15. Country Report of Philippines[1]

15.1 Current Status of the ICT Sector of Philippines

By technical definition, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) refers to all technology designed for the purpose of creating, manipulating, storing, managing, sending, and receiving any type of information. This includes media utilized through the internet and on technology hardware such as computers, tablets, mobile phones, and as well as older technologies such as radio, television, and the telephone[2]. ICT also includes software like social media services and mobile apps and tools. In the socio-economic development sphere, ICT is powerful tool that, when correctly utilized, can help address social inequities and help poor nations achieve its development goals. In fact, promotion and utilization of ICT is among the key strategies agreed upon by the country members of United Nations (UN) to effectively deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030[3].

In the current ICT landscape in the Philippines, there is a striking digital divide between the educated middle class in the cities and the rural-based populations. While people in the city have easier access to internet, mobile phones, computers and other forms or medium for ICT, there is still a very low computer and internet proliferation and usage in the rural countryside[4]. Contributing to this digital divide are the (1) lower levels of education in the rural areas that makes ICT intimidating to use; (2) the unavailability of ICT infrastructures or services that makes it inaccessible for these individuals; and (3) affordability of ICT tools and services, such as laptops, mobile phones and internet.

Infrastructure is among the key driver to accessing ICT, in the Philippines, there are only two major private corporations which provide mobile and internet services nationwide - PLDT-Smart Telecommunications with 54% market share, and Globe Telecoms with 29% market share, smaller mobile, cable TV and internet providers are also beginning to penetrate households in smaller market shares. This duopoly in mobile and internet services have efficiently kept prices all-time high, recently, the Philippines has been rated to be one of the slowest internet service in the Asia Pacific region.

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[2] UN-APCICT. (2016). Module C1: Women's Empowerment, SDGs and ICT. Korea: UN-APCICT/ESCAP

[3] Sustainable Development Goals as defined in Transforming Our World - the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

[4] (2003, May 28). Gender and ICT in the Philippines: A Proposed Policy Framework. Philippines Legislators' Committee on Population and Development Foundation, Inc. & WomensHub: Philippines.

Despite being one of the slowest, prices of internet services in the Philippines is among the most expensive. Rate per Mbps is on the average of Php848.65 (US$18), which is over three times the average global price of Php243.07 (US$5.21) per Mbps. PLDT Smart and Globe offers 100 Mbps fiber optic internet services in high end locations in Metro Manila with a monthly rate of about Php20,000 (about US$400)[5].

According to the Foundation for Media Alternatives, only 43% of Filipinos have Internet access. Internet shops where you can rent computer and internet time are also available in the country, but many youth are utilizing these facilities mainly for games and entertainment. It is common that many young Filipinos are avid online gamers, but do not know the basics of ICT applications for educational and productive utilization.

While ICT software, hardware and gadgets are easily available for sale from the numerous malls and shops across the country, only individuals earning wages or have at least a regular source of income are able to acquire such tools, which they mainly use to communicate or socialize online with other individuals, like family and friends. According to newsbytes.ph, 40 million Filipinos are active mobile social media users, favoring Android operated gadgets, 81%, over iOS, 19%. This is mainly because Android based gadgets are more adaptable and costs cheaper compared to iOS. Based on age demography, 88% of mobile internet users are under the age 34. With ages 15-24 dominating by 53%; 25-35 years old by 35%; 35 to 44 years old by 9%; and 45 years and older by 3%.It is also noteworthy that 94% of these active mobile internet users have Facebook account, with Facebook messenger as the most popular communication app, followed by Viber and Skype[6].

