

## **The Philippines, Network Readiness, and Open RAN November 2022**

The Philippines has continually striven to be a leading example of technology adopters and innovators in the Indo-Pacific region. Moving to adopt emerging technologies like 4G and 5G as well as promoting e-commerce to boost economies across its vast territory. The Philippines was featured as a rising network readiness nation in the recently launched [Network Readiness Index \(NRI\) 2022](#). But how does this relate to open RAN and the Academy?

The NRI is one of the world's most comprehensive assessments of digital readiness, ranking 131 economies based on their performance across 58 variables. This year, the Philippines rose 12 points globally – landing at 71 – an impressive feat considering the global challenges presented by COVID-19. [USAID's BEACON Activity](#) co-hosted the [2022 NRI Launch](#) which featured a spotlight on the Philippines. In addition to this, the 2022 theme highlighted digital natives (those born in the 'internet era') and how they will shape the e-world in the coming future. With an exceptionally large young population, this is of particular relevance to the Philippines as they move into a new era of connectivity post-COVID 19. While the country has made progress, gaps remain.

Mary Grace from [Better Internet PH](#) raised excellent points during the panel discussion that open RAN hopes to address, including highlighting connectivity gaps in greenfields and marginalized groups (women, youth, etc). Although the Philippines improved their rankings it must be noted that metro-areas with higher user density dominate the 'connected' of Filipino society. Rural and remote areas are often overlooked by telcos in terms of service provision, as was highlighted in last month's e-newsletter edition. Of the four main pillars: Technology, People, Governance, and Impact – the Philippines need to see improvements in the areas of regulation (governance) and inclusion (people). It was noted that during the pandemic people subscribed to broadband internet but now that the pandemic is 'over' many vendors are reporting cancellation of internet packages. With rising mobile tariffs an indication of a "lack of competition" Better Internet PH is concerned communities will be priced out as access to cable networks, cell sites, and even free government WiFi become increasingly inaccessible for a variety of reasons.

As the country continues to recover post-COVID it is imperative they look to continue targeted interventions to mitigate barriers to internet use by marginalized communities. Prioritizing these areas can help ensure inclusive recovery whilst spurring innovation in an open network market. Youth, in particular, play a significant role in shaping digital futures – as they have known no other world but an e-world. Richard Matias from Terra Hertz spoke of the shifting demographic of students; *"Recently, as I started increasing open RAN discussions and topics, a new breed of students are emerging. There is a mix between IT, computer engineering, computer science, and information technology students. They are recognizing the convergence between IT and*

telecommunications.” As the Philippines looks to improve its network readiness it needs to address gaps in connectivity in rural and remote areas, the emergence of new technologies, and the unique position digital natives can play in supporting knowledge transfer to parents and older-generations to reduce the age-based digital divide. [ResearchAndMarkets](#) reported that by 2030 in the United Kingdom approximately 35% of the nation’s mobile network traffic will be carried over open RAN – what this will be globally is yet to be seen. With the market estimated to be worth USD\$32 billion by 2030 Open RAN is an opportunity that cannot be ignored and AORA is poised and ready.

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