication of Topographic map by JUPEM
- vi) Demonstration on MyGeoName application
- vii) Hands-on training on updating of geographical names using Module on Verification of Geographical Names

3.5 Development of Module on Verification of Geographical Names

The module for updating the geographical names was introduced to expedite the verification process. Data Entry to the geographical names database will be done after the verification processes are completed by STCGN.

A few snapshots of the module are shown in **Diagram 4 to Diagram 6**.

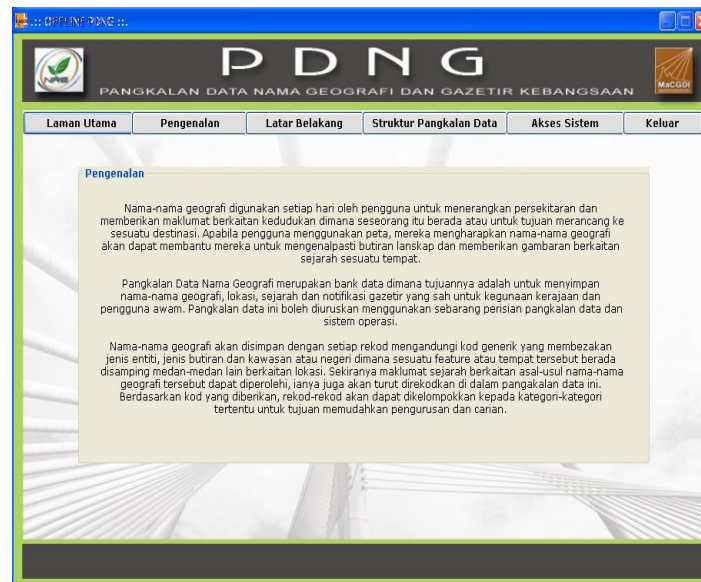


Diagram 4 : Interface of the Module on Verification of Geographical Names



Diagram5 : The list of geographical names to be verified

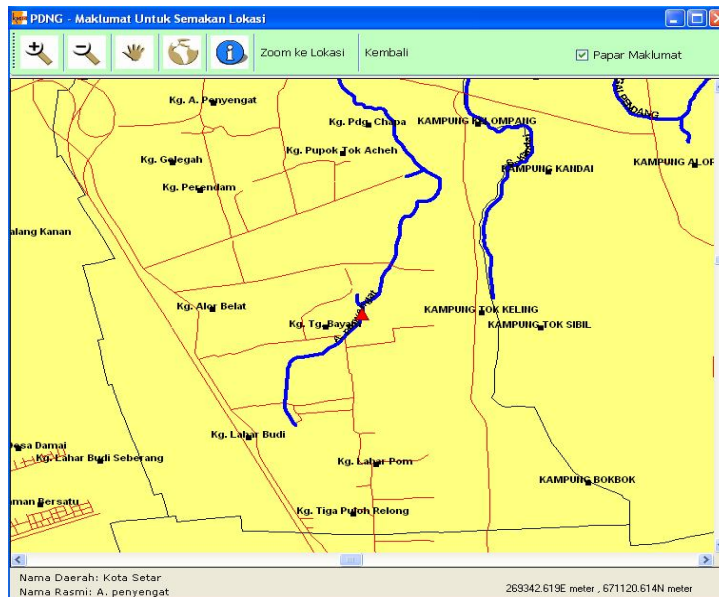


Diagram6 :The location of Geographical Names to be verified

3.6 Websites on Geographical Names Activities in Malaysia

a) MNCGN Website

JUPEM has launched the MNCGN Website named “MyGeoName” in July 2006 and the updating of the website is carried out regularly. The latest update was on November 2010 which includes the report on 17th UNGEGN Asia South East and Pacific South West Divisional Meeting in Sydney, Australia on 10th April 2010, and Information Bulletin of UNGEGN 2010. This website can be accessed at URL: <http://www.jupem.gov.my/geonames> in dual language that is in Malay language and in English language.

