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The Case for Open RAN Standards and Certification: An Interview with Maricor Akol and Lennart Olaivar

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What's in it for the consumer? Is the question posed by AORA's newest board member Maricor Akol when discussing standardization and certification for open RAN. With the emergence of new technologies, consumers need to be assured they are receiving quality products and services. Standards support quality assurance processes and certification helps ensure the workforce is sufficiently skilled to follow and maintain standards.

Maricor has over 30 years industry experience, starting her career as a Systems Engineer before moving into data encoding services, programming, and manpower placement. She is the Founding President of the [Philippine National IT Standards \(PhilNITS\) Foundation](#) which implements a certification program for IT professionals in collaboration with the Japanese government. *"The Philippines ICT Standards Foundation has developed certification exams based on Japanese standards. We are able to ensure our engineers are on par with Japanese engineers, allowing them to be paid and be provided the same benefits as Japanese engineers when they go to Japan for work,"* said Maricor in a recent interview.

How could this potentially relate to the open RAN industry?

MNOs in the Philippines are already recognizing this shift and need as they expand deeper into open RAN architecture. Lennart Olaivar from SMART Communications commented to the AORA Team when asked about open RAN certification, *"[o]f course, it will definitely help a lot. One of the main reasons we are supporting AORA is because we (telcos) are the first benefactor of new talent as they graduate. We are here to hire them."* Obtaining certification or continuing professional development credits gives these individuals an edge, whereby an engineer's skills and expertise are validated and officially recognized by a governing body. During his KNOWSS Webinar, Lennart highlighted several areas as employment opportunities for professionals looking to expand their skills and for new graduates joining the industry. DevSecOps in particular is an emerging field needing skilled engineers, *"[this was] previously done by the IT industry but now the telco industry is adapting this into their internal processes. Open RAN is highly dependent on the development of software, its operations and the embedding of security. For engineers new to the field – start here,"* commented Lennart during his presentation.

Developing open RAN standards in the Philippines will require buy-in from both the government and the private sector. Currently the [main standards bodies for open RAN](#) are the O-RAN Alliance and the Telecom Infra Project. Disaggregation is a journey that is just starting, but how standardization and certification fit into that mix continues to be a question rightly justified for serious discussion.