

New alternatives to achieving mobility in rural communities

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One of the highlights during the recently concluded 5th Knowledge Exchange Conference on Community eCenters (KEC5) last September 23-24, 2009 was the session on alternative solutions for Community eCenter (CeC) mobility in rural areas in the fields of healthcare, low-cost hardware and connectivity.

Discussing the CeCs' potential in healthcare was Sylvia Stolk, CEO of Salus Healthcare Informatics, Inc. In the current Philippine healthcare ecosystem, roughly around 73-80% of the population is covered by the [Philippine Health Insurance Corporation \(PhilHealth\)](#) . With this number, CeCs can easily serve as PhilHealth satellite offices for rural and hard-to-reach areas. Among others, the following are specific opportunities that CeCs can take advantage of in terms of fast-tracking the use of ICT in the field of healthcare:

- Using the CeCs as an online PhilHealth registration site
- Utilizing CeCs in the re-issuance of IDs to existing members to facilitate full automation of PhilHealth services
- Transforming CeCs into PhilHealth kiosks .

Acting on these concepts, CeCs can help in expanding the telemedicine reach with the use of the conceptual infrastructures (desktops, laptops, internet, camera, video, voice and other electronic devices) essential in the successful implementation of the program.

Along the hardware end, Joscel V. Pendejito, Countryside Manager of Intel Technology Philippines, Inc., introduced the [NETTOP ng Bayan](#) , a computer which derives its name from "Internet" and "desktop". The NETTOP, at Php 11,995, is designed for Internet usage where users do not need a high-end desktop for basic computing, Internet surfing, content development, music downloads, video streaming and networking.

According to Mr. Pendejito, the NETTOP's target market is the first time buyers, including those in the field of banking. In the CeC context, NETTOP is a cost-effective way of utilizing the CeC budget to buy more PC workstations.

Intel's advocacy for low-cost hardware is embodied in their program called COOPNET Centers, where it assists cooperative members to a business similar to an iCafe. Intel assists qualified applicants to set up a Community Net Center in their respective locality at a lesser cost.

Discussing infrastructure connectivity was Jay Bacoy of Smart Communications, Inc. Factors such as more stringent telecommunications regulations, economic activities and a more competitive telecommunication industry were cited as the challenges for telecommunication companies in setting up infrastructure and facilities. Accordingly, a priority concern that needs to be addressed prior to establishing facilities in new areas is the social preparation and education of communities on the benefits of new technologies.

These three platforms outlined the vast potential of the CeCs to expand and offer innovative services to bridge the digital divide in the rural communities. .