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NGOs and a More Equitable World

The Center for Nanotechnology (CNS) at UC Santa Barbara is hosting a three-day multidisciplinary, global conference that focuses on the role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in harnessing the benefits and safeguarding against the risks of new technologies in order to create a more sustainable and equitable world.

The conference, which begins on Thursday, Nov. 13, is titled “Democratizing Technologies: Assessing the Roles of NGOs in Shaping Technological Futures” and will bring together academic researchers as well as representatives from NGOs, government and industry. Except where otherwise noted, all events are free and open to the public and take place in UCSB’s Corwin Pavilion.

Kicking off the conference at 8 p.m. Nov. 13 will be a keynote address by Nicholas Kristof, the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and columnist for The New York Times. His talk, “A Path Appears: Transforming Lives, Creating Opportunity,” is based on his recent book of the same name. In it, Kristof and his co-author (and wife) Sheryl WuDunn examine the success of domestic and global aid initiatives and the effectiveness of specific approaches to giving. The authors offer practical advice on the best ways each of us can make a difference.

Kristof’s talk is co-presented by UCSB Arts & Lectures in conjunction with Direct Relief. Ticket information is available by calling the Arts & Lectures box office at (805) 893-3535 or visiting http://www.artsandlectures.sa.ucsb.edu.

Other conference speakers will address technologies such as geographic information systems (GIS), nanotechnology, synthetic biology, new media, military arms, energy extraction methods, and medical instruments along with their implications for worker health and safety, consumer safety, environmental health, equity, sustainability, global governance and developing economies. “The Democratizing Technologies conference was conceived to engage directly with NGOs working with and on new technologies in two-way dialogue about the role of those technologies in changing NGOs and global society,” said CNS Director Barbara Herr Harthorn.

Conference co-organizer Rich Appelbaum, who holds the MacArthur Chair in Global and International Studies, stressed that among the conference’s goals is to address responsible innovation in developing countries. “Democratizing Technologies will take a hard look at the impact of emerging technologies on the Global South, and the appropriate role of NGOs – and governments – in assuring that they best serve public needs,” he said.

CNS is supported by the National Science Foundation to study the ethical, legal, and societal implications of nanotechnology. Affiliated researchers address the historical context of the nano-enterprise, innovation processes, public risk perception, and social and environmental issues regarding the domestic U.S. and global creation, development, commercialization, production, consumption and control of specific kinds of nanoscale technologies. Now in its 10th year, CNS is broadening its focus to other emerging technologies.

One objective of the CNS is not only to study the forces that shape new technologies, but also to engage with those forces, including NGOs. Said conference co-organizer, Cassandra Engeman, a Ph.D. candidate in sociology, “Much of the research on new technologies and publics focuses on individuals. Organizations, with their financial and human resources, may have considerable impact on the development and governance of new technologies. This conference creates an opportunity to converse with NGOs and hear from them directly.”

Among the NGOs who will be represented at the conference are Ashoka, Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, Latin American Nanotechnology & Society Network, European Trade Union Institute, Direct Relief International, United Auto Workers, Groundwater Protection Council, The Tor Project, The Center for International Environmental Law, Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior, Good World Solutions, Worker Rights Consortium, and Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.

Member of these organizations will be on hand to answer questions during an “NGO Marketplace” networking event.

More information about the conference, including a complete list of participants and schedule of events is available at http://www.cns.ucsb.edu/demtech2014/welcome.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.