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DICT-UNDP Free Wi-fi for All Project
Minutes of Meeting: 2nd Project Board

(*22 September 2021, 1-3 pm, via Zoom*)

I. Participants:

Co-Chairpersons:

1. Undersecretary Emmanuel Rey Caintic, Digital Philippines, Department of ICT
2. Dr. Selva Ramachandran, Resident Representative, UNDP Philippines

Members:

3. Undersecretary Lilibeth C. David, Department of Health – represented by Mr. Robert S. Manuel, Division Chief, Knowledge Management and Information Technology Service
4. Undersecretary Epimaco V. Densing III, DILG (absent)
5. Executive Director Cinderella Filipina S. Benitez-Jaro, CHED (absent)

Other participants:

DICT

1. Atty. Kristoffer L. Tiansay, Assistant Secretary for Regional Operations and Countryside ICT Development
2. Mr. Arnold P. de Castro, Project Director, Free Wi-Fi for All - Free Public Internet Access Program/Infostructure Management Bureau
3. Ms. Sylvia Posadas, Project Manager, Free Wi-Fi for All - Free Public Internet Access Program
4. Engr. Lawrence Cabaluna, Engineer III, Free Wi-Fi for All - Free Public Internet Access Program
5. Ms. Nieva Marie D. Maliglig, Executive Assistant II, OASRO
6. Engr. Dhon G. Dungca, Chief of Staff, OASRO
7. Ms. Juny Anne Enriquez, Project Development Officer III, OASRO
8. Mr. Omi Castañar, Chief of Staff, OUDP

Department of Health

1. Mr. Joel S. Arias, Information Technology Officer (ITO) II, Knowledge Management and Information Technology Service
2. Mr. John Ulysses M. Galo, Program Manager, eHealth Project Management Office
3. Ms. Aliyah Lou Evangelista, Project Officer, eHealth Project Management Office
4. Dr. Terence Cheung, Technical Staff, Undersecretary of the Health Facilities and Infrastructure Development Team

UNDP

1. Mr. Edwine Carrie, Deputy Resident Representative
2. Ms. Maria Luisa Isabel Lim-Jolongbayan, Team Leader, Institutions and Partnerships Programme
3. Ms. Alka Aneja, Procurement Specialist
4. Ms. Marian Theresia Valera Co, RBM Analyst
5. Mr. Mark Marcos, Programme Analyst/ DRR Specialist

Secretariat/DICT-UNDP Free Wi-Fi for All Project Management Office:

1. Engr. Ronel Vincent Vistal, Officer-In-Charge
2. Mr. Ronell Malasa, Monitoring & Evaluation Officer
3. Ms. Sunshine De Guzman, Finance and Administrative Assistant
4. Ms. Cara Punay, Project Officer
5. Ms. Frances Estroga, Project Officer

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II. Agenda Items

1. Preliminaries and Introduction to Participants
2. Opening Messages and Adoption of the Provisional Agenda
3. Project Overview and Progress to Date
4. New Contexts and Priorities
5. Ways Forward and Agreements
6. Closing

III. Opening Messages and Adoption of the Provisional Agenda

The meeting was called to order at 01:08pm. Introductions were made, and the provisional agenda was adopted.

Undersecretary (Usec) Emmanuel Rey Caintic, Project Board (PB) Co-Chairperson thanked UNDP for organizing the Second PB meeting, acknowledged UNDP Resident Representative (RR) Selva Ramachandran, welcomed UNDP Deputy Resident Representative (DRR) Edwine Carrie, and appreciated the presence of Department of Health (DOH) representatives. He highlighted the need to prioritize the vaccination centers for the COVID-19 response of the government. He shared that he feels confident that the remaining targets of the project will be implemented swiftly. He added that DICT hopes to secure the services of a contractor with strong financial capacity and that can provide the needed internet bandwidth to help the Department fast track deployment.

RR Selva Ramachandran thanked Usec Caintic and the DOH, emphasized the importance of the PB meeting, and underscored the strong partnership between DICT and UNDP. He underscored the main reason for UNDP to partner on the project with DICT was to assist the last mile communities and schools (unserved, underserved, and remote communities) in being connected and accessing information. He acknowledged that the project faced a number of challenges including COVID-19, typhoons, commercial issues between the contractor and sub-contractor, and some negative media coverage. Hence, the importance of deciding a clear path moving forward. RR Ramachandran added that UNDP Headquarters (HQ) pays close attention to the project and provides the required guidance given the challenges and upheavals faced by the project. In this regard, he mentioned that he will brief on the outcome of the project meeting to UNDP HQ for required advice and guidance.

