The Issue: 'e' Business is redefining competitiveness. It is also establishing a new norm for the international transaction.

Enterprises in developing and transition economies are now required to meet new standards, both in how they organize their internal operations and how they deal with current and prospective international clients. Performance has been mixed, but in general the response to the 'e' challenge has been adequate to maintain commercial relationships.

But from the standpoint of bringing the poor into the export process, the 'e' revolution has had little impact.

And in the final analysis, why should we expect that it should have?

The Proposition: While 'e' may be an integral aspect of life in the commercial world and, indeed, increasingly relevant to the delivery of public sector services, it should not be considered as a critical aspect of a pro-poor export strategy.

e-Mail and mobile phones certainly facilitate communication, but it is unrealistic for export strategy-makers to believe that 'e' is the answer to ensuring that the poor participate directly in the export process.

Certainly, 'e' can facilitate existing linkages within the national value chain (i.e. the link between the 'cottage producer' and the dealer/collector or sub-contractor) but a strategy that is directed towards bringing the poor directly into the export process via 'e' is unrealistic.

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

1. Is the proposition valid? In the developing/transition economy context, can one realistically expect that access to the Internet or a mobile phone will translate into export receipts being generated directly by the poor?

2. Based on the above, what priority should be given to the 'e' dimension when preparing a pro-poor export strategy? Can the justification for such a priority be based on the concrete results achieved by other developing/transition economies, or will it be based on wishful thinking?

3. What are the principal constraints that need to be addressed within any 'e'-based effort to bring the poor into the export process? What are examples of initiatives that have successfully overcome these constraints?

4. What are the fundamental components of any pro-poor export strategy that employs 'e' as a means of strengthening the export development – poverty reduction linkage? What are the implications for the public-private sector partnership and the interaction between government ministries?

5. Where can trade-related technical assistance (TRTA) be most effectively provided to support an 'e'-based programme to bring the poor into the export process?