Introducing Electronic Governance in the Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

The Philippines has recently identified five key reform packages where information and communications technology (ICT) will play a key role: job creation through economic growth, anti-corruption through good government, social justice and basic needs, education and youth opportunity, and energy independence and savings (Patricio, 2004). Such an important role of ICT can be seen in terms of the signing of the Electronic Commerce Act of 2000, or the E-Commerce Act in June 2000. The law mandates all government agencies to adopt electronic means in their transactions within a period of two years (2000) of its signing.

BACKGROUND

Focusing on local governments, the National Computer Center (NCC, n.d.), assisted by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), is bringing electronic governance under the acronym, e-LGU, to the local government units (LGUs), as part of DOST’s Support Program for Electronic Governance (SUPRE-GOV). The e-LGU Project runs from 16 September 2003 to 15 September 2005.

Having learned from the experience of the 1990s, when DOS-based applications were introduced to LGUs but with very limited technical and financial support, the e-LGU Project recognizes the very limited resources to modernize LGUs’ operations. Thus, it advocates the use of open source technology, reducing the dependence on expensive, proprietary software and limited third-party governance solutions used by the more affluent LGUs, but increases the need for training on software.

ELECTRONIC GOVERNANCE IN THE PHILIPPINES

The e-LGU Project of bringing e-governance into the Project LGUs, has six components:

1. LGU-IT Resources and E-Governance Readiness Survey (LGU-IT Resources, 2004);
2. Electronic Governance Seminar for LGU Executives (Electronic Governance Seminar, 2004);
3. Information Systems Development Planning (Information Systems, 2004);
4. Formulation of Data Standards for Local Governance (Data Standards, 2004);
5. Establishment of LGU Web Presence (Web Presence, 2004); and

E-LGU aims to enable LGUs to use ICT in their operations to provide better public service. To be able to do this, it will determine the level of local government computerization and readiness for e-governance by means of a nationwide survey conducted in August 1992 (LGU-IT Resources, 2004). A total of 15,446 computer units are reported by 640 LGUs. The number ranges from a high of 435 units to one unit per LGU.

In the Philippines, LGUs are classified into provinces, cities, municipalities, and barangays (villages). Provinces are composed of component cities and municipalities. Highly urbanized and special cities do not belong to any province. Cities and municipalities are composed of barangays. Cities have the most number of computer units, with an average of 75 units, followed by provinces with 60 units, and municipalities with 10 units. The income classification of LGUs (ranging from first to sixth class as classified by the Department of Finance every three years) was found unrelated to their number of available computer units.

Microcomputer systems accounted for almost all (97%) of the systems reported. As far as Internet and e-commerce are concerned, 30.7% of LGU respondents reported having Internet capabilities, and the majority (87.6%) of them are connected via dial-up. The Philippines is divided into 15 regions, and two administrative regions (Cordillera Administrative Region and Administrative Region For Muslim Mindanao). Region III (Central Luzon) has the most number of Internet connection, then Region I (Ilocos), and Region IV-A (CALABARZON). LGUs with no Internet connection...