UNCSTD agrees on new committee and fund

Two major decisions were agreed at the final plenary session of the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development which ended in the early hours of last Saturday morning. The first was to set up a new intergovernmental committee on science and technology for development, open to all member states of the UN. The second was to recommend the establishment of a new financial system for science and technology for development and, while the details of this are being worked out, to set up an interim fund based on voluntary contributions, with an initial target of at least \$250 million for the two year period 1980-81. Both these decisions were modifications of the Group of 77's original demands.

The Group of 77, for example, had originally proposed that the intergovernmental committee be set up by, and report back to, the General Assembly of the UN. But the US had insisted that the committee be established by the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

A compromise was suggested by the Common Market countries and eventually accepted by the conference, along lines drawn up by the British delegation. The new committee will be set up by the General Assembly, but it will report back to the General Assembly through ECOSOC. And the latter, while not permitted to alter the reports, will be able to comment.

The new committee will play an important role within the UN system. How effective it will be will depend on factors such as the strength and status of the support it is given from the UN, which is yet to be decided. One of its main purposes, according to the wording of the final conference decision, will be to "help the General Assembly formulate guidelines for harmonising the policies of the United Nations system in regard to scientific and technological activities".

Specific responsibilities will include: identifying priorities for activities within the programme of action agreed by the conference (now referred to as the Vienna programme of action), preparing a plan for carrying out the programme, and monitoring activities and programmes related to science and technology within the UN system.

A particularly important function of the committee will be to "give directives and policy-making guidance" to the new financing system which the conference proposed that the UN should establish (an earlier proposal from the Group of 77 had been that the committee should "direct"

the way that the financing system was operated, but this language was rejected as too strong).

The financing system agreed is considerably less than the original demand of the Group of 77. This was for a target of two billion dollars by 1985 and four billion dollars by 1990 reached through "automatic" contributions mainly from developed countries.

The main opposition from the developed countries to this proposal was based more on the manner in which contributions were to be made than on the size of the fund. Almost all objected to the idea of "automatic" contributions based on factors such as the balance of trade in manufactured goods — a type of international tax which was strongly resisted — and it was agreed that at least initially all contributions will be voluntary. Other countries, in particular various members of the EEC, were initially opposed to the idea of a fund at all but were eventually convinced to accept the general consensus.

The purpose of the proposed global financial system, according to the conference resolution, will be to "finance a broad range of activities aimed at strengthening the endogenous scientific and technological capacities of developing countries and, in particular, assist in implementing the programme of action".

It was agreed by all conference participants that factors to be taken into account in determining the nature and level of the system's resources should include: the asymmetry of technological capacity between developed and developing countries, the need for predictability and continuous flow of financial resources, the need for substantial resources additional to those existing within the UN system and finally the need for untied external resources.

Since it will take some time to make the arrangements for this financing system, an interim fund, to be administered by the United Nations Development Programme, will be created: and a target for voluntary contributions to this fund has been set at "no less than \$250 million" over the two years 1980 and 1981.

A conference will be held before the end

of the year at which countries will indicate how much they are prepared to contribute to the interim fund. The main potential donors are the US and Saudi Arabia, with promises from France and a number of smaller European countries. Precisely how the interim fund will be spent remains to be worked out. But it is thought that most of it will go towards helping to build up scientific infrastructures in developing countries.

David Dickson

What scientists did in Vienna

WHILST there was no doubt that the main focus of attention at UNCSTD would be the debate over the Programme of Action, with its associated battles over institutions, money and so on, it was planned that there would be a parallel session to use the assembled scientific and technological expertise to good effect. This session had two fields to look at: new science and technology for overcoming obstacles to development; and science and technology for the future. The working group was chaired by M. Malitza of Romania.

The group had at its disposal national papers, together with two specially commissioned studies and the reports of several conferences. It also had freshly to hand a report from ACAST, the UN's Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology which had met in Vienna the previous week.

The working group (which comprised as many delegates as cared to show up) always seemed to be loaded with disadvantages. It did not start meeting till the fourth day of the conference, and then in a building not within walking distance of the main conference centre; it was presented with a bland ACAST report which seemed to convince the working group that its report should be equally platitudinous; and whilst a few delegations (France, Germany, Austria, United States in particular) had a good complement of scientists and technologists, many could field at most one, more often none at all.

The first draft of the report reflected

these weaknesses. The United States, which had not been one of the 6 members of the drafting group and which claimed it was having difficulty in getting its views considered, was particularly severe in its strictures that the report lacked 'soul'. As one of its delegates put it, "we have put a big effort into this conference; how can we defend this document to our scientists and technologists back home?" The British, too, were voicing concern both publicly and privately that "with all the expertise here in Vienna" nothing more helpful was emerging for consideration in planning future development programmes.

Certainly much of the document merely repeated the same general principles as were being negotiated more formally in the Programme of Action elsewhere. But by this stage there was not enough time left to start again from scratch. Nor would many developing country representatives have been pleased at the prospect, as they were more in need of a general statement of principles to put to the government back home rather than a 'soulful' document.

