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UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC  
AND  
SOCIAL COUNCIL



PROVISIONAL

E/CN.14/C.2/SR.6(VI)  
26 February 1964

Original: ENGLISH



ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA  
Sixth session  
Addis Ababa, 19 February - 3 March 1964

COMMITTEE II

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE SIXTH MEETING

held at Africa Hall, Addis Ababa,  
on Tuesday, 25 February 1964, at 9.20 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. KAMITATU (Congo, Leopoldville)  
Secretary: Mr. STAMENKOVIC

CONTENTS:

- Economic and social trends in Africa and review of the activities of the Economic Commission for Africa
- (b) Social development (continued)
- (e)(iv) Housing

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TRENDS IN AFRICA AND REVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA (agenda item 5)

(b) Social Development (E/CN.14/241, 244, 269; E/CN.14/L.181 continued)

Mr. SAM (Ghana) said that women ought to be enabled and encouraged to play a full part in the economic and social development of Africa. More workshops were needed like the Workshop on Urban Problems recently held in Lagos, the report of which, the Role of Women in Urban Development (E/CN.14/241) was before the Committee; their reports would help to guide economic planners, who ought to take full account of all aspects of indigenous society. Special attention should be paid to the recommendations of the Workshop on Urban Problems, which aimed at bringing women up to the same social level as men; recommendation 21 was particularly important, for in many cases women who had not been educated to the point of being able to speak English or French were much closer to the realities of life in their own countries. The recommendations on education, too, were sound and merited careful consideration. Lastly, attention should be paid to improving the status of women in rural as well as in urban areas.

Ato Assefa LEGGESE (Ethiopia) said that women ought to be encouraged to exercise their rights and to contribute as much as men to economic development. The recommendations contained in the report under discussion required careful examination. While valid in principle, they might have other than the desired effect if implemented at too early a stage in a country's development. If applied too rigidly, recommendation 12 for example might militate against the employment of women, while recommendation 18, by relieving a divorced wife of all burdens and putting her in a privileged position, might encourage divorce. Recommendation 21 was not very realistic: at some meetings at least fifteen interpreters might be needed. Recommendation 28 was vague. Recommendation 33 should be amended to say that parents, especially the mother or any female concerned, should be present at juvenile courts.

On the whole, his delegation endorsed the Report on the Workshop and the recommendations contained in it.

Mr. DARWISH (United Arab Republic) expressed approval of the new structure of the Social Affairs Section of the secretariat, and its proposed objectives. The fact that emphasis was to be placed on the improvement of training schools for social workers was particularly gratifying. The Report on the World Social Situation (E/CN.14/244) showed that in Africa populations were increasing faster than incomes. Economic Commission for Africa would have to find ways of raising the living standards of African populations, particularly the rural populations. That could be done by introducing rural industries and encouraging handicrafts; he was sure there were many countries which would willingly place their experience in that field at the disposal of the secretariat.

At the Committee's fifth meeting, the secretariat had proposed the establishment of a standing committee on social development. The secretariat needed an authority to guide in its work. Whether that authority should be an expert group or a standing committee, it would be for the Committee to decide.

Mr. BAKO (Nigeria), reverting to the Report of the Workshop on Urban Problems, remarked that Section V of the Report raised the question of polygamy. It was a popular misconception that men only benefited from the custom. In many cases women who were lonely at home while their husbands were out at work, or childless women who did not wish to deprive their husbands of the joys of parenthood, advocated the practice. Paragraphs 28, in Section V, was inaccurate: polygamy did not necessarily confer economic benefits, and old men did not use their money to acquire women.

Recommendation 1 in the Report did not state whether the meetings advocated were to be held quarterly, bi-annually or annually. His delegation considered that bi-annual meetings were necessary. The research work referred to in recommendations 2 and 15 ought to be done by the countries themselves, reports on the results of the research being forwarded to the Economic Commission for Africa. Regarding recommendation 4, legal means would not be effective for reducing the dowry; efforts

should be concentrated on educational means. Recommendations 5 and 6 seemed to conflict with recommendation 4. It was hard to see the reason for the medical certificate advocated in recommendation 16: marriage was founded on love, and the fitness of the partners hardly entered into the matter.

