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UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
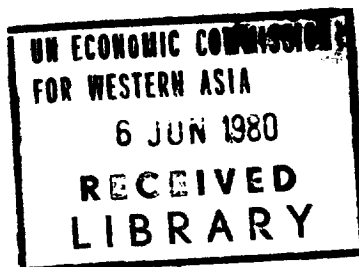
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA
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Item 7(a) of the provisional agenda

United Nations Conference on Science and Technology
for Development (UNCSTD)
(Vienna, Austria, 20 - 31 August 1979)

80-3090

Background

1. On 21 December 1976, the General Assembly adopted resolution 31/184 entitled "United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development", in which inter alia it decided to convene the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development during 1979, and that the Committee on Science and Technology for Development, open to the participation of all states, should act as the Preparatory Committee for UNCSTD.

2. The Preparatory Committee held its first session at UN Headquarters from 31 January to 14 February 1977. During this session, resolutions on co-ordination of, and financial resources for the preparatory work of UNCSTD, as well as decisions on programme of work for the preparatory period of the Conference and guidelines for the preparation of national papers were adopted.

3. Preparations for the Conference were made at the national, regional and international levels throughout the period January 1977 – August 1979. At the national level, and with the exception of one country of the ECWA region, all other thirteen members prepared national papers which reflect their respective positions on the substantive issues of the Conference. Two regional preparatory meetings for the said Conference were held by ECWA respectively in 1977 and 1978, and were preceded by an ECWA seminar on technology transfer and change in the Arab Middle East. An ECWA regional paper reflecting the problems of the region in using science and technology for development, and containing recommendations for action at national, regional and international levels was prepared and later discussed, amended and approved by member States at the Second Regional Preparatory Meeting for UNCSTD (Amman, Jordan, 12-15 Sept. 1978). This document was subsequently circulated in the fifth session of ECWA which was held in Amman,

Jordan between 2-6 October 1979, and in the UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development which was held in Vienna, Austria between 20-31 August 1979. Advisory services for the preparation of national papers were provided by ECWA to selected countries of the region upon their request. Similar efforts were made in other regions and a large number of national, subregional and regional seminars and international meetings were held in and outside the ECWA region in preparation for this Conference.

Organization and Agenda of the Conference

4. The United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development was held in Vienna, Austria, between 20-31 August 1979. About 142 Member States attended. All member States of ECWA as well as PLO were represented. The Agenda of the Conference was as follows:

1- Opening of the Conference

2- Election of the President of the Conference

3- Organizational matters

    (a) Adoption of the rules of procedure;

    (b) Adoption of the agenda;

    (c) Organization of work;

    (d) Election of officers other than the President;

    (e) Credentials of representatives to the Conference

        (i) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee;

        (ii) Report of the Credentials Committee.

4- Science and technology for development

    (a) Choice and transfer of technology for development;

    (b) Elimination of obstacles to the better utilization of knowledge and capabilities in science and technology for the development of all countries, particularly for their use in developing countries;

(c) Methods of integrating science and technology in economic and social development;

(d) New science and technology for overcoming obstacles to development.

5- Institutional arrangements and new forms of international co-operation in the application of science and technology

(a) Building up and expansion of institutional systems in developing countries for science and technology;

(b) Research and development in the industrialized countries in regard to problems of importance to developing countries;

(c) Mechanisms for the exchange of scientific and technological information and experience significant to development;

(d) Strengthening of international co-operation among all countries and design of concrete new forms of international co-operation in the fields of science and technology for development;

(e) Promotion of co-operation among developing countries and role of developed countries in such co-operation.

6- Utilization of the existing United Nations system and other international organizations

7- Science and technology and the future

8- Adoption of the report and final documents of the Conference.

Programme of Action on Science and Technology for Development

5. In resolution 1, the Conference adopted the Programme of Action* on Science and Technology for Development, which contains the agreed

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* The Programme of Action was subsequently issued as a United Nations Publication based on UN Document A/CONF.81/16.

recommendations of the Conference for consideration by the General Assembly
at its 34th session; urged all governments to take effective actions for
its implementation; requested the organizations of the United Nations
system and other intergovernmental organizations to comply with its
recommendations; and invited the scientific and technological community
to be guided by its provisions. The Conference further decided to refer
issues of the draft Programme of Action submitted to it by the Preparatory
Committee on which agreement had not been reached to the General Assembly
at its thirty-fourth session and invited the Assembly to consider those
issues or to refer them to the Intergovernmental Committee on Science and
Technology for Development, to be established at that session of the
Assembly, or to other bodies of the United Nations system, as appropriate,
in order that further progress may be made towards agreement on those
issues.

