

Better information about development

WHEN the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) comes to an end in Vienna in late August, what will it leave behind for the future? Many hope it will not spawn another UN agency or office, as there are enough of them already. But in individual countries there could be a valuable legacy: as a result of preparations for UNCSTD many nations have brought together a wide range of people—administrators, politicians, industrialists, trade unionists, academics—to discuss national problems, be they those of rich or poor countries. If these networks survive and continue to talk to each other then UNCSTD will not have been in vain.

Britain has kept such a low profile both domestically and internationally over the UNCSTD meeting that to talk about networks having emerged from any national debate on the subject would be entirely fatuous. And yet there is at present the possibility of raising public awareness about development questions.

The Overseas Development Ministry recently commissioned a survey on public attitudes towards overseas development and found a substantial decline in support for British aid since the last such survey (in 1969).

Whilst only a few per cent are against richer countries giving help to poorer countries, 39% of those interviewed were against Britain herself giving aid. And few were able to give even an order of magnitude estimate of how much the country spends on overseas aid, generally overestimating the figure. As interviews progressed and those interviewed were told Britain's actual expenditure, a significant shift in

attitudes occurred and support for more expenditure grew substantially.

Part of the reason for ignorance and distrust of overseas aid could simply be low public awareness of what is involved in an aid programme. Such a conclusion would be reinforced by comparative statistics on how much Britain spends on education about development: Britain's spending on education about overseas development has until recently amounted to about £215,000 per annum—about 0.3p per capita. This contrasts very unfavourably with countries such as Germany and Canada (spending 2p and 7p per capita respectively), and doesn't bear comparison at all with expenditure of 10p per capita in the Netherlands or 15p in Sweden. Now spending is going up enormously; a recent ODM working party on the subject recommended a budget of £2.7 millions for development education by 1982 (*Overseas Development Paper 14*, HMSO) and the government has accepted these proposals.

Universities should take advantage of this new scheme. By no means all ignorance of the problems of the developing world is confined to those who never benefited from higher education; indeed most students are unlikely to be made to think at all about these matters during their formal coursework except, perhaps, in a handful of lectures in an optional course on science and society. Better informed graduates in science and technology might make for more soundly-based judgements later in life. The financial means for providing better information are now available. Who will take them up? □

JET—an insoluble salary problem

READERS of the classified advertisement section of *Nature*—most of our readers tell us they turn to it first—will not be unaware of wide differentials in salary. If you work in a British university, or for the British civil service, the salary scale will be tightly defined to the fourth significant figure of a very modest sum. Find a post in a continental university and the salary doubles, at the least. The cost of living goes up too, of course, although few would deny that, taken all in all, the scientist in England is ill-paid in comparison with his continental colleagues.

It is the posts in international organisations which really raise the eyebrows, however. Many of these positions are either tax-free or subject to very modest taxes indeed. Recently, for instance, readers will have noticed such choice offerings as the directorship of an internationally sponsored laboratory in Monaco, no less, at £24,000 per annum, tax free. This is hardly an unusual sum; researchers with several years' experience can command the same at CERN.

What happens, however, when internationally sponsored laboratories, with their traditionally high tax-free salaries come to Britain where the natives are ill-paid? The answer is—real recruitment problems, as those working on the Joint European Torus (JET) programme are finding out in their early days at Culham.

At the professional level, roughly one-third of the em-

ployees at JET are British, the rest are from other participating nations; at the senior technician level Britain supplies about 50% of the staff. The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority pays the salaries of Britons at its own standard rates subject, of course, to British taxes. Euratom supports the rest, who pay only a very modest 'community tax'.

Were Euratom to pay at the same rate as it does in Brussels, say, the differential between British and non-British employees' pay would be grotesque, so a figure of 62% of the Brussels rate has been established. Italians, for instance, still find this sort of salary attractive, but the same cannot be said for Germans—so there are differential recruitment problems. And even so, the 62% figure means that the net salaries of non-British employees are between 1.5 and 2 times greater than those of British counterparts. It is generally accepted that a factor of 1.3 to 1.5 is adequate compensation for living in a foreign country; there is little doubt that higher figures are ultimately going to be bad for morale.

At present, even if there are recruitment problems, the high level of motivation of the staff makes the salary question less important. But JET is a long-haul project, and the salary issue will not go away unless something quite remarkable happens to Britain and the pound sterling. □