In the event, and amidst much lobbying by the US, a second draft was produced which left the Americans moderately satisfied without causing problems amongst developing countries. Some of the key points are outlined below.

Science: 'Science policy should be mainly linked to long term objectives'. 'Science and technology . . . should be consistent with national aspirations and objectives'. 'Science of the future must include in its concerns the uplifting of the welfare of the total human being' (the first version had contained the phrase 'basic science should be left free to follow its own internal dynamics').

Obstacles: 'One of the most urgent questions is disarmament . . . more effect should be given to analysing in what ways ongoing research and technical application now directed towards war could be adjusted for peaceful applications'. 'The brain drain of the most skilful scientists and technologists from developing countries creates a serious obstacle to their own scientific and technological development . . . developed countries should assist by actively discouraging a brain drain from developing countries'. This last phrase was concocted as an alternative to the more loaded phrase 'should assist by not enticing scientists and technologists from developing countries', to which some developed countries took exception. But at least one delegate was wondering privately whether 'discouraging' the brain drain did not contravene agreements on the free-flow of scientists.

The United States would additionally have liked a reference to the population problem, but could not get a consensus.

Objectives: 'All countries should develop

G77 wins on global information network

ONE of the few victories of UNCSTD, from the point of view of the developing countries, is the agreement in principle to set up a global information system for the benefit of the Third World. This was a hard-fought victory, with resistance from the US, Canada, Japan and the EEC. And it is a victory that also places responsibility on the developing countries to evolve extensive national systems.

The developed countries had argued that systems which operate with such low efficiency in the developed world, with all possible sophisticated backup, have little chance of operating efficiently in the third world. But after what amounted to the Group of 77's toughest stand at UNCSTD, the developed countries agreed to develop a global information system within the United Nations system, having a global focal-point and series of networks including national focal points.

The function of the global focal-point caused much controversy. The developing countries wanted to perform both retrieval and referral functions. The developed countries believed it was not technically possible for the global-point to perform a retrieval function.

After four days of negotiation in closed committee meetings, the Group of 77 finally dropped its demand. It was decided that the focal point will perform the referral function, but will also act as a

"complaints bureau". The retrieval function will be performed largely by the national focal points, but users facing difficulties in getting a response would be able to refer to the global focal-point.

For the global information network to function properly, the national focal-points must provide significant backup support. The Third World countries are required to extend and develop their national information systems considerably, and to have storage and retrieval facilities on information concerning development of science and technology, foreign sources of technology supply, sources of foreign capital and their conditions, and national users of science and technology. In their turn, the developed countries would extend their own facilities for use by developing countries. They also agreed to provide, "the fullest possible access to available information technologies".

Furthermore, the developed countries would allow access to research and development information relevant to the social and economic development of developing countries". Who decides what is relevant and what are the criteria of relevancy, however, were not significantly discussed. Also omitted from the general agreement is the question of confidentiality.

ZIAUDDIN SARDAR

endogenous capabilities to assess the trends of science and the consequences of technological options'. 'Developing countries have to carry out their own studies of global problems so as to bring their own perspective to bear on the world *problematique*'. 'Goals include overcoming poverty and seeking ways to reduce the disparities that exist between developed and developing societies in, for example, life expectancy, infant mortality and education'. A stronger version speaking of 'halving by the year 2000 the disparities' could not attract a consensus.

Resources: 'As concerns R and D activities in developing countries, every effort should be made by the world community to raise the level of these activities from the present very low level to a substantially increased level. It was the considered view of many delegations that a more quantitative goal should be set and they felt that this should be of the order of 20% to 25% of global world research and development expenditure by the year 2000'. Countries such as India and Bangladesh were keen to have a target, but there were doubts amongst some countries about the reasonableness of these targets or even the precise definition of the terms used.

Action: The building up of endogenous capabilities requires 'massive expansion of

the educational system in order to provide access to primary, secondary, technical and higher education to most, if not all, the populations, male and female equally'.

Governments in developing countries should provide support both for existing and new centres of excellence 'dedicated to both basic research and applied research of relevance to their societies'.

Scientists in developed countries 'should be encouraged and helped by their governments to take a more active interest in solving problems in developing countries . . . exchange of scientists and technologists between developed and developing countries should be encouraged . . . informal communications between scientists based on mutual interest are also among the powerful instruments which can be used to help in problem solving'.

Specifics: The working group made sure, in a footnote, that just about every branch of science and technology with the remotest relevance to development received a mention. But it also identified in the main text some rapidly developing fields such as information technology, non-conventional generation of energy (including fusion), biotechnologies and marine sciences.

Women and young scientists: 'Technological development often affects men and women differently and the intro-

duction of new technologies has tended to have an adverse impact on the latter, thereby lessening their earnings and social status. It is therefore of the utmost interest to society that in future the full participation of women be ensured in the planning and setting of priorities for research and development as well as in activities relating to the design, choice and application of science and technology for development. They should also be provided with equal access to scientific and technological training and professional career opportunities'.

'Rapid development of science and technology throughout the world will

depend in part on the younger men and women who can be brought into these fields, involved in decision making bodies and given full opportunity to use their intelligence and skills'.

