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EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Second Forum on Local Governance and Development

Digital transformation is a vital tool to cutting red tape and corruption, improving public service, and saving lives during disasters, but many local governments are still in the dark on how to do it the right way. This was the challenge being addressed by the Second Forum on Local Governance and Development hosted by the Center for Research and Communication's Institute for Local Development (CRC-ILD) and finance super app GCash on February 11, 2026 at the University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P).

With the theme, "Reimagining Local Governance: Digital Transformation for Local Development", the Forum aimed to provide a platform to discuss how digital tools and approaches have strengthened local governance, and how these practical solutions and scalable models can be adopted by LGUs across the country. The event was attended by over 160 participants from LGUs, national government agencies, academia, civil society, and the business sector and was participated by 40 LGUs from Metro Manila and across the country.

Atty. John Philip R. Yeung, President of UA&P and CRC, delivered the opening remarks and welcomed the participants. CRC-ILD Project Director Mr. Mir Tillah introduced the Institute for Local Governance and presented an overview of the Forum. The event featured distinguished speakers who talked about digital transformation initiatives in two areas: (1) improving efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness in local governance, and (2) improving disaster risk reduction and response. Speakers from GCash, Khan Academy Philippines, and the Quezon City local government showcased initiatives actively addressing bureaucratic red tape, and improving and expanding social services such as education, while the Office of Civil Defense, the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation, UK-based philanthropy Unconnected.org, and Japan-based AI company Spectee presented their innovative programs supporting resilience building, disaster management and response, and communications especially for the last mile community. The panel discussions were moderated by former Secretary of Information and Communications Technology and CRC-ILD's Digital Transformation Lead Mr. Manny Caintic.

Leading economist Dr. Bernardo M. Villegas, Founder and Research Director at CRC, delivered the closing message, summing up the core challenge and opportunity for LGUs. He called on smaller but contiguous LGUs to collaborate to achieve economies of scale in setting up digital infrastructure, and to continue to engage with the private sector. He also spoke of the vital role that LGUs play in accelerating national economic development to avoid the "middle income trap." According to Villegas, a "concerted, whole-of-society effort led at the grassroots by local governments is essential in rapidly growing the economy, and building a more resilient Philippines."



Highlights of Panel Discussions

Panel Discussion on Improving Efficiency and Transparency in Local Governanc LGUs

Innovations in Digital Payments to Improve Ease of Doing Business

Ms. Cleo Celeste Santos, *Vice President & Head of Public Sector, GCash*

GCash Vice President Cleo Santos discussed how GCash has worked with several LGUs to improve the ease of doing business by enabling seamless digital transactions, reducing red tape opportunities for corruption. She discussed the role of GCash as a "digital bridge" to achieve financial inclusion for Filipinos. Other initiatives like Paleng-QR Ph Plus for market vendors, digital fare payments for tricycles, and direct payments for water districts and local hospitals are also now available. However, policy challenges remain as laws and regulations lag behind the real-time use at scale of innovative digital tools like e-wallets.



Quezon City's E-Governance

Mr. Michael Alimurung, *Quezon City Administrator*

Quezon City Administrator Michael Alimurung shared Quezon City's journey from zero online services in 2019 to 34 online modules offering 241 services today, serving 3.5 million registered accounts and 1.6 million Quezon City ID holders. This provides significant benefits for both City Hall operations and for Quezon City's citizens. Quezon City's approach to digitalization is anchored on making data-driven decisions on efficient allocation of resources that improve delivery of basic services leading to better quality of life for its citizens. Mr. Alimurung emphasized that digital transformation is impossible without the firm commitment and vision of the local leader.



Modernizing the Classroom through Digital Learning

Ms. Denise Fabella, *Executive Director of Khan Academy Philippines*

Khan Academy's Executive Director Denise Fabella shared about their organization's mission to provide free, world-class education through technological innovation. Khan Academy has scaled from 34 schools in 2023 to over 2,500 schools nationwide in partnership with LGUs and the private sector using AI and digital connectivity. Khan Academy partners with LGUs to improve technological infrastructure in public schools, and to conduct teacher training and remediation pilots.



Key Takeaways from First Panel Discussion

- **Leadership is paramount** - Quezon City Administrator Alimurung highlighted political will and leadership. Digital transformation in local governance is only possible if the local leader is firmly committed to implementing it.
- **Start with Identity** - Establishing a reliable smart identity management system for citizens and businesses is the critical first step for any LGU wanting to pursue digital transformation.
- **Economies of Scale** - Dr. Bernie Villegas urged contiguous LGUs to collaborate and work together on digital infrastructure and projects to achieve economies of scale. By collaborating on digital transformation initiatives, smaller municipalities can implement major digital and physical developments that they could not afford individually.