At the end of recommendation 17, the words "that in countries ..... secured" should be deleted; women who contracted a polygamous marriage were always aware of what they were doing. Recommendation 18, on separation and divorce, allowed women too much latitude. In recommendation 25, the words "urban middle-class" should be deleted, as savouring over-much of discrimination. Recommendation 32 was impracticable and would give rise to more problems than it solved. Moslem countries might have difficulty in putting into effect recommendation 33: "that women should be present at all juvenile courts". The recommendation should be amended so as to read: "women should be present at juvenile courts where religion does not prohibit the practice." Recommendation 38 appeared superfluous; girls were already afforded the same facilities as boys. In recommendation 42, on the status of teaching staff, he wondered whether the words "improved as regards salaries" applied to women only. In Nigeria, women with the equivalent qualifications were paid the same salaries as men.

Mr. BRIGHT (Liberia) observed that in many parts of Africa women had been led to believe they were inferior to men and had, in consequence, developed an inferiority complex. More workshops at local level, like the Workshops on Urban Problems, would be a means of eradicating the complex. However, the granting of equal rights to women might give rise to certain difficulties. He enquired whether, for instance, the widower of a woman who had held a political position would be entitled to a pension if she pre-deceased him. Developments of that nature might be repugnant to African men.

Mr. HOCINE (Algeria), speaking on the subject of adult literacy and economic and social development (document E/CN.14/269), said that five-sevenths of the continent's population were illiterate and would

have to be taught to read and write if they were to play their proper role in Africa's economic, political and social development. That fact had been emphasized in General Assembly resolution 1937 (XVIII), of which Algeria had been a sponsor.

In 1963 the Algerian Minister of Education had launched a campaign aiming to eradicate illiteracy in one year. The aim of the campaign was to reach the isolated regions of the country, to install a sense of revolutionary purpose into the peasants and to ensure that the population played a fuller part in the life of the country. The campaign was conducted by voluntary teachers, monitors and civil servants working in their spare time. Lack of teachers, teaching material and premises, and of finance, were among the difficulties encountered in conducting the campaign. The role of international co-operation in overcoming such difficulties was important, and it was to be noted that General Assembly resolution 1937 (XVIII) had invited the Secretary-General to collaborate with other international organizations finding ways of assisting national efforts to eradicate illiteracy. The right to education was one of the human rights, and education was at once a pre-condition of material progress and a means of preparing human beings to make use of and to benefit from that progress.

Mr. KACEM (Observer for the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that his organization was very pleased to see recommendations 9 and 12 in the Report of the Workshop on Urban Problem. They had been drafted by women and showed that African women were anxious to unite in demanding their rights and material conditions which would enable them to play their proper part in Africa's development. His organization would do its utmost to ensure that the recommendations were put into effect.

Mr. RIBY-WILLIAMS (Secretariat) reminded the Committee that, in his introductory statement on the sub-item under discussion, at the fifth meeting, he had asked for comments on the advisability of setting up a regular body of the Commission to study the Economic Commission for Africa's social development programme and to advise the Commission on measures to be

taken in that field. In reaching its decision on the subject of setting up such a body, the Committee should remember that the standing committee already set up under Commission resolution 36(III) operated in the limited field of social welfare and community development, that all the secretariat was in effect, asking was that the terms of reference of that standing committee be expanded to cover the whole field of social planning and that the standing committee with its expanded terms of reference should meet regularly, and that no more meetings than were held at present, or additional expense to the Economic Commission for Africa, would be involved.

Hitherto, the secretariat had devoted little attention to the prevention of crime and treatment of offenders. The mandate of the Committee would be necessary before the re-organized Social Affairs Section could introduce programmes in that field. The Committee would also have to authorize the secretariat to re-organize the former Community Development Unit so as to enable it to deal with such questions as agrarian structure, land reform, rural marketing, co-operatives and rural credit.

Ato Assefa LEGGESE (Ethiopia) reminded the Committee that a detailed discussion on meetings, standing committees and expert groups had taken place at the Fifth session, and it had then been decided to reduce the Standing Committee on Social Welfare and Community Development to the status of an expert group. A note by the Executive Secretary, Standing Committee (E/CN.14/177), describing the difference between standing committees and expert groups, had been distributed during that session. He asked that that note should be re-circulated. A standing committee imposed a certain financial burden on governments, whereas, an expert group did not. The suggestion being made by the secretariat seemed to conflict with what had been decided at the Fifth session. His Government was not yet taking a definite stand in the matter; but it wanted to be convinced of the necessity of setting up a standing committee before voting in favour of it.