Through this website, all information related to geographic naming activities could be accessed and is linked to UNGEGN website and other country websites which are related to the geographical naming such as New Zealand and Canada. This website also include of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). A list of liaison officers for each agency is also included for communication purpose. MyGeoName application can be accessed by clicking the related link, via this website.

b) MyGeoName Application

MyGeoName application has been developed by MaCGDI. The interface of MyGeoName Application is as shown in **Diagram 7**. The development for MyGeoName application is still ongoing with a few new additional modules being introduced as follows:

i) Searching Module

This module was developed to make searching on the database. Searching can be made via geographical names, locations, districts or states.

ii) Audio Module

Some communities in the States have their own dialects thus, pronunciation of geographic names can be different and sometimes cannot be determined correctly. On this matter, MNCGN had decided that “Audio File” be developed for all names that appear in the Web Gazetteer and this would in certain ways be able to address this matter and would lead to pronunciation of geographical names being made in a standardised manner.

There are two (2) versions of “Audio File” have been developed to represent its different way of pronunciations. In this regard, first version represents pronunciation using formal Malay language whilst the second version represents dialect pronunciation of each state of the country. Verifications of ‘Audio File’ are made by representative of NTCGN and secretariat of NCGN.

iii) Arabic (Jawi) Character Module

Arabic Character module is a module developed within the geographical names database. All arabic character for 64,554 geographical names throughout Malaysia including 3,974 foreign names has been submitted to National Authority for Linguistics for verification by related experts appointed.

iv) Administration Module

Administration module consists of data entry, data updating of geographical names and coordinates of the location. It also consists of verification of the spelling of geographical names.

v) Gazetteer Publication Module

This module is to publish and generate an authoritative national and state gazetteer of geographical names which had been verified by the SCGN.



MyGeoName Application

<http://www.mygeoportal.gov.my>

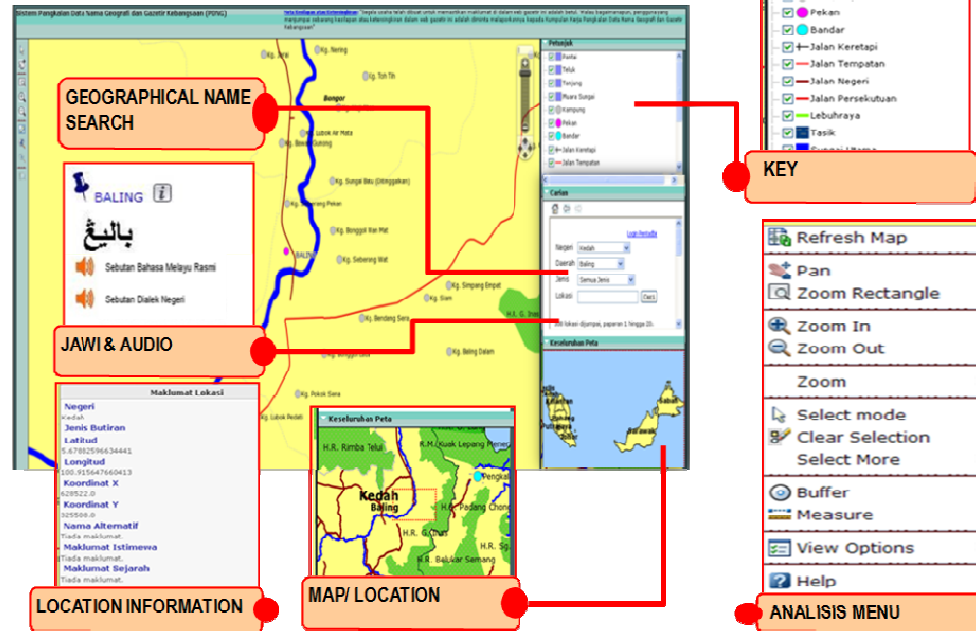


Diagram 7 : Interface of MyGeoName Application

3.7 ComputerBased Training (CBT) forGeographicalNaming

The purpose of this CBT is to educate and illustrates the significance of geographic naming in the country for officers from Federal Agencies, State Agencies and Local Authority. The CBT comprises of introduction of the importance aspect of geographic naming (which include a speech from the Chairman of MNCGN), compilation of presentations from workshops given by JUPEM, MaCGDI and National Hydrographic Center, and procedure to update geographic names database in the country. Interface of CBT as shown inDiagram 8andDiagram 9.