Panel Discussion on Digital Tools for Resilience and Emergency Response

Leveraging Digital Tools for Local Disaster Resilience

Mr. Junie B. Castillo, Spokesperson, Office of Civil Defense

Mr. Castillo discussed how the Office of Civil Defense has moved to digital modeling to anticipate risks and identify where, when, and how intense a hazard will be. They then prioritize action for exposed communities and bridging digital gaps to ensure early warnings for isolated populations. Digital tools are no longer optional "add-ons" as they are now essential infrastructure that supports critical decision-making across all phases of disaster management: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. He also underscored the need to ensure that digital transformation reaches geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs).



Private Sector Coordination for DRRM

Ms. Veronica Gabaldon, Executive Director, Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF)

Ms. Gabaldon highlighted the importance of reliable and resilient communications in DRRM, particularly in managing the critical first 48 hours of a disaster response given its importance in ensuring that resources are deployed efficiently. She shared about the role of PDRF's specialized operations center in Clark, which coordinates the resources of major corporations to support LGU response efforts, ensuring that relief and restoration of services happen faster. Resilient governance includes helping local businesses get back on their feet to maintain the local economy after a calamity.



Connectivity for the Last Mile

Mr. Benjz Sevilla, General Manager for the Philippines, *Unconnected.org*

Focusing on last-mile connectivity gap, Mr. Sevilla discussed the deployment of innovative connectivity technologies to provide high-speed internet in areas where traditional cell towers are down or non-existent. In terms of DRRM, unconnected.org's work focuses on ensuring that evacuation centers and schools remain connected during disasters so that data for relief distribution and emergency communication can flow without interruption.



Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Harnessing Information from Social Media for DRRM

Mr. Satoshi Negoro, Chief Operating Officer, *Spectee*

Mr. Negoro presented how AI can be used to scan and harness information from social media to identify disaster-related incidents as they happen. Spectee's technology validates "crowdsourced" information in real-time—filtering out fake news or old photos—to provide LGUs with a verified visual map of where floods, fires, or landslides are occurring, often before official reports even reach the command center.



Key Takeaways from Panel Discussion

The session concluded with a moderated panel discussion. Key takeaways and lessons from the discussion include:

- **Hyper-Localization** - Technology must be adapted to the specific geography and local conditions of LGUs. There is no "one size fits all" solution in digital transformation. Coastal towns need different digital triggers and digital solutions compared to mountainous regions.
- **Data Sharing** - There is a critical need for interoperable data. National agencies, private companies, and LGUs must use compatible digital platforms so that information is not siloed during a crisis.
- **Inclusivity**: Digital resilience must reach the "last mile." If a community has no cellphone signal, the most advanced AI tools remain useless, making hybrid solutions (combining digital and traditional) necessary.





Participating LGUs

The event was attended by 40 provincial, city, and municipal LGUs from Metro Manila and across the country, representing 16 provinces.

Region	Province	List of Participating LGUs
NCR	Metro Manila	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. City of Manila 2. City of Pasay 3. Makati City 4. Muntinlupa City 5. Parañaque City
I	La Union	6. Provincial Government of La Union
	Pangasinan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Provincial Government of Pangasinan 8. Alaminos City 9. Municipality of Bayambang 10. Municipality of Santa Barbara
II	Nueva Vizcaya	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Municipality of Bambang 12. Municipality of Santa Fe
CAR	Benguet	13. Baguio City
III	Bataan	14. Balanga City, Bataan
	Bulacan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Provincial Government of Bulacan 16. Malolos City 17. Meycauayan City 18. Municipality of Marilao
	Pampanga	19. San Fernando City
IV-A	Batangas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 20. Province of Batangas 21. Lipa City, Batangas 22. Municipality of Cuenca
	Cavite	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 23. Cavite City 24. Dasmarinas City 25. Carmona City

Region	Province	List of Participating LGUs
		26. General Trias City 27. Trece Martires City
	Laguna	28. Calamba City 29. Municipality of Los Baños 30. Municipality of Majayjay 31. City of Binan
		32. Municipality of Patnanungan 33. Municipality of Atimonan
	Rizal	34. Provincial Government of Rizal 35. Municipality of Taytay 36. Municipality of San Mateo
V	Masbate	37. Masbate City
VII	Bohol	38. Tagbilaran City, Bohol
VIII	Northern Samar	39. Provincial Government of Northern Samar
XIII	Surigao del Sur	40. Tandag City