

Web Presence of One Province in the Philippines

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Abstract— Information and communications technology (ICT) has played a significant role in the various sectors of society, particularly in public administration and governance. This descriptive-evaluative study aimed to evaluate the websites of the local government units (LGUs) in the Province of Sorsogon, Philippines per Department of Interior and Local Government Memorandum Circular (DILG MC) No. 2009-19. It also aimed to identify the challenges encountered by the LGUs in establishing a web presence. A checklist of the standards and interview guide were utilized as instruments. The Planning and Development Coordinators of the LGUs and the IT Focal Persons were involved as key informants. The study revealed that eight LGUs in Sorsogon have websites. These include Sorsogon City, Barcelona, Castilla, Irosin, Magallanes, Pilar, Sta. Magdalena and the Provincial Government Unit of Sorsogon. The websites of these LGUs were compliant to stage one of the United Nations – American Society for Public Administration (UN-ASPAs) five stages of e-government per DILG MC No. 2009-119. The study also revealed that there were several challenges encountered in establishing the web presence of some LGUs. With these, the officials, particularly of those LGUs without websites may exert more efforts to establish web presence in order to provide the public with more information and greater access to government services. The LGUs may strive harder to improve from stage one to higher stages of e-government, especially in times of pandemic when physical movements are restricted in order not to hamper the delivery and access to services.

Keywords— Web Presence, Local Governments, E-Government, Province of Sorsogon.

I. INTRODUCTION

Information and communications technology (ICT) has played a significant role in the various sectors of society, particularly in public administration and governance. Modern technologies such as electronic databases, decision support systems, management information systems, and other IT applications were used to facilitate some of the government's processes and transactions and enhanced the delivery and quality of services. ICT has provided the public and private sectors with greater government access. It further revolutionized the way how public administrators perform, conduct, and provide efficient government services.

The local governments around the world cited ICT for contributing to the accuracy of records, increases in tax collection and other income, and improvements in efficiency, accountability, and transparency (Iglesias, 2010). In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 8792, or the E-Commerce Act of 2000 paved the way for national government agencies (NGAs) and local government units (LGUs) to embrace electronic systems in their daily transaction (Garcia and Pacis, 2017). It directed all agencies of government including LGUs in the Province of Sorsogon to use electronic means in government transactions within two (2) years from the date of effectivity.

Relevant to this, the National Computer Center (NCC) issued in July 2002 the guidelines which mandated all

government agencies including LGUs to create the agency's official website and comply with E-Commerce Law and stage one of UN-ASPAs (United Nations American Society for Public Administration) Stages of E-Government (NCC, 2002). Another guideline was issued by NCC in the year 2003 directing all government agencies including LGUs to comply with the E-Commerce Act and Stage Two and Three of the UN-ASPAs Stages of E-Government (NCC, 2003). Likewise, on August 24, 2009, the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) issued Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 2009-119 for strict compliance with E-Commerce Law. The memorandum circular of DILG reiterated the guidelines issued by NCC on the website features per UN-ASPAs Five Stages of E-Government.

The UN-ASPAs Five Stages of E-Government include the following: (1) emerging web presence, (2) enhanced web presence, (3) interactive web presence, (4) transactional web presence, and (5) seamless or fully integrated web presence. For stage one, websites serve as a public information source and static information on the government is provided. Frequently asked questions may be found and contact information is provided. Stage two or the enhanced web presence has the following website features: (a) provide access to regularly updated specific information, (b) presence of a central government homepage that may act as a portal to other department sites, (c) enable downloading of useful documents or ordering online, and (d) enable search features, e-mail and accessible areas for comments.