6. This Programme of Action sets forth the requirements for specific
action at the national, subregional, regional, interregional and international
levels, _inter alia_, on the following:

(a) Creation and/or strengthening of the policy-making capacity
of developing countries in scientific and technological matters;

(b) Promotion of the self-reliant efforts of the developing countries
to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity;

(c) Strengthening of the scientific and technological capacity
of developing countries, _inter alia_ through external support and assistance,
to generate scientific and technological knowledge in those countries and
to enable them to apply science and technology to their own development;

(d) Restructuring of existing international co-operation so as
to promote a better distribution of world production and resources in the
fields of science and technology;

(e) Allocation of adequate financial resources for the development of science and technology in and for the developing countries;

(f) Strengthening of scientific and technological co-operation among developing countries;

(g) Adoption of special measures in the field of science and technology in favour of least developed, land-locked, island and the most seriously affected developing countries;

(h) Strengthening of co-operation between developing and developed countries in the application of science and technology to development.

7. Regarding the institutional arrangements and structural transformations, the Conference recommended that the General Assembly of the United Nations should establish a high-level intergovernmental committee to be known as "the intergovernmental committee on science and technology for development". The functions of this committee will be concerned with the formulation of policy guidelines for the harmonization of policies of the organizations of the UN system in science and technology and for the co-ordination of their activities on the basis of the programme of action. This committee is further expected to prepare a plan for the implementation of the programme of action, monitor the activities and programmes related to science and technology within the organizations of the UN system and to provide directives and policy-making guidance to the UN financing system for science and technology for development, referred to later in this document. The membership of the intergovernmental committee shall be open to all Member States. It shall meet annually and submit its report and recommendations to the General Assembly through ECOSOC, which may transmit to the Assembly such comments on the report as it may deem necessary.

All organizations of the UN system including the regional commissions shall be invited to participate in the meetings of this committee. The Conference further recommended to ECOSOC that the Committee on Science and Technology for Development be abolished, and that the terms of reference of the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development (ACAST) be modified to enable it provide expert advice to the intergovernmental committee upon the latter's request. The Director General for Development and International Economic Co-operation of the United Nations was, within the framework of his mandate, entrusted with the responsibility of exercising overall co-ordination at the secretariat level, in science and technology. It was also agreed that a secretariat for the intergovernmental committee, headed by a UN official at a fairly high senior level, should be established, drawing as much as possible on resources from within the UN system including those of the Office for Science and Technology. The Conference requested the Director General for Development and International Economic Co-operation to submit to the General Assembly, at its thirty-fourth session a report outlining the organizational and financial implications of the establishment of the intergovernmental committee.

8. On the question of financial arrangements, the Conference recommended that the General Assembly establish a financing system to finance activities in science and technology at national, regional and interregional levels, within the framework of the adopted programme of action. Two types of financial arrangements were adopted: long-term arrangement to start as of 1982, and an interim one for the period 1980-1981. The long-term arrangement was thought of as a permanent mechanism which could ensure the continuous flow of funds to finance science and technology activities. However, since proposals for the automatic and continuous generation of funds needed further discussions, the Conference recommended that the General Assembly create at

its 34th session an intergovernmental group of experts whose task would
be to prepare a study on the design and operation of a long-term financial
arrangement for the consideration of the intergovernmental committee prior
to submitting it with the appropriate recommendation to the thirty-sixth
session of the General Assembly for discussion and adoption. The Conference
further decided that in the interim period 1980-1981, a fund should be
established to finance activities in science and technology at the national,
regional and interregional levels. It was further agreed that this fund
should be set up from voluntary contributions of no less than 250 million
dollars for the two-year period, and should be reviewed by the intergovernmental
committee with a view to raising additional resources, if needed. The
responsibility of administering the interim fund was entrusted to UNDP
subject to policy guidelines and procedures established by the General
Assembly at its thirty-fourth session and the guidelines of the
intergovernmental committee. It was also agreed that the UNDP Administrator,
in consultation with the Director General for Development and International
Economic Co-operation, shall prepare a prospectus for the operation of
the interim fund, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its
34th session for discussion and adoption. Finally, the Secretary-General
was requested by the Conference to call a pledging conference before the
end of 1979.

Follow-up Action to UNCSTD

9. As a follow-up to the adopted Programme of Action, an Ad Hoc high
level interagency meeting was convened by the Director General for
Development and International Economic Co-operation at United Nations
Headquarters in New York on 19 October 1979 to discuss immediate tasks
arising out of the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology
for Development. During this meeting, conference papers and notes on the

establishment of the intergovernmental committee on science and technology for development, and the initial prospectus for the United Nations Interim Fund on Science and Technology for Development were among other items discussed. The meeting agreed subsequently on a version of the aforementioned prospectus which was later adopted by the General Assembly at its 34th session. The prospectus in question contains general principles and some policy guidelines under which the Interim Fund would operate and defines the nature and scope of the Fund's activities as well as other procedural matters pertaining to the formulation of requests for assistance and arrangements for the execution of projects.