Mr. HAMID (Sudan) stated that his delegation would support the setting up of a permanent body to guide the secretariat in its work, provided that body were an extension of, or replaced, the former expert group.

Mr. RIBY-WILLIAMS (Secretariat) explained that the terms of reference of the Standing Committee set up under Commission resolution 36(III), the status of which had been reduced to that of an expert group at the Fifth session, were not wide enough to cover the activities of the re-organized Social Affairs Section. The secretariat was accordingly suggesting that a new standing committee be set up to guide and advise the secretariat, scrutinize its plans for future work and make recommendations to the Commission. There would be no need to maintain in existence the former body which had met in 1961 and 1962; in place of it there would be a single standing committee covering the whole field of social work. It would be a committee of the Commission, reporting to the Commission and making recommendations to the Commission.

Mr. TOURE (Guinea) said that the social aspects of development were so important that it was almost unthinkable that there should not be a permanent body to advise the secretariat on social matters. His delegation supported the secretariat proposal and hoped other delegations would do likewise.

Mr. SAVI DE TOVE (Togo) observed that, since a country could not develop economically unless its social conditions were satisfactory, the social aspects of development ought to be given precedence over its economic aspects. He accordingly agreed with the secretariat that the terms of reference of the Standing Committee established at the Third session should be expanded.

In his opinion, the secretariat was laying too little emphasis upon juvenile delinquency and the problems of youth, social security, and apprenticeship.

The CHAIRMAN reminded the representative of Togo that the Committee was at present discussing the secretariat's proposal for the establishment of a standing committee.

Ato Assefa LEGGESE (Ethiopia) felt that the question of a standing committee on social development could not properly be discussed



independently of the subject of social development as a whole; he would prefer to discuss the two matters together. The Committee might, alternatively, deal with the general situation first, and then pass on to the more particular problem.

The CHAIRMAN reminded the Committee of the need to limit discussion to the minimum. He invited the Committee to vote on the question whether social development in general, or the proposed standing committee, should now be discussed.

It was decided, by 10 votes to 9 with no abstentions, that social development should be discussed.

Mr. SAM (Ghana) strongly supported recommendation 32 in the Report of the Workshop on Social Problems. Reception centres were most important; he hoped that in addition to familiarizing country people with urban conditions, they might encourage them to return to rural areas. Recommendation 33 required amplification; juvenile courts should be attended, not by the parents of delinquents, but by trained welfare women, who would get in touch with the parents after the court proceedings, and keep in touch with them.

Mr. BAKO (Nigeria) was not in favour of recommendation 32. Desirable though such reception centres might be, their cost was prohibitive. It was bad reasoning to argue that reception centres should be established simply because a large organization like the British Council had set up centres.

Ato Assefa LEGGESE (Ethiopia) said that the problem of illiteracy was put in a nutshell in paragraphs 5 and 7 of the UNESCO document on Adult Literacy and Economic and Social Development (E/CN.14/269). The joint draft resolution (E/CN.14/L.181) concerning the World Campaign for Universal Literacy had his support. It was valuable as a demonstration of the Commission's concern over illiteracy and an indication of what was hoped for from UNESCO and from member countries of the Commission. He had some minor amendments to propose when the draft resolution was discussed.

Mr. BAKO (Nigeria) supported the recommendations contained in the UNESCO, (E/CN.14/269).

As to the joint draft resolution, operative paragraph 1 should be redrafted in a less imperative form: it was for governments to decide how far programmes for adult literacy and adult education could be included in their development plans.

Mr. KACHEM (Observer for the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said he had read the UNESCO document with great interest and fully supported General Assembly resolution 1937 (XVIII). He was glad to see that literacy was to be treated as an integral part of economic, social and cultural development. Investigations carried out among workers showed that productivity increased in proportion to years of study, which indicated that a literacy campaign would help to speed up development in Africa. Certain countries in Africa had already started literacy campaigns among workers, particularly in rural areas through agricultural co-operatives. The trade union movement was anxious to raise the cultural level of workers in Africa and thereby to make agriculture and industry more profitable. His organization would spare no effort to ensure the success of the promotion of literacy among agricultural and urban workers.

