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Geneva, 24–26 September 2012

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Work of the Bureau of the Committee on Housing and Land Management

Recommendations of the Bureau on current and future work of the Committee on Housing and Land Management

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This note is based on the reports of the meetings of the Bureau of the Committee on Housing and Land Management (CHLM) held in Geneva on 2 April and on 2 and 3 July 2012. It contains those proposals and recommendations agreed by the Bureau, which are relevant to the work of the Committee and the future programme of work. It provides information supporting the annotated provisional agenda of the meeting (ECE/HBP/169), as well as implementation of the programme of work for 2012–2013 (ECE/HBP/2011/1/) as adopted by Committee at its seventy-second session of the Committee (ECE/HBP/167).

I. Bureau meeting, 2 April 2012, Geneva

A. ECE Review 2011-2012

1. Bureau members emphasized the importance for member States of the work of the Committee. In particular, they welcomed the concrete examples of the impact that the Committee work had in the countries of the region, as presented to the Executive Committee of UNECE (EXCOM) on 18 October 2011. Given its relevance, the Bureau suggested to upload the presentation to the UNECE website.
2. The final decisions on the review process will be taken by EXCOM in the third quarter of 2012.

B. Ministerial Meeting 2013: proposals for substantive discussions

3. The Bureau agreed to recommend the following topics for discussion at the Ministerial Meeting:
 - (a) Progress made in housing and land-management. On this first item, Ministers would be expected to deliver presentations on the progress made by countries in the last decade. Guidelines for the statements should be prepared in advance and communicated to member States by the secretariat. The discussion would have a special focus on the country profiles on housing and land management for those countries that have undertaken such studies. All statements would feed into a publication of national reports on the implementation of housing and land management policies.
 - (b) Energy efficiency in housing: a discussion will be held on the implementation of the UNECE Action Plan on Energy Efficient Housing.
 - (c) The promotion and development of sustainable housing. The Committee is expected to adopt a decision on the possible negotiation of a framework convention on sustainable housing at the seventy-third CHLM session to be held on 24–26 September 2012. Should such a decision be taken, EXCOM would then need to endorse it. Depending upon these decisions, the Ministerial Meeting would either approve going forward with the Convention or discuss other ways to suggest the development of sustainable housing in the region.
 - (d) Strategy and Targets for 2014-2020. The Ministerial Meeting is expected to adopt this. Bureau members agreed that the strategy should be as short, compact and concise as possible. They suggested that the document be results-oriented, containing the main objectives, and should guide the Committee's work in future years. They also agreed that the strategy should contain some concrete targets to be achieved by 2020. They requested contributions on the targets from the Working Party on Land Administration and the Real Estate Market Advisory Group.

C. Preparations for the seventy-third session of the Committee on Housing and Land Management

4. The Chair of the Committee presented the draft agenda for the seventy-third session, to be held in Geneva from 24 to 26 September 2012. The Bureau added two new items as follows: a) Strategy and Targets for 2014-2020 and b) Information on Global Meetings such as the World Urban Forum and the Rio +20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (including information on the Rio+20 side event on "Greening Real Estate Markets").

D. Programme of work

(a) Country profiles on the housing sector

5. It was agreed that information on a study on the improvement of the methodology of the country profiles would be submitted as an informal document to the seventy-third session.

(b) Housing modernization and management

6. Regarding the Action Plan on Energy Efficient Housing in the UNECE region, special attention should be given to the implementation phase. The secretariat announced that as a follow-up to this regional action plan, a National Action Plan of Montenegro for Energy Efficiency Measures in the Residential Sector, had been developed. It was agreed that national action plans could also be developed for other countries upon request and that the National Action Plan of Montenegro could serve as a model.

7. It was suggested that since there was an interest from member States in the Green Homes study, the publication would be reprinted. Bureau members welcomed this proposal and suggested that in the new edition a reference to the Action Plan on Energy Efficient Housing be included in the introduction.

(c) Improvement of urban environmental performance

8. Bureau members discussed possible future cooperation with the UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents and, in particular, involvement in simulation games testing the reaction to accidents and resulting risks. They considered that while this topic could not be the main priority of the Committee's work, it could support concrete results and, therefore, should be pursued.

(d) Land registration and land markets

9. The secretariat announced that Ms. Anna Georgieva from the World Bank had been suggested as a new member of REM. The Bureau welcomed this idea.

(e) Date of the next meeting

10. It was agreed that the next Bureau meeting would take place in Geneva on 2 and 3 April 2012.

II. Bureau retreat, 2-3 July 2012, Geneva

A. Outcomes of Rio + 20 and their impact on the work of the Committee

11. Sustainable development of human settlements, especially sustainable urban development, received significant attention at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Bureau members agreed that the Rio+20 outcomes reiterated the importance of issues covered by all the areas of work of the Committee and, in particular, the issue of sustainable urban development.

B. Budget and fundraising

12. The Bureau requested to move the discussion on fundraising to the beginning of the agenda of the Committee's upcoming session. In support of this item, they requested detailed information on the Committee's trust fund.

