

IN FOCUS: Considering all the options



At the weekend, I attended an unusual gathering of 800 scientists, politicians, policy makers and business leaders from 91 countries. Over three days they talked, debated and discussed some of the world's major problems and tried to agree on possible solutions.

The unusual twist was that all of those problems were approached from the perspective of science and technology. Yes, social, political and economic issues were discussed – and were central to the debate – but everything was approached from the angle of what science could do, and what technology could fix. Known as the Science and Technology in Society Forum, it has been held annually in Kyoto for five years, in the same building where the Kyoto Protocol was negotiated in 1997. It is a welcome initiative by Japan (which this week bagged a haul of new Nobel laureates), where the government calls it “science and technology diplomacy”.

The 2008 forum, which focussed on climate change, stressed the need for a new international agreement post-Kyoto to limit CO₂ in the atmosphere to 350 parts per million by 2050 – an agreement that would include action by all nations, including the U.S., China and India. It called for rapid improvements in energy efficiency, conservation and clean alternative energy development. But it also stressed that nuclear power will be crucially important in meeting these targets and called for increased “implementation of fission power, under strict conditions of nuclear safeguards, safety and security. The development of nuclear fusion power is also essential for the future.”

“All options must be on the table,” said one government commentator. “Striking out any option would make all other options more expensive, harder to implement and less likely to succeed. We simply cannot wait for the perfect solution, we need to act now with all of the measures at our disposal.” A salient point. And one worth considering.

Wilson da Silva
Editor-in-Chief

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