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Editorial Setting new agendas: critical perspectives on Corporate Social Responsibility in the developing world

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Setting new agendas: critical perspectives on Corporate Social Responsibility in the developing world

MICHAEL BLOWFIELD AND JEDRZEJ GEORGE FRYNAS

The theme of this special issue is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the developing world, and the need for more critical perspectives to understand what CSR does and could mean for the poor and marginalized in developing countries. Numerous claims have been made about the contribution CSR can make to poverty alleviation and other development goals. However, the contributors to this issue have reached the conclusion that current CSR approaches do not warrant such claims. Their work shows the need for a critical approach to the strengths and limitations of CSR, one that poses questions that hitherto have been unasked or neglected. In this editorial we outline what such a critical agenda might look like, drawing on the work of our fellow contributors and the many others who have been invited to comment.¹

A critical agenda is needed because many policy-makers see business as important in meeting development challenges: not just those of economic growth, but also in areas such as combating HIV/AIDS, reducing poverty and building human capital. Moreover, government, civil society and business all to some extent see CSR as a bridge connecting the arenas of business and development, and increasingly discuss CSR programmes in terms of their contribution to development. Implicit in this view is that developing economies are different from developed ones, and require particular attention. This broadly complements the premise of international development theory that there are unique aspects to issues such as poverty and sustainability in the developing world that demand different solutions from those that might be implemented in developed economies. However, as many of the articles in this

¹ This special issue is the culmination of an innovative collaboration among the contributors, Copenhagen Business School and Chatham House. The contributors first presented their work in November 2003 at a workshop convened by the Copenhagen Business School when the need for a critical agenda became clear. Revised papers and a draft of this editorial were presented at a second workshop and a one-day conference in August 2004. The papers were then presented for external review at a meeting of business, civil society and government representatives held at Chatham House in January 2005. We would like to thank all who participated in these events for their contributions, and especially Peter Lund-Thomsen and Michael Nielsen for initiating and sustaining this initiative.

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