

UNESCO CHAIR ON RESOURCES AND INFORMATION ESTABLISHED AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

By David Carnoy

New York - In an effort to promote and discover new ways in which industrial and developing countries can increase their productivity without destroying the environment, UNESCO intends to endow a chair at Columbia University in the area of global environmental problems. The chair, which is affiliated with Columbia's new Program on Information and Resources, will be held by Graciela Chichilnisky, a professor of economics and mathematics who is the director of the program.

Columbia, like UNESCO, shares a common desire to address global environmental problems not in isolation, but in conjunction with the social, economics, and cultural factors which help create those problems. The university and, in particular, the emerging Program on Information and Resources, also recognizes that the transfer of information between industrial and developing countries is crucial to implementing new models for global sustainability.

Recently, Professor Chichilnisky and Jorge Werthein, the Director of the New York UNESCO Office, met with the president of the National Resources Defense Council, John Adams, who agreed to join forces with UNESCO and Columbia to help create a "global environmental web."

"Ultimately, every UNESCO branch office in the world," Professor Chichilnisky said, "will have a computer that will allow immediate access to an enormous database on the Internet provided by the NRDC, which is the biggest environmental organization in the U.S. That database will offer a wealth of information concerning environmental policy, law, and technical issues related to the environment to all countries of the world."

Chichilnisky, a native of Argentina, specializes in the global environment from an economic and mathematical viewpoint that looks at the relationship between industrial and developing countries and their relationship to the international market. Before coming to Columbia, she was a professor at Harvard University and at the University of Essex in England.

She said, "The limits of growth appeared to indicate that developing countries could not develop because if they tried to develop, they would deplete the world's resources. We have tried to determine whether it was possible for developing countries to develop without such problems."

In creating her economic and mathematical models, Chichilnisky has focused her research on the concept of sustained economic development based on the satisfaction of basic needs. Sustained development, she explained, means you have economic development without destroying or depleting the environment while the satisfaction of basic needs means that every member of a particular society is provided with adequate housing, food, clothing, education, health care and other "basic needs."

In sponsoring the chair, UNESCO has committed \$100,000 a year for five years to the Program on Information and Resources. But most of the money will be used for the Program's activities in developing countries and to endow a seedfund that will be drawn upon as a base for further fundraising efforts. "UNESCO is not interested in subsidizing a major American university," said Chichilnisky. "Among other projects, we are planning, for instance, to start research programs on sustainable development in South Africa, Namibia and the United States."

For its part, Columbia is providing Professor Chichilnisky's salary, appropriate space and equipment for the chair and associated staff, \$50,000 per year to support the Program on Information and Resources and the general themes of the chair, and enhanced high-speed communication linkages between Columbia, UNESCO and collaborating institutions. Chichilnisky said the university's investment represents almost four times the amount of UNESCO's contribution.

"The university believes the UNESCO chair will serve as a model for global networking and problem solving," she said, "and it sees its relationship with UNESCO as an opportunity to help establish Columbia as a global university."



Graciela Chichilnisky

Photo Credit: Doug Hohn