10. In resolution A/C.2/34/L.122 dated 12 December 1979, the General Assembly adopted the Programme of Action of UNCSTD including the decision to establish an Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development (with terms of reference as indicated in paragraph 7 of this document) and a supporting secretariat at United Nations Headquarters to be known as the Centre for Science and Technology for Development, and an Interim Fund for the two-year period 1980-1981 of no less than $ 250 million to be administered by UNDP under policy guidelines approved by the General Assembly and described in the initial prospectus for the United Nations Interim Fund for Science and Technology for Development (A/C.2/34/L.122/Add.1).

11. ECWA participated in the Inter-Agency Co-ordination Meeting (IACM) which was held in Geneva from 17 to 19 December 1979 to discuss the programme and procedural aspects of the Interim Fund for Science and Technology for Development. ECWA submitted a note to this meeting expressing the following views on the subject:

(a) Regarding the substantive orientation of the Fund, ECWA stressed the need to create and strengthen the necessary infrastructure in science and technology, and to develop the indigenous scientific and technological capabilities of the developing countries. This can be achieved through the establishment and strengthening of institutional mechanisms in science and technology and the organization and financing of training programmes, workshops, convening of technical seminars and preparation of studies on various aspects of science and technology. Specific project proposals on some of these issues were submitted by ECWA to UNDP for financial support on 9 November 1979;

(b) Concerning procedures to identify and formulate projects, ECWA's view was that these procedures have to be flexible, but as much as possible standardized to allow easy monitoring and evaluation by the Interim Fund. Flexibility is required in order to allow for regions and countries to identify priority projects emanating from their own development needs. It seems therefore reasonable, while designing the above procedures, to bear in mind activities identified in the UNCSTD Programme of Action and particularly the recommendations of the regional commissions. The project formulation of activities selected from the Programme of Action and from the regional and country papers can be made according to a standard format prepared by UNDP;

(c) ECWA further emphasized the adoption of procedures which ensure accelerated implementation during the interim period 1980-1981. If an impact is to be made during the interim period, decentralization becomes essential. The regional commissions are in a particularly suitable position to assist UNDP in carrying out work relating to the administration at the regional level of resources to be used for the design, execution and evaluation of programmes/projects in the field of science and technology;

(d) It was also explained that the meagre human and financial resources allocated to the science and technology programme of the regional commissions and particularly to ECWA do not enable the commissions to assume this important role and emphasis should therefore be put on the strengthening of their capcities in this field. This has already been stated in various resolutions notably General Assembly Resolution 32/197 and in the Programme of Action which entrusted to the regional commissions the role of team leadership for co-ordination of science and technology co-operative programmes at the regional level. It might be necessary therefore to finance from the Fund programme separate staff for administering, monitoring and evaluating projects undertaken at the regional level and for strengthening the science and technology organizational units of the secretariats of these commissions. The financing of programme support for the implementation of projects of the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women could stand as an example in this regard. On the other hand, the regional commissions will be held accountable to the Interim Fund, UNDP and the new intergovernmental committee on science and technology for development for the adequate use and efficient administration of resources made available to them;

(e) ECWA finally recommended that projects which will be identified be formulated and executed jointly between relevant specialized agencies, and the regional commissions. Decentralization and joint implementation of activities are therefore two important arrangements which, if adopted, will accelerate implementation during the interim period and avoid duplication of work among organizations of the United Nations.

12. It was confirmed during this Inter-Agency Co-ordination Meeting that a pledging conference would be called not later than March 1980, and that the Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development would have its first meeting of a procedural nature from 28 January to 1 February 1980, and its first regular meeting on 22-31 May 1980 in New York.

13. On the other hand, it should be mentioned that projects and activities which are contained in the approved 1980-1981 programme of work of ECWA in science and technology (document E/ECWA/74, presented to the sixth session of ECWA) fall within the framework of the UNCSTD Programme of Action. Furthermore, one particular project (521.2, E/ECWA/74) in this programme of work has been designed as a direct follow-up activity to the recommendations of the regional meetings and the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development. The study, to be implemented during this biennium, subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources, is expected to review all recommendations in order to ascertain the degree of their regional relevance, evaluate the likely costs and benefits of their implementation and identify possible areas and mechanisms for their execution.