

# 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