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REPORT ON WORK IN HOUSING, BUILDING AND PLANNING

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REPORT ON WORK IN HOUSING, BUILDING AND PLANNING

1. The Housing, Building and Planning Section was established on 1 January 1963. Even before its establishment, and in accordance with the provisions of Resolution 53(IV) of the fourth session of the Commission, the secretariat had taken steps to convene a Meeting of Experts on Housing Problems in Africa; this meeting was held in Addis Ababa from 9 to 17 January 1963. In preparation for this meeting the secretariat had compiled a certain number of working documents of which the main one, Housing in Africa: Problems and Policies,^{1/} served as a basis for the discussions of the experts.
2. The conclusions of the meeting were summarized in a document submitted to the Commission at its fifth session.^{2/} This document included, among other things, an annex with suggestions for a long-term work programme for the Commission in housing, building and planning. The most important of these recommendations concerned the establishment within the Commission of a Committee on Housing and Physical Planning whose terms of reference and work programme were defined along general lines.^{3/}
3. All these recommendations were adopted by the Commission, which inter alia decided to incorporate the particular work programme proposed by the group of experts into its general work programme.^{4/} The favourable reception given by the member states to the proposals of the group of experts thus permitted the secretariat to implement the adopted work programme and to undertake forthwith a series of studies following the order of priority established by the Commission.

^{1/} E/CN.14/HOUPA/3 and annexes, which after revision became E/CN.14/HOU/2.

^{2/} Report of the Meeting of Experts on Housing Problems in Africa, E/CN.14/191 - E/CN.14/HOU/1.

^{3/} E/CN.14/191 - E/CN.14/HOU/1, annex III.

^{4/} See Economic Commission for Africa, fifth session, Annual Report to the Economic and Social Council, document E/3727, E/CN.14/289, para. 90-92, and 257-259 and part V.

4. This programme includes six major fields of activity: general documentation, housing policies, the economic problems of housing, resources, physical planning and research and documentation in the fields of housing and building.
5. It was anticipated, with respect to general documentation that the secretariat would assemble in a single document extracts from the main reports produced by Technical Assistance and Special Fund experts on questions concerning housing, building and planning in Africa. Such a compilation in fact seemed useful both for the work of the Technical Assistance and Special Fund experts and for that of the official bodies commissioned to work out and implement housing and building programmes in Africa.
6. In view of the fact that most of the documents which were to serve as the basis for this work were located in the archives of the Technical Assistance Administration in New York, it was decided to assign this task to the Housing, Building and Planning Branch of the Bureau of Social Affairs.
7. It is anticipated that the results of the work on document analysis will be available by the beginning of 1964. As soon as this document is received the secretariat will assume responsibility for ensuring that it is disseminated as widely as possible among the public bodies of the member states, Technical Assistance and Special Fund specialists and experts, research institutes, etc.
8. Still within the field of general documentation, the secretariat was requested to assemble in a single document the latest information on the major sources of external financial aid which might be directed towards the financing of housing, building and physical planning operations. The major purpose of this document was to supply the governments concerned with a general review of the administrative or technical arrangements and conditions for possible external financial assistance, both bilateral and strictly international.
9. At the meeting of the Working Group on Housing and Related Community Facilities of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination held in Geneva

from 4 to 6 June 1963, the representative of the Bureau of Social Affairs of United Nations Headquarters called attention to the general advantages of such a document and proposed that its scope be broadened and not limited exclusively to Africa. It was therefore decided, in agreement with the Bureau of Social Affairs that the latter would assume responsibility for the study in question. It would later be communicated to the secretariats of the various regional economic commissions, which in turn would ensure its distribution to the countries concerned. It is anticipated that the document will be available by the beginning of 1964.

10. The housing policy project which was given first priority related to the establishment of a model comprehensive and detailed survey of housing needs based on the experience of certain countries and paying particular attention to the conditions prevailing in African countries in process of rapid development. The Commission in fact recognized the primary importance of a quantitative as well as qualitative knowledge of housing needs as a pre-condition for elaborating a housing policy and formulating medium- and long-term building programmes.

11. In applying the resolutions of the Commission, the secretariat therefore made a survey in a restricted number of African countries which, to its knowledge, had proceeded to make global estimates of their needs within the framework of economic development programmes or plans. Proceeding from the replies to this first sample survey, and thanks to the systematic exploitation of information contained in national development plans being applied or presently under study, the secretariat made a first evaluation of the role of housing in development planning.^{1/}

12. This provisional document was submitted to the Meeting of Experts on the Integration of Social Development Plans with Over-all Development Planning, held in Addis Ababa from 9 to 18 October 1963.^{2/}

^{1/} HOU/Working Document No.2, 21 August 1963.

^{2/} E/CN.14/SDP/24.

13. A more complete version of this document, including an annex giving a detailed analysis of some twenty national development plans from the stand-point of housing, was submitted for comment to a large number of competent bodies and specialists in Africa with a view to preparing a more complete study, to be submitted at the first meeting of the Committee on Housing and Physical Planning scheduled for November - December 1964. The secretariat also hopes to gather useful information on the experience acquired in a certain number of African countries which are contemplating or have already undertaken studies with a view to elaborating a national housing policy.

14. In so far as the economic aspects of housing are concerned, and apart from the problem of investments devoted to housing and related community facilities already treated in the study referred to in the above paragraph, the secretariat concentrated mainly on acquiring a better understanding of the real costs of social housing presently built in certain African countries. These costs were broken down so as to indicate the major items of building expenditure proper and reveal the factors capable of influencing each of them.

15. Proceeding from the long experience acquired by other organizations in the comparative study of house-building costs, and particularly the studies successfully carried out since 1958 by the Economic Commission for Europe, the secretariat undertook a preliminary survey in the form of a detailed questionnaire accompanied by a model reply.

