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From words and whispers to deals and deeds: reflections on the 2012 Skoll World Forum



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The stars were there at the [2012 Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship](#), held in Oxford on 28-30 March. From Bill Drayton, the father of the movement, spectral and luminous, to the newest Skoll awardees like Debbie Sung Din Taylor, whose award ceremony speech flickered like an Olympic torch – a new hope for Burma as it emerges from a long winter of dictatorship.

The Skoll chroniclers were there: to name just two, Skoll Foundation chief executive Sally Osberg provided an account of the state of the movement, while director of the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship Pamela Hartigan traced the outlines of leading edge practice.

The power organizations were there, from government, foundation and business spheres, led by our eponymous host. And the Fringe was as you would have it – buzzy, irreverent, hungry.

I missed Archbishop Tutu, who made Skoll 2011 unforgettable. But when Annie Lennox sat down at the keyboards and sang, further comparisons were banished.

The Skoll World Forum has come to have something of the feeling of a revival meeting for questing changemakers. Maybe it is the Oxford setting, but there is more than a hint of J R R Tolkien and C S Lewis wafting about.

I think that the Forum has also started to realize an early ambition to be a marketplace: partnerships are forming and the grapevine is thick with pitches. Maybe next year they can be tracked and published live as part of the state-of-the-art webcasting and Forum website, adding to the energy and moving us firmly from words and whispers to deals and deeds.

David Bonbright is chief executive of Keystone Accountability

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