Mr. SAM (Ghana) thought that the UNESCO document offered excellent guidance for the literacy campaign. With regard to the objective of universal primary schooling by 1980, referred to in paragraph 17 of the document, he suggested that the Social Affairs Section be asked to prepare a programme for the guidance of member countries in the setting up of schools. He urged that the Commission help governments to remove the obstacles to the elimination of illiteracy mentioned in paragraph 22, by passing on to them the experience of countries which had already made progress in that direction. Ghana would be very willing to lend its assistance.

With regard to measures for reducing costs, referred to in paragraph 32, he suggested that schoolrooms might be used during holidays, and that literacy campaigns could be carried out through agricultural co-operatives. The cultural level of workers could be raised.

teachers should work in their own districts. In connexion with the suggestion in paragraph 37 that local agricultural workers could help in the literacy campaign, it was important to bear in mind, that, however anxious they might be to assist, they would not be available at harvest and other peak agricultural periods.

It would be useful if governments could set up special departments responsible for the literacy campaign.

Mr. SAVI DE TOVE (Togo) pointed out that one of the problems in world social development was the psychological attitudes, of superiority or inferiority for example, produced by racial differences: it was a problem that needed careful attention. While he recognized the need for adult education, he urged that mass programmes should take into account the situation of those who were, perhaps, too old to be educated. Efforts should also be made to counter the attitude of superiority of literates to illiterates, and to ensure that those who had had the advantages of education freely helped the less favoured. Above all, community development should be encouraged to overcome differences between nationalities. A useful measure would be exchanges between children from different regions and countries in Africa, and even from different continents.

Mr. COULIBAYY (Ivory Coast) fully supported the world literacy campaign and the joint draft resolution on the subject. Unless the masses attained a certain level of literacy there would be serious obstacles to economic and social progress.

The meeting was suspended at 11.50 a.m. and was resumed at 12.20 p.m.

(e)(iv) Housing (E/CN.14/251)

Mr. TURIN (Secretariat) said that the Standing Committee on Housing and Physical Planning, established at the Fifth session, planned to hold its first meeting in November 1964; the Committee had, however, already started work.

The housing situation in Africa was far from satisfactory. Only about half a million new dwellings were being built every year, which was only one-fifth of what the Committee estimated was required to make good the existing back-log. The cost of building a dwelling in Africa represented from 3 to 8 years of a worker's wage, and was thus far beyond the reach of the least favoured class. Moreover, there was an immense discrepancy between the very high standards set by the colonial powers for their officials and the traditional housing of the rural, semi-urban and urban masses; only a prolonged effort could close the gap.

More than fifty per cent of the building materials used in Africa were imported. The Housing, Building and Planning Section was convinced that at least 90 per cent of those materials could be produced in Africa. However, African materials, often made by handicraft methods, were also far too expensive. Transport and distribution costs were very high; and, despite the very low wages of African workers, the proportion of labour costs in the total cost of building materials was just as high as in the industrialized countries. Rationalization and re-organization of the building industry could therefore have an enormous effect on reducing the cost of housing. Every means ought to be adopted to increase labour productivity, including the provision of training facilities.

African governments were often afraid to face the enormous problem of providing adequate housing; few of them had even made estimates of their housing needs, and still fewer had a general policy for housing. Whereas in the European countries, from two to four per cent of the national income was spent on housing, in Africa the figure was only one

and a half per cent, and that included middle class and even luxury housing. The building industry, with its various ancillaries such as the manufacture of building materials and trade training, ought to be a major item in any general economic plan.

Very few African countries were tackling town and country planning on a national scale; most had merely partial plans for certain towns or districts. But the population of many large towns in Africa was doubling every ten years. That meant enormous problems in providing housing and services for the new inhabitants.

Serious though they were, the housing problems with which Africa was confronted were not insurmountable; but they could only be properly tackled on a regional or sub-regional basis. African countries ought to collaborate in planning their building industries and their training schemes, by exchanging experience and discussing methods; there was no need to confine collaboration to other African countries, for many countries in Latin America and in Asia were facing very similar problems.

