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# Technology & Development

**W**elcome to another edition of the *ESR Review*. We have titled this issue “Technology and Development,” and we have chosen contributions that highlight the powerful role that technology has played to promote and visions of how it may yet promote economic development and self-reliance around the world.

We have chosen this topic for a number of reasons. First, the growth and penetration of computing technology is both phenomenal and impressive. For example, it took radio thirty-eight years from its introduction to get a market of 50 million users; television took thirteen years, and the Internet took only four years from its inception to hit this milestone. Evangelical stories abound emphasizing technology’s ability to help people escape poverty, such as the mom formerly on welfare now trading on eBay and the fishermen in India who use their cell phones to find the best markets/prices for their daily catch.

Second, Microsoft Corporation has just introduced its new Windows Vista operating system. On its Web site, the

company claims that “the WOW starts now” and that Vista will make computer and Internet use safer, easier, and more entertaining. Will Vista and the next generation make computer use safer, easier, and more productive for many of the world’s poor? Or will the digital divide widen, making it harder for the poor to gain access to these powerful resources?

John Davies, vice president of Intel’s World Ahead project, offers a private-industry perspective of computing’s potential to lift the poor and outlines a migration path of how his company intends to make that possible. Peter Bladin of the Grameen Foundation outlines how their Village Phone program has helped improve the livelihoods of its microfranchise owners. To bring these sides together, Steve Liddle, director of the Rollins Center for eBusiness at Brigham Young University, comments on the substantial commonalities and significant differences of the two perspectives.

Patrick Crompton details how handheld computing technology has

enabled FINCA to collect, aggregate, and use data more effectively. We see in this example the two-fold power of technology to assist NGO leaders with the thorny problem of measuring program success—*efficient* and *reliable* collection, transmission, and aggregation of data for meaningful analysis.

Janine Firpo of Sevak Solutions, a nonprofit alliance between business, NGO, and academic partners, describes the development and implementation of the Remote Transaction System. The system uses a technology-based backbone to connect microcredit borrowers in Uganda with a formal banking infrastructure, increasing their ability to make timely loan payments and their access to financial products and services. Firpo presents some of the real challenges and hurdles that face any effort to replace tradition-based business processes with technology-based ones.

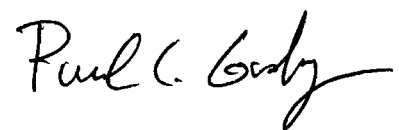
Dr. Steve Barley, Charles M. Pigott professor of management science and engineering at Stanford University,

provides our Best Practice section. Barley is a world-class expert on the impacts of technology introduction on the surrounding social system. In our conversation, we focused on why social context influences technology adoption—for good and for ill—and how proponents of technology-based solutions can better plan and account for this context.

Assunta Forgione concludes our issue by reviewing Rodney Stark's *Victory of Reason*. Stark's thesis is that Christian theology provides the foundational building block for the rise, proliferation, and success of capitalism in the Western world, and that Roman Catholic doctrine, not Calvin's Protestant ethic, contributed most to this development. Forgione offers a balanced review of this controversial thesis and invites you to ponder how the religious foundations of societies may promote or inhibit economic development.

As with our first issue, many thanks are in order: First, to Todd Manwaring and the staff at the

Economic Self-Reliance Center for their unfailing support in handling the myriad details needed to get this issue out the door. Second, to the Rollins e-Business Center at Brigham Young University for their financial sponsorship of this issue; they made it possible to fill our pages with meaningful content instead of paid advertising. Third, to each contributor who took my somewhat vague invitation to write about “technology and development” and generated thought-provoking and meaningful articles. And finally, to you, our readers, for taking your valuable time to read, consider, and (we hope) implement what you find useful in these pages.



Paul C. Godfrey, Editor