

CSR/sustainability experts on hope and 2009 prospects

By Wayne Visser

Last night I was at the Science Museum in London attending the 20th Anniversary alumni celebrations of the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry (CPI - where I am a Senior Associate and was formerly Research Director).

The evening included an introductory speech by Director, Polly Courtice. Then we showed a little film (on a BIG Imax screen). The film included extracts from interviews I conducted with Joseph Stiglitz, George Monbiot, Hunter Lovins, Elizabeth Economy, Mohammad Yunus and Jeffrey Sachs. These interviews are the basis of two books that I am writing, which will be published in 2009.

Following the film was a panel discussion comprising John Elkington (Founder, SustainAbility and Volans Ventures), Emma Howard-Boyd (Director, Juipiter Asset Management), Doug Parr (Chief Scientist, Greenpeace UK) and Jonathon Porritt (Founder, Forum for the Future). They were asked to speak about what made them hopeful about the future.

John was placing his bets on social entrepreneurs, Emma commented on substantial growth in SRI in the past year (suggesting that it may be up to 20% of all investments by 2015 if memory serves), Doug cited victories in stalling a new UK nuclear plant and airport runway and Jonathon was putting his faith in a grassroots upswell (and his hopes for Barack Obama).

I would be lying if I said it was an entirely upbeat discussion. John sees the next 7 or 8 years of recession being very bleak and creating serious (and painful) discontinuities, Doug despairs over multilateral policy processes like Poznan and Jonathon thinks the scope for business to make serious progress in the current policy climate is extremely limited.

What all seemed to agree, however, is that 2009 will be an extremely challenging and exciting year for all of us working in CSR and sustainability. Their unified plea was for us to focus on the strategic, systemic reforms, rather than fiddling around the edges with incremental change. And speaking of strategic initiatives, if you haven't yet seen the Posnan Communique, signed by 140 global businesses, check it out at:

http://www.cpi.cam.ac.uk/programmes/energy_and_climate_change/corporate_leaders_group_on_cli.aspx

Source:

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