

ARID ZONE RESEARCH

THE Advisory Committee on Arid Zone Research, set up by Unesco, recommended at its first meeting, held in April 1951, that special attention should be given to the collection of information and the discussion of problems concerning arid zone hydrology and particularly water supply. Thus on the Committee's advice, Unesco obtained and is printing a series of reports on hydrology and its problems in the arid areas of the world written by a number of authors, together with climatological maps of such areas.

Unesco in 1952 also organized, jointly with the Government of Turkey, a symposium on "Hydrology of the Arid Zone" which was held in Ankara during April 25-29. This conference was opened by the President of the Turkish Republic. Papers were given by representatives of about a dozen nations and dealt with: (1) the statics and dynamics of underground water; (2) its physical and chemical properties; (3) the hydrological balance and the effects of water utilization; (4) methods of prospecting for water; (5) the relation of hydrology to other sciences. Each of these subjects was introduced by a general review paper, after which papers were given on particular aspects of it. Many of the papers aroused considerable interest and provoked active discussion, and it was generally thought that the conference had proved very useful. Its proceedings will be published. Visitors taking part in the symposium received very kind hospitality from the Turkish authorities during and after the meeting. This included an excursion to part of the arid area of Central Turkey.

The Advisory Committee on Arid Zone Research also held its third meeting in Ankara in April. In its recommendations it followed its policy of giving priority to the collection, dissemination and discussion of information. Thus it recommended the preparation and printing of reviews of research on: (1) arid zone plant ecology; (2) sources of energy available in arid regions. Symposia on these two subjects were proposed for 1953 and 1954 respectively. On the Committee's recommendation, Unesco gave financial help to the Government of Israel in publishing the proceedings of its Symposium on Desert Research that was held in Jerusalem during May 7-14 (see below) and to the Institute of Biology (U.K.) to help towards the travel expenses of participants in its symposium on the "Productivity and Biology of Hot and Cold Deserts" that is to be held on September 25-27 next in London.

Unesco has asked its member States to appoint persons from whom advice may be obtained in a number of fields related to arid zone research. Such panels of experts have now been appointed by fifteen States and have already proved useful. The Committee recommended that this scheme be extended.

It also considered the preparation of a handbook that should give advice on the collection of basic data needed in planning the development of arid areas.

A scheme is now in operation in which certain research institutions, carrying out research in arid areas or concerned with their development, may be designated as suitable for the exchange of personnel and information and for the reception of visiting scientists. After considering their qualifications, the Committee recommended that the following institutions be added to those already designated.

Particulars about them can be obtained from Unesco: (a) Fen Fakultesi Botanik Enstitüsü (Institute of Botany, Faculty of Science), University, Ankara, Turkey; (b) Department of Botany and its Geobotanical Research Laboratory of the Negev, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel; (c) Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, Dakar, French West Africa; (d) Jaswant College, Jodhpur, India; (e) Tohum Islah ve Deneme İstasyonu (Seed Improvement Station), Eskischir, Turkey.

The Committee considered the question of giving travel grants to men of science desiring to carry out research or make field studies abroad. It recommended that the Director-General might give such assistance in a limited number of cases provided: "(a) that the proposed research or field study comes within the scope of the Arid Zone Programme; (b) that the work is of importance to several Unesco Member States having arid and semi-arid areas; (c) that the results of the work will be freely available to the public; (d) that the request for transportation assistance by the individual is supported by the Unesco National Commission in his country; (e) that the individual has obtained approval for the research or field study from the appropriate authority at the institution or in the area in which the work is to be done".

On the research side the Committee recommended a small grant to assist in the study of the vegetation on certain nitrate- and sulphate-rich soils in South Algeria.

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AN international symposium on "Desert Research", organized by the Research Council of Israel in co-operation with Unesco, was held in Israel during May 7-14. The growing interest in research devoted to various aspects of arid zones and their reclamation has been further stimulated by Unesco's activities, especially by the establishment of the Arid Zone Research Committee, and by the Unesco symposium on "Hydrology of the Arid Zone" (see above). The symposium in Israel was the first of its kind to be organized by a member-state of Unesco, and the first the programme of which did not restrict itself to one special subject of arid zone research but included several topics, and gave the opportunity for scientists in those fields of research to get an integrated picture of various aspects of desert research.

About fifty-five men of science from eighteen countries attended the symposium. At the opening ceremony in Jerusalem guests were welcomed by the Prime Minister, Mr. D. Ben-Gurion. Dr. Shen-Yi, chief of the bureau of Flood Control of the U.N. Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, brought the greetings of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Dr. F. J. Malina, of the Natural Science Department of Unesco, spoke on behalf of the Director-General of his organization. A short outline of the significance of the symposium was given by Dr. W. C. Lowdermilk, F.A.O. Adviser to the Government of Israel, who presided over the symposium.

Three days were devoted to scientific sessions in Jerusalem, the next three days to scientific excursions in the Negev, the Coastal Plain, and Galilee, and a final day to further scientific sessions in the Institute of Technology, Haifa.