The Issue: Land reform and redistribution can make a major contribution to both poverty reduction and export development.

But in many developing/transition economies, land reform programmes are struggling to achieve their targeted objectives. From the poverty reduction standpoint, new income generated has either fallen below expectations or has not been sustained. New entrepreneurship opportunities have either not emerged or not been acted upon. The status quo has been maintained among disadvantaged groups and in disadvantaged regions of the country.

Certainly, the intended contribution of the majority of land reform programmes to national export performance has been lower than anticipated. Indeed, land reform has on occasion undermined the national export effort. In several instances, the lack of positive impact, in terms of poverty reduction and export performance, has been due to the slowness of implementation of the land reform programmes. In such cases, the political imperative is now to accelerate the process and to move away from the traditional ‘willing-buyer/willing-seller’ approach.

While a more interventionist approach may expedite land redistribution, the question is: Will it result in the achievement of the twin objectives of poverty reduction and improved export performance?

The Proposition: Ownership and utilization of land must be a central consideration in any pro-poor export strategy. And vice-versa, export development should be a key aspiration of land reform.

To ensure that the poverty reduction and export development relationship is reinforced within the context of such a strategy, priority must be given not just to the mechanics of land redistribution, but to the attendant competitiveness considerations of (i) fragmentation of supply capacity; (ii) beneficiary competency to participate in a globalized value chain; and (iii) the protection of existing, and the creation and maintenance of new, commercial relationships.

Targeted interventions, in the form of infrastructural and technical support, must be accompanied by institutional development, implementation facilitation and incentives.

In short, while a number of developing/transition economy governments may be contemplating a more interventionist approach to land reform, a similarly proactive stance to technical and organizational support must be adopted if the beneficiaries of this reform are to be in a position to retain and build-upon income-generating potential of their new asset.

Focus of the Debate: The debate will address the following questions:

1. Is the proposition valid? And if so, why have land reform programmes generally failed to effectively combine the poverty reduction and export development objectives? What land reform programmes have proven to be successful from both the poverty reduction and export development standpoints? What was the key to their success?

2. Regarding land that currently produces profitable exports, how do strategy-makers ensure that future redistribution maintains buyer relationships and production standards? What are the technical and organizational prerequisites?

3. Regarding currently unproductive or non-exporting land, what programmes/processes do strategy-makers need to ensure are put in place to enable beneficiaries to gain access to export markets? What are the technical and organizational prerequisites?

4. In conclusion, what are the key initiatives of a pro-poor export strategy that addresses the central issue of land reform?