The work programme of the Housing, Building and Planning Section was fairly ambitious. The Section was endeavouring to study problems from every angle - economic, financial, political, technical, social - though it was aware that such a wide approach carried a danger of superficiality. It was counting on the collaboration of governments and hoped to produce five or six further documents before the Committee on Housing and Physical Planning met in November.

Mr. SAM (Ghana) described his country's housing programme, which was based on the idea that the well-being of the individual, however humble, was of supreme importance.

Following a demographic survey made in 1962 and 1963, plans had been made for dwelling construction, involving an estimated expenditure of £44.5 million, aiming at reducing average house occupancy from the present figure of between 13 and 20 to less than 10 during the course of the next seven years. Expanding population would be provided for by

building new cities, towns and villages, while the increase in the urban population would be catered for by temporary low-cost satellite villages. Schemes for more permanent housing included loans for private house ownership. The aim was to reduce the cost of housing in relation to incomes.

He welcomed the Commission's proposed work on housing, and hoped that it would include research on cheaper building methods through improved design, more efficient methods of construction and the use of local instead of imported materials.

Mr. BAKO (Nigeria) said that the main problems in his country were housing for city workers, and housing necessitated by new industries. A six-year programme had been planned, but the difficulty was how to finance it. He wondered whether the Commission for Africa, through its Housing, Building and Planning Section, could help member governments to find means of financing their housing programmes. He also asked if it would be possible for the Committee to examine the question of rural housing, which might perhaps be one of the causes of the drift to towns.

He would like information on three further points. How much attention was the Section paying to the question of the use of local materials for the local houses? Traditional taste was being lost, and new materials were often unsuitable: corrugated iron roofing, for instance, was very hot. What was being done to encourage the modernization of African houses without losing traditional design and architecture? It would be regrettable if nothing were preserved for the future. And, lastly, what was being done to publicize the Commission's work in the field of housing?

Mr. GABDOU (Chad) said that it would be useful if a meeting of African housing experts were organized to study the two main types of houses in Africa - the "hard" houses of brick or stone or cement, and the traditional houses using local materials - and to consider the possibilities of re-designing the latter so that a decent, resistant, sanitary dwelling could be provided within the means of people who could not afford the typical present day house in "hard" materials.

Under the legislation in force in many countries, moreover, a man wishing to build a house had first to purchase the land to put it on. The Economic Commission for Africa should recommend that countries "socialize" their legislation in that respect, so that house purchase might become possible, not just for privileged groups, but for the whole population.

Mr. NIGER (Equatorial Guinea) said that his country had a three-year experimental building plan, with a target of 4,000 dwellings, nearly half of which were under construction. The dwellings were financed largely by interest free loans to the occupiers, and in part by State subsidy.

Ato Assefa LEGGESE (Ethiopia) felt that the funds available for housing under the Technical Assistance Programme and the Special Fund were unduly limited, in view of the need for housing.

The Committee's discussion had, laid rather undue stress on urban housing; that more attention might be paid to rural housing. In the housing studies which were being made it might be better to concentrate on a few problems, such as finance, housing policy and the use of local materials.

The CHAIRMAN invited observers to address the Committee.

Mr. REYNAUD (International Labour Organization) said that his organization fully endorsed the views expressed in the Report on Work in Housing, Building and Planning (E/CN.14/251). He drew the Committee's attention to the reference to ILO in paragraph 23.

The International Labour Organization was chiefly interested in problems of manpower, training, housing co-operatives, and accident insurance and security in the building industry. The 1961 International Labour Conference had made recommendations concerning the housing of workers, in both town and country.





In December 1963 ILO had organized, at Lagos, a Conference on Labour and Productivity in Public Works in Africa, which was attended by some twenty African countries; the Conference had made a comparative study of manual and mechanized methods in public works construction.

Mr. OGUTU (Observer for the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) stated that the free trade unions were participating directly in cheap workers' housing projects in certain African countries and elsewhere, and the ICFTU was planning an extensive campaign to encourage African trade unions to create workers' housing co-operatives and to encourage agricultural workers to build their own houses with government help.

The ICFTU wished to co-operate closely with the Economic Commission for Africa on housing problems and hoped to receive advice from the Housing, Building and Planning Section. It urged that a certain number of members of trade unions be admitted to the courses organized by the Economic Commission for Africa for leaders of self-help housing projects.

The meeting rose at 1:25 p.m.