C. Mandate, mission, added value, scope and structure of the Committee's work

(a) Mandate and mission

13. The mandate of the Committee, as per the outcome of the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Housing held in 2000, and as reconfirmed by the Ministerial Conference held in 2006, is *"to promote the sustainable development of human settlements in the ECE region while fostering economic and social prosperity and supporting democratic governance"*¹.

14. Keeping this broad mandate in mind, the Bureau members agreed to recommend the following mission statement for the Committee: *"To improve the housing and land management situation throughout the UNECE region in a sustainable manner and by providing practical solutions and guidelines"*. Sustainable development as used in the mission statement should be understood as covering all three pillars of sustainability - economic, environmental and social.

(b) Added value

15. Bureau members pointed out that the Committee is the only intergovernmental body dealing with housing and land management matters covering the UNECE region. Furthermore, they identified the following elements as added value of the work of UNECE in the area of housing and land management. The Committee:

- Serves as a neutral platform for dialogue between governments and supports their decision-making.
- Provides international expertise to member States to address their national housing and land management challenges and develops recommendations that are useful to the governments.
- Develops practical solutions to specific challenges encountered by member States in the area of housing, land management and urban development and monitors the progress of implementation.
- Supports the harmonisation of methodologies and definitions in the area of housing and land management at a regional and international level, which fosters better understanding of national housing and land management systems in the UNECE region and allows their comparison.
- Facilitates the exchange of experiences and the transfer of knowledge between global (UN), regional (UNECE), national and local levels.

(c) Discussions on the Scope, Structure and Functioning of the CHLM

16. Bureau members explored three main questions as follows:

Does the scope of work of the Committee adequately respond to its objectives?

Does the structure of the Committee adequately respond to its objectives?

Does the functioning of the Committee adequately respond to its objectives?

¹ ECE Strategy for sustainable quality of life in human settlements in the 21st century available at <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/2001/ece/hbp/ece.hbp.120.pdf>

Scope

17. Bureau members agreed that, in general, the current four areas of work (country profiles, housing modernization and management, land administration and registration, urban environmental performance) of the Committee performed well in terms of reflecting and contributing to the Committee's main objectives. At the same time, in particular in the light of the programme of work for 2014 -2015, all the areas needed refocusing to better respond to the needs of member States and reflect the current social, economic and political context.

Structure

18. Bureau members found the present structure to be efficient. They noted that in recent years participation and continuity of membership in the Committee sessions had improved. On the other hand, they were of the opinion that the secretariat needed additional human and financial resources in order to serve the Committee more effectively. It was also proposed to strengthen communication and outreach activities in order to better inform the stakeholders, permanent missions, and national governments about the Committee's activities.

Functioning

19. Bureau members found that, overall, the Committee was functioning relatively well on all three levels – the Committee, the Bureau and the secretariat. The changes in recent years and, in particular, the move of the Housing and Land Management Unit from the Environment to the Trade and Sustainable Land Management Division had led to a better workflow and to a better functioning of the Committee. This was because the Trade and Sustainable Land Management Division activities cover all the three pillars of sustainable development –economic, environmental and social while the focus of activities under the Environment Division is on environmental protection; work on housing and land management requires all the three dimensions. At the same time, Bureau members emphasized that to better preserve the institutional memory of the Committee, there was a need for continuity in secretariat staff, as well as of the Bureau and Committee representatives.

20. Bureau members proposed that Bureau meetings should take place not less than twice a year and should last at least one full day. This would help improve communication within the Bureau as well as between the Bureau and the Secretariat. Seminars organized by the secretariat were considered important since they enabled Committee delegates to meet with other groups of stakeholders, including representatives of municipalities, academia, the private sector and international organizations.

21. Bureau members considered that new members, who did not usually have experience in working with the United Nations, would benefit from receiving more information on how the United Nations is organized and the procedures and work of the Bureau. The Bureau requested the secretariat to prepare a handbook for newcomers, which would provide an introduction to the United Nations system as a whole, as well as to the working of the UNECE.

(b) Key stakeholders

22. Bureau members considered it important to involve the main stakeholders more effectively in the Committee's work. They reiterated that member States were the most important stakeholders.

23. Other main stakeholder groups were:
- Local governments, including municipalities and cities, depending on the national system in member States
 - Citizens, tenants, owners, and groups representing condominium owners
 - Business and the private sector
 - NGOs
 - International organizations.
24. The Bureau pointed out that it was particularly important to develop cooperation with NGOs.
25. Given the large number of national and local organizations dealing with housing and land management in the UNECE region and the fact that developing cooperation with each partner is time consuming, the Bureau suggested that the secretariat should adopt a strategic approach to establishing partnerships.
26. The Bureau also highlighted the importance of fundraising for activities in the programme of work. It was agreed that Bureau members who had knowledge about funding agencies in their countries would provide the secretariat with this information.