UNDP Programme Team Leader Ms. Maria Luisa Lim-Jolongbayan presented the roles and responsibilities of the PB before moving to the next agenda item.

IV. Project Overview and Progress to Date

Engr. Ronel Vincent Vistal, Officer-in-Charge of the DICT-UNDP PMO, presented the Project's background, accomplishments, financial status, and challenges across the project timelines.

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Discussions/agreements:

1. *On the remaining project resources*
   Assistant Secretary (Asec) Kristoffer L. Tiansay inquired if the remaining balance is updated. Ms. Lim-Jolongbayan remarked that it is. She added that UNDP has completed payments to Speedcast (for the accepted sites) and will be closing the purchase order for the Phase 1 contract. Asec Tiansay noted that the USD 12.6 mil remaining balance of the project will be for reprogramming.

2. *On Output 1, Phase 3 (PLDT contract)*
   Usec Caintic clarified if Phase 3 has started implementation and Ms. Alka Aneja, Procurement Specialist, responded that the Notice to Proceed will be issued shortly and implementation of activities will commence now that PLDT complied with the insurance requirement. Asec Tiansay requested the final list of sites of Phase 3 and Ms. Alka assured that UNDP will provide this document.

   Usec Caintic inquired if the list of sites under Phase 3 is final or can still be modified given that its download and upload specifications are suitable for vaccination sites. Regarding this, Ms. Aneja responded that the contract was entered through an open competitive selection process and any major change would trigger a review of the contract awarding process, taking into consideration the principles of fairness and transparency that UNDP Procurement adheres to. She also added that any change in the contract would require internal approval from UNDP HQ. Nonetheless, she added that UNDP has requested PLDT to prioritize SUCs in the list that are identified as vaccination centers. Usec Caintic agreed that the contract with PLDT must be honored and changing the contract will require a complex administrative and legal process.

3. *On plans for the deactivated 852 sites*
   UNDP Deputy Resident Representative (DRR) Edwine Carrie inquired about the utilization of the sites by potential beneficiaries, whether sites are operational and providing the intended service.

   Usec Caintic noted school/university closures due the impact of COVID-19. He emphasized the importance of putting internet in the vaccination sites because the Government is facing ongoing challenges in getting the vaccination line lists. He also recognized the need to provide free Wi-Fi in the State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) campuses under Phase 3.

   UNDP RR Ramachandran inquired about connectivity for 852 deactivated sites and highlighted the need for a clear communication for this to LGUs, especially those that are in DCP schools, since opening of schools may already start on a pilot-basis for low alert level local governments. Usec Caintic acknowledged the concern but explained that equally important is to provide decent internet services to rural health units. He requested DOH to discuss the situation in rural health units.

   Usec Caintic further explained that vaccination centers need connectivity to be able to promptly submit the list and other reports related to vaccination. He added that this applies to vaccination centers in both GIDAs and non-GIDAs since all areas experience connectivity issues. He proposed to revisit the list of sites to be able to address the need and the current priority under the government's COVID-19 response.

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V. New Contexts and Priorities

DICT FWFA Project Manager Sylvia Posadas presented the new priorities of the DICT in which the Free Wi-Fi for All – Free Public Internet Access Program shall provide internet connectivity to public COVID-19 related facilities (vaccination centers, isolation/quarantine facilities, health centers and hospitals) that will allow them to access and submit data to the Philippine COVID-19 Vaccine Information Management System (VIMS). The current DICT procurement aligned with these are subscription of internet service for mega vaccination centers, regular COVID-19 facilities, and for GIDA sites. DOH stressed the importance and urgent support needed in this direction.

Discussions/agreements:

1. Usec Caintic requested clarification if there are vaccinations sites that are also under GIDAs in which PM Sylvia responded in the affirmative and supported by Ms. Aliyah Lou Evangelista of the Department of Health. RR Ramachandran and Usec Caintic inquired from the DOH representatives if there are other details that DICT and UNDP needed to know regarding the vaccination centers since the issue is not limited only with COVID-19 but an aspect of the health services in general. Usec Caintic added that even the COVID-19 non-vaccination center sites such as isolation facilities need internet connectivity. RR Ramachandran and Usec Caintic agreed that there should be a cross-referencing of the PLDT sites with the GIDA vaccination sites identified by the DICT.