Diagram 8 : Interface of CBT



Diagram9 : Interface of CBT

3.8 PRODUCTION OF NATIONAL GAZETTEER

The National Gazetteer of Malaysia is the authoritative geographical place names and is the result of the cooperative effort of federal and state governments. The Gazetteer is compiled annually by the Working Group on National Geographical Names Database and Gazetteer within MNCGN, using data provided by the Department of Survey and Mapping Malaysia (JUPEM), National Hydrographic Centre (NHC), Royal Malaysian Navy and State Committee on Geographical Names (SCGN).

This document details amongst others the organizations involved in the production of the gazetteer. It also describes in detail on the gazetteer product, data requirements, metadata, production methodology, associated production issues and quality control procedures.

4. IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

In developing and implementing the standardised usage of geographical names throughout the country, there were some issues encountered by MNCGN, amongst which are as follows:

4.1 Verification of The Geographical Names

In developing the Malaysian Geographical Names Database and Web Gazetteer, the concerned Working Group only obtained partial commitment from the SCGN, particularly in regards to the verification of geographical names. Some State Liaison Officers appointed to the SCGN were frequently transferred to other positions and this affected the needed continuity on the data verification activities. Since procedures to verify geographical names were not properly documented new officers would face difficulties in carrying out their tasks.

In addressing this situation, State Working Groups had been formed by MaCGDI, whereby members among others comprise of an officer from MaCGDI and the State Liaison Officer. Any problem encountered is solved by State Working Groups collectively and completed work done was documented. In the case of the State Liaison Officer being transferred to another department, the State Working Group will acts as a mediator until a new State Liaison Officer is appointed by SCGN.

Besides that, the Computer Based Training and the Module on Verification of Geographical Names that have been developed will help State Liaison Officer to update the geographical names database. Briefings have been given to each state on how to use the module. During briefing, each district of the state will be given the module to update the geographical names in their district only. Then, the State Liaison Officer will collect the geographical names which have been update from the districts for the validation and send back to the working group within three (3) months after receiving the module.

4.2 Awareness On The Importance Of Geographical Names

In Malaysia, awareness of the importance of geographical names is mainly carried out by MNCGN with the cooperation of geographical names committees and working groups especially at the state level which comprises of local authorities as the key players in the geographical naming. Furthermore Local Authorities are encouraged to submit to the state government (SCGN) name changes and new names for unnamed places for consideration as official names.

In this respect the government has encourage the usage of the official names in all levels including government, public sector and the citizen. Besides that, state names authorities also promote throughout state government and the citizens an awareness of the importance and procedures for geographic name standardisation.

Furthermore, briefings and workshops on geographical names held frequently throughout the states to give awareness to the participants on the importance of geographical names. During briefing and workshops, participants were exposed on the importance to adhere the principles in the Guideline for the Determination of Geographical Names. These principles which are intended to serve as guides for the standardisation of geographical naming process in Malaysia towards a standard, accurate and consistent use of geographical names.

Therefore, awareness on the needs of standardization of geographical names is important because confusion, uncertainty, and misunderstanding may occur if more than one name is used for the same place, the same name is applied to different places, or the spelling of a name is inconsistent.

5. CONCLUSION

Geographical names activities in Malaysia need support, cooperation and commitment of all agencies, particularly at state level in completing works of updating geographical names within the time frame given. Compliance with policies and Guidelines for the Determination of Geographical Names is important so that geographical names used are consistent and authoritative. An effective database of geographical names will be a reference to all parties, significantly in the aspect of national building.