16. Eight countries have already sent their replies to the secretariat and a total of fifteen are expected to participate actively in this survey. On the basis of information received, the secretariat intends to produce a provisional report which will be submitted to the Committee on Housing and Physical Planning at its first meeting.

17. The secretariat has also undertaken a preliminary study on the cost of the major services related to housing, taking into account the standards of density and equipment and expressed in terms of cost per hectare of developed land per dwelling unit or per habitable room. The purpose of

this study, undertaken at the moment on the basis of documents available to the secretariat, is to complete the information which will be assembled in the study referred to in the above paragraph and to accentuate the relative importance of house-building costs proper and the cost of the related services particularly as regards urban residential units.

18. A purely tentative version of this study will be distributed by the end of 1963 and member states will be invited to submit supplementary information to the secretariat. It is then planned to proceed to a more thorough analysis of the technical and economic aspects of community facilities related to housing, by paying particular attention to the cost of water supply networks, sewage disposal and environmental sanitation problems in general. The secretariat will be assisted in this task by a sanitary engineer seconded to the Housing, Building and Planning Section from the World Health Organization. He will probably assume his functions at the beginning of 1964.

19. Finally, in response to concern expressed on numerous occasions by African countries, the secretariat has decided to undertake a preliminary study on domestic sources of financing for housing and related community facilities. In fact, it seemed obvious that, whatever its nature, external financial assistance could represent only a marginal contribution in solving the problem of low-cost housing in Africa. The experience of the African and other developing countries will have to be studied so as to determine the main course of action aimed at mobilizing the purely domestic resources (private savings, insurance funds, social security, etc.) which could be used to finance the provision of housing and related community facilities. The secretariat intends to visit a certain number of countries and evaluate the experience already acquired so as to submit a working document to the Committee on Housing and Physical Planning at its first meeting.

20. With respect to resources, the secretariat has undertaken an initial documentary study on the current availability of certain basic building materials in Africa as the preliminary phase of a more general survey on the building industry. The latter will deal particularly with the more efficient use of present production capacity and the possibilities of its

further development within the framework of general economic development programmes, the establishment of new material-producing industries, the sub-regional co-ordination of national investment policies and the changes to be desired in the present structure of the building industry in the African countries so as to make them better adapted to future building programmes.

21. An initial evaluation of the current production of certain basic materials has already been made on the basis of documents available to the secretariat and in consultation with the governments concerned. A preliminary report is being prepared and will be distributed at the beginning of 1964. Contacts have also been made with the Special Fund so as to study the possibility of obtaining assistance for more detailed sector studies, probably on a sub-regional level.

22. A certain number of specific studies have also been prepared by the secretariat, particularly as regards the building material industry in the countries of East and Central Africa. These specific studies will be included in the general study referred to above.

23. As regards manpower resources and vocational training requirements, contact has been made with the International Labour Office, which has indicated its interest and is presently studying the possibility of undertaking a certain number of studies in this field in close co-operation with the secretariat of the Commission.

24. In the field of physical planning, the activity of the secretariat has been directed almost exclusively to preparing a workshop which is scheduled to be held in Ghana in October 1964 on the role of physical planning and urbanization policies in general economic development. Some fifteen African experts and a limited number of consultants will be invited to participate in this workshop, the results of which will be submitted to the Committee on Housing and Physical Planning at its first meeting.

25. In the field of research and documentation in matters of housing and building, the secretariat has pursued its efforts to establish effective co-operation at sub-regional level.

26. A proposal to establish an agency to collaborate research and documentation in the fields of housing and building with regard to the countries of East Africa, is at present being studied by the competent services of the Technical Assistance Administration. This proposal, elaborated by the secretariat in consultation with the principal countries concerned, aims at establishing continuous co-operation between the research institutes of the sub-regions, the strengthening of existing bodies and the possible establishment of one or two new ones, such co-operation being based on the principle of specialization.

27. The proposal also provides for the establishment of a scientific secretariat to maintain contacts between the member agencies and governments participating in the project. This relatively flexible solution was preferred, at least in the present state of research organization, to the establishment of a sub-regional centre proper.

28. Examination of the possibility of establishing a similar organization covering the countries of western Africa had to be curtailed for budgetary reasons, but will probably be resumed in the course of 1964. In the meanwhile preparations have begun for the organization of a seminar scheduled for the beginning of 1965 on applied housing and building research in Africa. The International Council for Building Research, Studies and Documentation (CIB) has agreed to share responsibility for the organization of the seminar with the secretariat of the Commission and has already given valuable assistance in elaborating a detailed programme, defining the main subjects to be treated and appointing experts and consultants to compile the necessary syntheses.

29. Many documents (plans, photos, etc.) intended for inclusion in an exhibition on housing in Africa have been gathered or are on their way. It was originally expected that this exhibition would coincide with the first meeting of the Committee on Housing and Physical Planning, which was to be held in Addis Ababa in December 1963. It then appeared that, in view of the postponement of the first meeting of the Committee to the end of 1964, the material thus assembled might be used for a travelling exhibition to be placed at the disposal of interested African governments.

30. Delays in the transmission of these documents have again led to postponement of the date on which it would be possible to mount such an exhibition. It is therefore probable that the exhibition will not be a travelling one; but it is planned to edit in co-operation with the Ethio-Swedish Institute of Building Technology, a brochure on housing in Africa on the basis of the documents gathered for the exhibition. This brochure could be widely distributed in African countries.

31. Finally, it may be added that for part of the year the Housing, Building and Planning Section was assisted by two regional advisers; one of them was responsible for reviewing a certain number of technical assistance projects in Africa (pilot projects and missions of experts), while the other was engaged in arranging a course in self-help housing for scolarship holders from the countries of East Africa.

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