2. Ms. Evangelista stated that the average bandwidth of the vaccination centers in the GIDAs is 1 to 5 Mbps through the FWFA. Moreover, provision of internet services for rural health units (RHUs) is the responsibility of the respective local government unit (LGU). Robert Manuel of DOH added that the DOH takes care of the internet services of the regional offices since these are under the supervision and control of the DOH. However, RHUs are also asking the DICT for assistance to provide internet services especially for the national e-health program. Ms. Lim-Jolongbayan added that provision of free public internet service through the project is also a way to support local governments as they transition into the implementation of the Mandanas-Garcia Ruling, since health services is one of the most devolved functions of the government.

3. RR Ramachandran asked for updates of the House of Representatives (HOR) Inquiry, the DICT Investigation Task Force, and the Ombudsman's probe, and remaining issues regarding the Commission on Audit's (COA) report in 2020 that the UNDP must take cognizance of in moving forward. Usec Caintic responded that the HOR suggested that the activated sites be retained "as much as possible", which he interpreted "as where it is really needed". Hence, he opined that the DICT will not be faulted if it decides to provide connectivity to the RHUs since it is of paramount importance during the pandemic. Mr. John Ulysses Galo of DOH also added that the pandemic had increased the demand and the request for assistance of the RHUs for improved internet connectivity for reporting. Currently, the DOH addressed this by ensuring that recording can be implemented through online and offline modalities, with RHUs submitting their online reports to the DOH as soon as they get stable connection. With regard to COA, Usec Caintic responded that the remaining COA issue is the design of the project, which the Project Board can address.

4. DRR Carrie also added that the project should also try to deliver and prioritize sites with high impact, using appropriate technology that can provide the needed internet services. Mr. Galo

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suggested that for site prioritization, it is worth considering the 59 Universal Health Care (UHC) sites, specifically primary care facilities. Usec Caintic also pointed out that Wi-Fi services is integral to communicating the logistics of the vaccination in the vaccination centers.

5. In summary, DICT along with DOH stressed that in line with the new context and emerging priorities it is vital to provide internet access to health and vaccination centres in connection with COVID-19.

VI. Ways Forward

Ms. Lim-Jolongbayan presented the summary of the status of the three Project Outputs, with a sum of uncommitted funds in the amount of approximately USD 12.6 mil and raised that these are for the PB's decision on moving forward. She then presented options to move forward, namely:

1. A clear direction for the project from October 2021 forward.
   a. The first option for this is for UNDP to return the uncommitted funds from Outputs 1, 2 and 3, while the PLDT contract will proceed with DICT and UNDP oversight.
   b. A second option is to explore alternative options to reprogramme the uncommitted funds from Outputs 1, 2 and 3, and if this is agreed, a new project to be co-designed, with new scope responding to new context and priorities, new timelines and new implementation modality.

2. If there is agreement to reprogramme and co-design a new project, an appropriate implementation modality needs to be decided, also taking into consideration that DICT has already signified in earlier meetings that they already have the capacity to manage the project. Ms. Lim-Jolongbayan added UNDP can support the project even under a National Implementation Modality (NIM).

3. Further, once it has been decided that there will be a new project, a joint statement on the joint decision on the partnership and the project is proposed to be released.

4. Lastly, UNDP wanted to ensure that there will be continuity of the decisions of the PB even if there would be changes in leadership in the DICT and the LGUs due to the upcoming elections.