Figure 1. Asia Pacific Countries Internet Speed

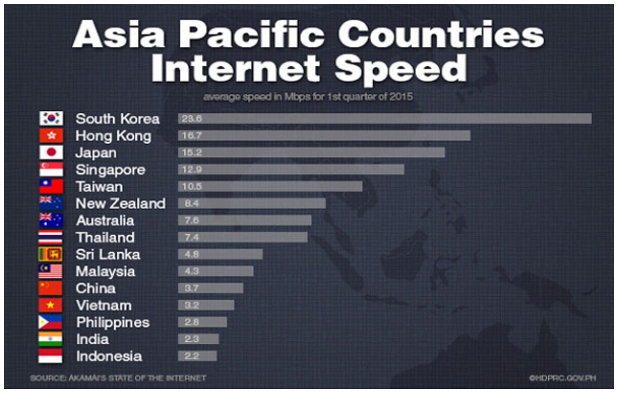

Image source Philstar Website: http://beta.philstar.com/opinion/2015/08/23/1491398/uy65lI2jA8sREwpd.99

[5] Why is our internet so slow?, Lila Ramos Shahani, August 2015, http://beta.philstar.com/opinion/2015/08/23/1491398/why-our-internet-so-slow#uy65lI2jA8sREwpd.99

[6] Profile of Smartphone Users in the Philippines, September 10, 2016 http://newsbytes.ph/2016/09/10/inforgraphic-profile-of-smarkphone-users-in-the-philippines,

There is also an observed gender disparity when it comes to access to ICT for productive use. Traditional Filipino families, especially in the rural areas, remain very patriarchal. It is regarded that ICT, and other Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields in general, as a form of productive endeavor is a more appropriate field for male members of the family[7]. As a result, ICT is likely to become more accessible through education to Filipino males. This gender digital divide is deeply rooted from the historical economic, socio-cultural, and political inequities between Filipino men and women. Filipino male population dominates the IT field in the country, gender stereotyping and discrimination in education and the workplace end up making the knowledge needed to better utilize ICT more accessible and seemingly more appropriate to men only. These circumstances makes ICT promotion among Filipino women a gender gap equalizing tool, as stipulated in SDG #5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

The succession in the Philippine Government leaderships acknowledge the importance of ICT in nation building. In the year 2016, the ICT government arm has been fully empowered to become an independent executive department, this is coming from being a long time sub-office of the Department of Transportation and Communications (DOTC) and the Department of Science and Technology (DOST). The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) came into being by virtue of Republic Act 10944 otherwise known as the "Department of Information and Communications Technology Act of 2015," which was signed into law on 23 May 2016 by former President Benigno S. Aquino. Transitioning to a fully operational department, the DICT is mandated to serve as the primary policy, planning, coordinating, implementing, and administrative entity of the Executive Branch of the government that will plan, develop, and promote the national ICT development agenda. It envisions that the Philippines will become "*an innovative, safe and happy nation that thrives through and is enabled by Information and Communications Technology,"* with the firm commitment to (1) provide every Filipino access to vital ICT "infostructure" and services; (2) ensure sustainable growth of Philippine ICT-enabled industries resulting to creation of more jobs; (3) establish a One Digitized Government, One Nation facility; (4) Support the administration in fully achieving its goals; and (5) be the enabler, innovator, achiever, and leader in pushing the country's development and transition towards a world-class digital economy. The current government leadership is also supportive to the set mandates of the DICT and provided budget to facilitate the accomplishment of its set of commitments[8].

Likewise, the DICT, the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), and the United Nations Asia and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communications Technology for Development (APCICT), together with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the ASEAN Women

[7] (2003, May 28). Gender and ICT in the Philippines: A Proposed Policy Framework. Philippines Legislators' Committee on Population and Development Foundation, Inc. & WomensHub: Philippines.

[8] Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) official website: www.dict.gov.ph

Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN) forged partnership for the Women ICT Frontier Initiative (WIFI) ASEAN Sub-Regional Launch. This partnership program aims to promote ICT capacity development to help empower women entrepreneurs in Asia and the Pacific. The program aims to promote ICT as business development tool to support women-owned businesses, while also influencing Philippine legislative and executive government leaders to foster an enabling environment for an ICT-empowered women entrepreneurship[9].

[9] Philippine Commission on Women. (2017, August 28). Women ICT Frontier Initiative (WIFI) Program for ASEAN launched in PH-hosted 2017 Women's Business Confab. Retrieved from http://www.pcw.gov.ph/article/women-ict-frontier-initiative-wifi-program-asean-launched-ph-hosted-2017-women%E2%80%99s-business-confab