D. Proposals for renaming programme areas

27. The Bureau discussed the scope and areas of work and highlighted that the programme of work needed some restructuring and adjustments. These recommendations are also included as part of Proposal for the amendment of some elements of the Programme of Work (ECE/HBP/2012/5). The Bureau members formulated the following proposals for refocusing the areas of work:

- **“Housing modernization and management”** to be renamed to **“Sustainable Housing and Real Estate Markets”**. This programme element would cover issues such as ecological, healthy energy efficient housing; housing affordability and accessibility (barrier-free housing); resilience to earthquakes and other natural and man-made disasters (including fires), as well as maintenance, management and refurbishment of the existing housing stock. The possible negotiation of a framework convention on housing issues would also be under this area of work. The Bureau emphasized the close linkage of real estate markets and housing and considered that moving this topic together with sustainable housing would reflect better to the challenges post 2008 economic crisis and would, in addition, further strengthen the work of the Real Estate Market Advisory Group. However, the functions of the Advisory Group should not be limited only to the Sustainable Housing and Real Estate Market programme element.
- **“Urban environmental performance”** to be renamed to **“Sustainable Urban Development”**. In particular, the work on cities should be strengthened. Green Economy seminars, initiatives on smart cities and disaster resilience would be covered by this area of work.
- **“Land registration and land markets”** to be renamed to **“Land Administration and Land Management”** as it would reflect better the mandate of the Working Party on Land Administration (main body dealing with those issues). At the same time, although the Working Party is mainly in charge of this programme element, the Working Party should also advise the Committee in all other areas of work. This is because land administration and land management are closely linked to both sustainable housing and

real estate markets and particularly closely related to sustainable urban development. In addition, the Bureau recommended that the topic of informal settlements be addressed by the Working Party. It was also recommended that the Real Estate Market Advisory Group would provide future assistance to the Working Party on topics related to the collection of registry data for fiscal purposes.

- **“Country profiles on the housing sector”**. It was suggested that the title of this work area and related publications be changed to include the words “housing and land management” since in recent years, the studies have covered both topics. Therefore, the area could be renamed to “Country profiles on housing and land management”. Studies including only one of those areas will mention only it in the title. It was further suggested that the methodology should be reviewed and monitoring and review of implementation be strengthened. Countries should be encouraged to establish high-level national inter-sectoral steering committees to review the situation before undertaking a study. Once a study is finalized, these committees could assist in monitoring the implementation.

28. Bureau members emphasized that the Working Party and the Real Estate Market Advisory Group, as the bodies advising the Committee in all cross-cutting issues, should be involved in all areas of work.

E. Discussions on on-going preparations for the seventy-third session, the Ministerial Meeting and other upcoming events

(a) Ministerial Meeting

29. Bureau members had earlier proposed to discuss at the Ministerial meeting the role of the State in the housing sector. Now, after further discussing, Bureau members decided to recommend that the discussions on the role of the State in the housing sector should take place at the seventy-fourth session instead because of the shortage of time at the Ministerial. For the discussions to be planned timely and efficiently and allow exchange between the Ministers and Committee delegates, the Bureau suggested that the meetings should be organized as follows:

- First day Committee session
- Second day Ministerial meeting
- Third day Committee session.

30. The Bureau requested that the secretariat updates the annotated provisional agenda for the Ministerial meeting accordingly and presents it at the September 2012 Committee session.

31. Bureau members also suggested that as part of the preparation for the Ministerial meeting, member States should draft concise national reports on the implementation of housing and land management policies in the last decade.

(b) Seventy-third session of the Committee on Housing and Land Management

32. Bureau members were presented with the annotated provisional agenda for the seventy-third session.

33. It was agreed that this document would be revised taking into account the decision taken at the Bureau meeting.

34. The meeting suggested inviting to the Committee session a legal expert to deliver a presentation on the role of framework conventions under agenda item 4 as had been done at the second meeting of the Working Group. This would help delegates to better understand

the possible benefits coming from such a convention, as well as the kind of commitment that member States would be asked to make (i.e., to the principles that are part of the framework).

(c) World Habitat Day

35. The Bureau discussed the ongoing preparations for the exhibition “Building the Future We Want” to take place between 24 September and 15 October in Geneva. The exhibition will include photos of sustainable buildings in the UNECE region. It was suggested that the photos to be of innovative solutions in the area of sustainable buildings. In addition, it was requested that the exhibition be prepared as a travelling one. This would enable it to be presented in different countries upon request.

36. The Bureau agreed to contact their representatives at the permanent missions and suggest photos of buildings for the exhibition. It was agreed that the secretariat would send Bureau members more information on the topic via e-mail.

37. It was also suggested that the publication “Climate Neutral Cities: How to make cities less energy and carbon intensive and more resilient to climatic challenges” be presented at the event to be organized on World Habitat Day (1 October 2012).

(d) World Urban Forum

38. The secretariat was requested to communicate to the Bureau further information on the ongoing organization of the networking events on Country Profiles and on Energy Efficiency in Housing to take place at the World Urban Forum via e-mail.