Ms. Marian Theresia Valera Co, UNDP RBM Analyst, also presented the different UNDP project implementation modalities, including the processes that need to be undertaken and the documents to be completed prior to Project Document (ProDoc) signing. The following options were presented:

1. NIM with Partial Country Office Support (NIM-PS),
   Under NIM-PS, the IP would be DICT hence the responsibility and accountability of project implementation lie with them. Through the NIM-PS, the systems and processes used can be that of the DICT or UNDP depending on what will be agreed upon by the two parties. The support provided by UNDP to NIM shall be detailed in the Letter of Agreement (LOA) signed between the IP (DICT) and UNDP. Outputs that DICT would implement using their systems and processes are subjected to the UN Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT). This involves the conduct of HACT assurance activities, such as micro-assessments, spot checks, audits, and programme monitoring visits. The HACT micro-assessment assesses the partner's financial management capacity, including accounting, procurement, reporting, and internal controls, to

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determine the overall risk rating for UNDP Partners, the applicable cash transfer modality, and the required assurance activities during the period of engagement. The HACT micro-assessment needs to be completed before any systems and processes of the IP can be used to deliver project activities (e.g. procurement, human resources, asset management, etc). This takes about four weeks and must be considered in identifying the timeline for the design and implementation of the new project.

On audits, a NIM audit will be conducted for expenditures on goods and services delivered using DICT's processes and systems.

2. NIM with Full CO Support (NIM-FS), and Direct Implementation Modality (DIM). If applied to the context of the project DICT will be the Implementing Partner (IP) for NIM-PS and NIM-FS, while UNDP will be the IP for DIM. The IP is the designated entity responsible and accountable for the effective use of resources and management of the project to deliver outputs that are agreed under the Project Document and Work Plans.

   NIM FS. Under NIM-FS, DICT as the IP will full responsibility and accountability over project implementation. However, under NIM-FS, DICT will sign a LOA with UNDP indicating that all outputs will be delivered using UNDP systems and processes. The PMO can have matrix reporting with both DICT and UNDP. NIM-FS projects undergo a DIM audit of UNDP transactions.

3. *DIM*. Under the DIM, which is the implementation modality of the current project, UNDP is the IP. Therefore, it is responsible and accountable for the effective use of resources and management of the project. DICT is still part of the Project Board, the highest decision-making body of the project, and can still influence the implementation of the project by providing guidance during project design and implementation. DIM projects undergo a DIM audit of UNDP transactions.

Discussions/agreements:

1. Usec Caintic stated that the DICT prefers the option of reprogramming the uncommitted funds from Outputs 1, 2 and 3 and co-designing a new project. DICT wishes to utilize the budget to assist the DOH since they needed internet connectivity even before the pandemic. He proposed that DICT can handle procurement and implementation and requested UNDP's support on monitoring and evaluation. He also supported the need to issue a joint statement on the collective decision of DICT and UNDP to move with the partnership. Usec Caintic announced that DICT will go for NIM with partial support from UNDP (NIM-PS).

   Usec Caintic reassured PB members of the continuity and follow-up of PB decisions, even with future potential changes in the leadership of DICT.

2. Asec Tiansay also supported the statement of Usec Caintic to utilize the uncommitted funds to design a new project since the DOH really needs the support. He also stated that before the new project can proceed, there is a need to confirm the remaining funds balance (approximately USD 12.6 million) since they need to report this remaining balance to Secretary Honasan. Next, there is a need to finalize the membership of the PB for the new project. Lastly, he noted that there is a need to constitute a new technical working group (TWG) to draft a new set of Terms of References (TORs). He noted that DICT has already developed TORs for service providers.

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3. Asec Tiansay asked the role of UNDP under the NIM-PS. Ms. Co responded that the role of UNDP will depend upon the roles that will be identified and shared by the parties in the LOA. Asec Tiansay asked if DICT can procure and UNDP will pay, and Ms Co confirmed that this is possible under Direct Payment cash transfer modality, where UNDP will directly pay the supplier identified using DICT's procurement systems. UNDP will also continue in its assurance and oversight role during the conduct of the project. Ms. Lim-Jolongbayan also added that UNDP can provide the requested monitoring and evaluation support as requested by Usec Caintic. The roles of the parties will be stipulated in a LOA.

4. Asec Tiansay also inquired about the new documents needed for the new project to be implemented. Ms. Lim-Jolongbayan replied that a new project document will need to be developed and approved by DICT and UNDP, and the Financing Agreement needs to be amended. Ms. Co also explained the need to conduct a HACT micro-assessment for the DICT as a requirement for the new project wherein UNDP will be hiring an independent audit firm. This process will take about four weeks.

5. Asec Tiansay sought clarification on the final number of approved activated under the project. Ms. Lim-Jolongbayan confirmed by mentioning that UNDP and DICT PMO have vetted and agreed to the final list of 852 approved activated sites. As for the remaining balance, Speedcast had already been informed about the final number of accepted sites, so no major changes are expected to the current financial estimate. Asec Tiansay requested a copy of the list of the 852 sites.

