

**Loan,**  
from SI/1

The FishCoRe project aims to enhance fisheries management and production, and boost incomes in selected coastal communities.

The TEACEP project, which was approved by the World Bank last Friday, seeks to enhance learning outcomes in Mindanao by improving access to quality teaching.

Meanwhile, the MIADP seeks to improve agricultural productivity in Mindanao while protecting ancestral domains.

The Finance department said the loan deals were signed using a digital signing platform (DocuSign), which is part of the World Bank's shift to streamline business processes through digital technology. The World Bank will be using e-signatures as the default modality for the signing of its financing agreements starting July 1.

**DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE LOAN**

Meanwhile, the Philippine government is seeking a \$300-million loan from the World Bank to improve its digital infrastructure.

"The project development objective is to improve broadband connectivity, strengthen the resilience of the digital

environment, and enhance the digital infrastructure foundations for government service delivery," the World Bank said in a document uploaded on its website.

The Philippines Digital Infrastructure Project is expected to be approved by the World Bank board on March 28, 2024.

"The Philippines' digital infrastructure — across dimensions of broadband connectivity, data infrastructure, cloud services, and cybersecurity — is uneven and characterized by gaps in various segments of the network and fragmentation in its overall architecture," the multilateral lender said.

Over 58 million Filipinos or 52% of the population were found to be "internet poor," according to the Internet Poverty Index. This is much higher than its regional neighbors such as Malaysia (1%), Indonesia (16%), Vietnam (10%) and Thailand (5%).

Outside of Luzon, the Visayas (63%) and Mindanao (77%) have the highest percentage of individuals without internet access.

"The connectivity component of the project will make investments in the government fiber optic backbone at the national level as well as in middle-mile

and last-mile connectivity, providing internet access to people and households in remote areas in Eastern Mindanao," the World Bank said.

"The project will activate the entire government broadband backbone from the North to the South of the country connecting to two main international landing stations," it added.

The Philippine government has prioritized the implementation of the National Broadband Plan, which has been delayed in the last few years due to lack of funding.

"The government's request for development financing is an expression of the need to accelerate necessary investments in the country's backbone, middle-mile connectivity, and closing remaining last-mile gaps," the World Bank said.

The project also aims to ramp up cybersecurity capacity and infrastructure, which the World Bank noted are at a "low level."

Last year, the Philippines ranked 61<sup>st</sup> in the Global Cybersecurity Index and 89<sup>th</sup> in the E-Government Development Index.

The project aims to strengthen the national and regional computer emergency

response teams and enhance government capacities, and update legal frameworks related to cybersecurity.

However, it also noted that improving cybersecurity will not interfere with the privacy and access to information of citizens.

Also, the project aims to strengthen the government's data infrastructure. This includes making government data centers "cloud-platform hosting ready."

"The project beneficiaries are citizens and businesses in the Philippines, benefiting from higher quality and more affordable broadband access in the entire country and in previously unserved or underserved areas, and improved user experiences and lower cost of doing business through improved public service delivery," the World Bank added.

The Department of Information and Communications Technology will be the lead implementing agency for the project.

As of 2021, the World Bank was the country's third-largest source of official development assistance (ODA), with loans and grants representing 24% of total ODA or \$7.66 billion. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

**Seafarer,**  
from SI/1

Bjorn Hojgaard, chief executive officer of Anglo-Eastern Univan Group, said there is a need to improve the working conditions of seafarers.

"I think a problem we do have today is the 'dark fleet.' I think you know that there are almost 1,000 ships sailing around now with substandard conditions, no insurance and no class and we somehow allow that to happen. I think that's a real menace for the men and women serving on board ships," Mr. Hojgaard said.

Improving the working environment of the seafarers will allow them to thrive and be more productive, he added.

Gabby Bornheim, president of German Shipowners' Association, said the curriculum should be reviewed to make it easier for the younger generation to learn.

"We have to look at our curriculums. Are we teaching the right matters? ... Can we make more visible ways of learning like e-learning? That's the way. We have to adapt to the needs of the younger generation, in my view," said Ms. Bornheim.

Mapua University Chairman and President Reynaldo B. Veja said there should be opportunities for seafarers to continue their education even while they're on-board ships.



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