Institutions: 'There is a need to restructure and strengthen the international scientific and technological system and the role of international intergovernmental organisations in such a way as to permit such organisations to act as effective instruments in satisfying the priority objectives of member states'.

'An appropriate UN body on science and technology, and other UN agencies competent in this matter' should make

recommendations regarding changes in the structure of science and technology to 'service the needs and problems of the peoples of the world, with special regard to the needs of developing countries'. Originally this recommendation spoke only of the new intergovernmental committee that was being established elsewhere in the conference, but the Soviet delegate, in a rare intervention, asked for the involvement of other UN agencies. This possibly keeps the door open for UNESCO and ACAST, both of which had been widely thought to have lost considerable influence as a result of this conference.

David Davies

EEC countries attempt to speak with one voice

ONE of the most significant consequences of the UNCSTD conference is that, for almost the first time, the nine member countries of the European Economic Community were required to speak with a single voice on the appropriate international policies for applying science and technology to development.

At times, EEC manoeuvring to achieve this unity resembled those of a cox-less, novice rowing-eight (Luxembourg played a relatively minor role in the negotiations), with everyone heading roughly in the same direction, but with substantially different ideas about commitment and timing. Furthermore, the political requirement for solidarity during formal negotiations with the developing countries meant that many harsh words were said to colleagues behind closed committee doors.

The outcome, however, was at least a partial victory for political cohesion. And this will inevitably have important consequences for the future role played by EEC countries in encouraging particular forms of economic and political development in the Third World.

The pressure to speak with a common voice added a third political factor to the two which have traditionally dominated national discussions of foreign aid policy: on the one hand, the domestic implications, both political and economic, of spending public money on foreign aid, on the other, the international gains to be made by spending this money in a particular way.

A fourth factor played a less explicit, but no less significant, role during the conference negotiations. This was the knowledge that the US had committed itself to ensuring the approval of an interim \$250 million fund, with particular executive responsibilities given to the United Nations Development Programme, and investigating the setting up of a long-term international funding system for science and technology for development.

Caught between these four different sources of political pressure, each member country of the EEC was forced to weigh up their relative importance in its own

particular circumstances — and decide its negotiating strategy accordingly. At the one extreme Denmark had, at the beginning of the conference, surprised some of its EEC colleagues by advocating immediate commitment to the US-backed package. Compromise was "imperative" to make UNCSTD successful, the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs Lise Ostergaard, told the plenary session.

Similar indications of support came from the Netherlands and Italy. Holland was eager for domestic political reasons not to appear to be backing away from its reputation for generosity in foreign aid, despite economic difficulties.

In contrast, the three major economic partners in the EEC — Britain, France and Germany — each had different reservations about the US-backed package. Britain's position was made clear by the Minister for Overseas Development, Mr Neil Marten, who told the conference that recent drastic cuts in public spending meant that Britain had no money to contribute to any new fund, and that in any case Britain had "serious doubts" about the value of any new financial mechanism or the separation of funds for science and technology for development.

At the same time, however, the British delegation was keen to maintain the political unity of the EEC's negotiating positions and not to be seen as the only country which was sticking out against a consensus.

Germany's position was more complicated. Politically it agreed with the US's view about the need for "cooperation" rather than "confrontation" in economic relations with the developing countries, and about how science and technology agreements can help achieve this goal. It also accepted the need for EEC unity, and could not complain about lack of funds.

For domestic political reasons, however, the German government was reluctant to provide funds to a programme whose precise activities had not been spelt out in detail. It tried — unsuccessfully — to get the EEC to back the idea of contributing

directly to a World Bank research programme on renewable energy resources for developing countries.

Finally France, the maverick in the group, was happy to be seen increasing its foreign aid contributions, but less happy about a sectoral fund inside the UNDP. The French annoyed some other EEC delegation members by announcing to them two days before the end of the conference its opposition to the new fund.

Despite such divergences of opinion, by the end of the conference a consensus had been reached to support the US/UNDP package in principle (see page 2). At the closing session, however, it was publicly acknowledged that there remained differences between the EEC members. Speaking on behalf of the whole group as current president of the EEC, the head of the Irish delegation said that six countries — Belgium, West Germany, France, Ireland, Luxembourg and Britain — wished to make it clear that they maintained "their well-known reservation on the efficacy of any sectoral fund for science and technology for development". However, in the interests of achieving a consensus, the statement said, these six countries had not opposed the arrangements for an interim fund, once it had been established that the contributions would be on a voluntary basis.

No-one within the EEC delegation was entirely happy with the outcome. But it was generally accepted that, given the pressures under which the group was working the outcome as a political exercise was fair.

Whether the result will be of overall benefit to the developing countries is another question. Some EEC delegates point out that by agreeing to accept a consensus, some countries adopted a more conciliatory position than they might otherwise have done. Developing country critics, however, also argued that through such consensus-building, countries which might otherwise wish to adopt a more radical stance in their general approach to north-south relationships might be persuaded against doing so.

David Dickson