6. RR Ramachandran stated that the new project will not necessarily be a FWFA project, but a COVID-19 response project in line with the emerging and new priorities explained by DICT and DOH. It will also be necessary to determine its scope and timeline. He also asked Usec Caintic what the timeframe for the project will be. Usec Caintic responded that a year's worth of internet service should be the minimum but noted that it will be carefully assessed during the formulation of the project. RR Ramachandran asked Usec Caintic on how the project will respond to LGUs given that there will be changes in the list sites. Usec Caintic said that the vaccination centers will still be for the benefit of the LGUs. He also asked how DOH will be involved in the project, and Ms. Lim-Jolongbayan proposed that the TWG, which will co-design the project be composed of DICT, DOH, DILG and UNDP. This was approved by the Project Board.

7. RR Ramachandran asked for clarity why the option to return the remaining funds to the Government was not pursued to provide a clear explanation to UNDP HQ. Usec Caintic stated that since the budget came from the 2018 appropriation by Congress, the governing law, which was the 2018 General Appropriations Act, is no longer in effect - the funds cannot be "repurposed" by the Department and should be returned to Treasury. An enactment of Congress will be needed before the funds can be used again for any purpose.

   RR Ramachandran asked whether the Commission on Audit (COA) will have any observation if the project goes into a new direction. Usec Caintic responded that this will not be an issue since DICT is responding to an emergency and the immediate need of the government and its constituents. The line of questioning of the COA was with the design and implementation, and with DICT and UNDP coming up with a better project, this will not be an issue.

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VII. Closing, Agreements and Next Steps

Usec Caintic thanked DOH for enlightening and emphasizing the importance of connectivity in the government's COVID-19 response. The prudent use of USD 12.6 mil should be responsive to the times and the new project should be implemented fast and effectively. This will enable a full year for the RHU facilities to enjoy the provision of internet services.

RR Ramachandran summarized the PB decisions:

1. renew the focus of the new project on health and vaccination centers;
2. UNDP will continue the implementation of the PLDT contract;
3. a TWG will be organized to co-design the new project to be implemented under NIM-PS;
4. a HACT micro-assessment will be conducted as a requirement for the new NIM-PS project;
5. a full accounting of funds will also be provided to DICT after the Speedcast PO has been closed and to have written confirmation from DICT to utilize the funding; and
6. a joint statement to be released when the project formulation has been completed.

RR Ramachandran indicated that he will also update UNDP HQ on the outcome of the meeting and provide an update to DICT.

There being no other matters to be discussed, the meeting ended at 3:00pm.

VIII. Action points

Agenda item	Action Point	Responsible Unit	Timeline
Project Overview and Progress to Date	1. Provide DICT with the list of sites of PLDT contract and the deactivated 852 sites	UNDP PMO	Not later than 01 Oct 2021
	2. Provide clear joint communication to affected local government units regarding the status and plans for the 852 sites	DICT and UNDP	Not later than 31 October 2021
New Contexts and Priorities	3. Cross-referencing of PLDT sites with GIDAs vaccination centers identified by DICT	DICT and UNDP PMO	Not later than 01 October 2021
Ways Forward and Agreements	4. Full accounting of project resources to be provided to DICT after Speedcast PO closure	UNDP	Not later than 15 October 2021
	5. Officially organize the TWG to co-design the new project	DICT and UNDP	Not later than 15 October 201
	6. Conduct the UNDP Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT) micro-assessment	UNDP and DICT	To commence not later than 31 October 2021
	7. Co-design new project under NIM-PS CO	DICT, UNDP	First draft not

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		DOH, DILG	later than 31 October 2021
	8. Inform DICT of UNDP HQ's feedback on the agreements during the PB meeting	UNDP Senior Management	As soon as a meeting with UNDP HQ is held
	9. Issue a joint statement on the joint decision on the partnership and the new project	DICT and UNDP	Not later than 31 December 2021

===END===

Prepared by:

29-Sep-2021

Ronel Vincent Vistal
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Free Wi-Fi for All Project, UNDP Philippines

Approved by:

29-Sep-2021

Maria Luisa Isabel Lim-Jolongbayan
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