Empowering Rural Philippines: New Agreement Connects Communities

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unconnected.org collaborates with Microsoft to help Bridge the Digital Divide and Empower Rural Communities in the Philippines.

[London, UK] – [02/05/2024] – unconnected.org, focused on global community connectivity, is proud to announce a new strategic collaboration with Microsoft's Airband Initiative, which convenes a global network of internet and energy providers, government agencies, nonprofits, and private sector companies focused on closing the global digital divide. This collaboration aims to catalyse internet access and digital skills training to 50 community anchor institutions, including schools and clinics across the Philippines, with a goal to extend internet connectivity to one million people in the Philippines by December 2025, thereby helping to bridge the digital gap and fostering empowerment. As a demonstration of a hub-and-spoke model, this partnership will bring connectivity to anchor institutions and then expand it to surrounding communities.

The Digital Divide in the Philippines

Despite an overall internet user rate of approximately 73% in the Philippines, only 56.1% of households reported having internet access according to the 2020 Philippine Census of Population and Housing. This disparity underscores the issue of affordability rather than network availability.

The Philippines confronts the significant challenge of providing widespread, affordable, and reliable internet access to millions of people, particularly those residing in rural areas.

Building on a Strong Foundation

unconnected.org has a proven track record of connecting communities in Sub-Saharan Africa and is currently extending connectivity to communities in Malaysia and across Latin America. Microsoft's Airband Initiative is committed to bring internet access to 250 million people in unserved and underserved communities around the world by the end of 2025. Together, they bring a wealth of experience and resources to address this critical initiative in the Philippines.

"The potential impact of this collaboration is truly inspiring," states Mea Thompson, Co-Founder at unconnected.org. "By providing affordable and meaningful internet access to millions of people in the Philippines, Microsoft Airband and unconnected.org are empowering individuals, fostering economic growth, and creating a brighter future for all."

Empowering Communities Through Connectivity

This goes beyond mere connectivity. Focus will be on empowering communities in the rural Philippines. By providing internet access, unconnected.org and Microsoft's Airband initiative aim to unlock a world of opportunities, including:

- **Enhanced Education**
- **Improved Healthcare**
- **Economic Participation**
- **Greater Well-being**

"Universal, affordable internet access is a cornerstone of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and our partnership with unconnected.org is a key stride towards that objective," said Vickie Robinson, General Manager of Microsoft's Airband Initiative. "We believe that internet access is a fundamental right that empowers individuals and communities to thrive in the digital economy. Through our collaboration with unconnected.org, we're working closely with local ISPs, hardware manufacturers, and funders to roll out affordable internet access across the Philippines, with the aim of fostering economic development

and regional growth."

About unconnected.org

unconnected.org is dedicated to connecting communities worldwide by catalysing local entrepreneurs to build our connectivity infrastructure in their communities. They collaborate with local partners to design, deploy, and manage self-sustainable internet connectivity solutions, empowering individuals and communities with the tools they need to thrive in the digital age.

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