

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY FOR PHILIPPINE AGRICULTURE:

OPEN FORUM

Dr. N. Bantayan, UPLB: I'm interested in the infrastructure based on the talk by Dr. Torres. What are your thoughts in terms of open source systems or software against the proprietary ones that, as you said, cost so much, if you want to develop the ICT infrastructure in the country?

Academician W.T. Torres: Quickly, technology should be open. It is up to the user to determine whether he can afford Microsoft, for instance, versus Linux. However, looking at the agricultural sector, I already mentioned that many people in this sector may not be able to afford expensive software. So the open source initiative I think should serve that particular sector. The idea is not to develop softwares that are very sophisticated. A Microsoft packages has 10 million lines or more; perhaps the farmer or the fishermen only need software with 10 thousand lines or less. Perhaps we can lower the cost by simply focusing on the needs of the sector. The answer is we need to develop our own. When we say acquire software tools, I don't mean we buy them necessarily from foreign suppliers. We can get these tools from local software developers. Incidentally, we'll be helping the local ICT industry by doing this.

Mr. Ronald Talio, MAPECON Green Charcoal: I'm a member of the Filipino Inventors Society. In PA 2020, I think the so-called e-commerce was not touched and this particular subject should be part and parcel of the information technology wherein all of the products in the Philippines could be exported using computers and payment through credit cards or debit cards. You also mentioned VOIP by which we can call the United States at PhP1.07 compared to PLDT cost of about PhP22.00. We could use the VOIP in the Philippines using the DSL modem or dial-up connection. Thank you very much.

Academician Torres: I'm quite familiar with the two things you mentioned. My assessment about domestic e-commerce is that it is not yet mature. It is not even in the embryonic stage at this point in time. E-commerce will prosper if there is demand for it. However, what is promising is an e-

commerce scheme wherein the seller is in the Philippines and buyers are outside the Philippines. A good current example is call center agents based in the country and providing services outside the country. The other thing I want to add is that e-commerce is sometimes perceived as B-to-C — business selling to consumers. E-commerce has many other different features such as that in B2BPriceNow.com. This e-commerce Web Portal allows farmers using their mobile phones to know what the prices of agricultural goods are anywhere in the Philippines; they can also post their own prices on these portal. This feature of e-commerce has been running for a few years already. It was an ICT application that had won a World Bank award.

In regard to VOIP, a few more months from now, we expect the National Telecommunications Commission to issue a policy that would make VOIP available more widely in our country. Today, we can make use of VOIP already. Using a computer we can make calls outside the Philippines for a small fraction of the prevailing price, or even for free, depending on what we do. However, the unfortunate thing is, people from outside calling us will have to pay a lot more. At least 12 US cents per minute will be added to that service by the telecommunications company concerned. This is the cost component we are trying to have reduced. We want to reduce the cost of voice call termination within the Philippines which is bundled together with the international transmission of that call. We want to unbundle the two cost components because we can use VOIP for the international component, at low cost, and combine this with the traditional domestic long-distance call, the cost of which we're to pay. The moment we do this, I think it will impact the countryside because VOIP will enable more and more people to afford making international calls – outbound as well as inbound calls. It has significant implications not only among OFWs and their families but also in business. Thank you.