Stage three of e-government per UN-ASPA Five Stages of E-Government is called interactive web presence. The features include: (a) the presence of a national government website that frequently acts as a portal, (b) enabling users to search specialized databases, (c) enabling downloading and submitting forms online, and (d) the emergence of secure sites and passwords. Features for stage 4 which is called transactional web presence include the following: (a) enable users to conduct complete and secure transactions online, (b) allow users to customize a portal to directly access services based on specific needs and priorities, and (c) secure sites. The features for stage five or seamless or fully integrated web presence include: (a) providing all services and links through a single portal, (b) no defined demarcation between various agencies and departments, and (c) all transactional services offered by the government will be available online.

As of November 2016, based on the data of the DICT-National Governance Service, 72.84% of 81 provinces in the country have a web presence, 18.52% are offline, and 8.64% are without a web presence. In addition, 57.58% of 1,489 municipalities in the country have a web presence, 2.63% are offline, and 39.80% do not have a web presence.

With reference to the DILG MC No. 2009-119, the web features for stage one compliance were stated as follows: a. Creation of an official agency website, which should contain the following basic information: (1) Philippines national flag graphics image; (2) agency name and logo; (3) mandate and functions; (4) organizational aims and objectives; (5) historical background of the agency; (6) organizational structure and the responsibilities of each unit; (7) list of key officials and their responsibilities; (8) plans/programs/projects; (9) policy pronouncements/official statements/rules and regulations issued; (10) products, services, reports, publications, and statistical information; (11) agency contact details; and (12) a link to Philippine Government portal and other government offices; and b. Registration of domain name under .gov.ph through <http://dns.gov.ph> or through the domain name administrator of their respective mother agency. For identification and subject to gov.ph through <http://dns.gov.ph> or through the domain name administrator of their respective mother agency. For identification and subject to .gov.ph policies, all agency online sites should have the form [http://www.\(descriptive name or initial of the agency\).gov.ph](http://www.(descriptive name or initial of the agency).gov.ph). The website features for stages two and three compliance to UN-ASPA five stages of e-government were also included in DILG MC No. 2009-119.

Sorsogon which is located in the Bicol region is the southernmost province of Luzon in the Philippines. It is a second-class province and has two congressional districts (DILG, 2013). The first congressional district of Sorsogon is composed of five (5) municipalities namely Casiguran, Castilla, Donsol, Magallanes, and Pilar. Sorsogon City, the component city of the province also belongs to the first district. On the other hand, the second district of Sorsogon is composed of nine (9) municipalities namely: Barcelona, Bulan, Bulusan, Gubat, Gubat, Irosin, Juban, Matnog, Prieto Diaz, and Sta. Magdalena. In general, the province is composed of 14 municipalities, 1 city, and 541 barangays (PSA, 2016).

From the researchers' initial evaluation, it was found out that out of the 16 LGUs which comprised of the 14 municipalities, the City and the Provincial government of Sorsogon, only eight of them have established a web presence. Only Sorsogon City, Barcelona, Castilla, Irosin, Magallanes, Pilar, Sta. Magdalena and the Provincial Government Unit of Sorsogon have websites. The website of Sorsogon City can be accessed via sorsogoncity.gov.ph. The websites of Barcelona and Castilla can be accessed via barcelona.sorsogon.gov.ph and castillasorsogon.gov.ph. For Irosin, the website is available at irosin.gov.ph. For Magallanes and Pilar, the websites can be accessed via magallanessorsogon.gov.ph and pilarsorsogon.gov.ph. The websites of Sta. Magdalena and the Provincial Government can be accessed at stamagdalen.gov.ph and Sorsogon.gov.ph.

Taking into consideration the importance of government websites to promote responsive, ethical, accountable, and transparent government service, the researchers were inspired to evaluate the features of the websites of the said LGUs based on DILG MC No. 2009-19. The researchers also determined the challenges encountered by the LGUs in establishing a web presence.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study evaluated the websites of the LGUs in the Province of Sorsogon. Specifically, it aimed to achieve the following objectives: (1) evaluate the websites of the LGUs per DILG MC No. 2009-19, and (2) identify the challenges encountered in establishing a web presence.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The descriptive-evaluative research method was employed in this study. Website evaluation was conducted to identify the features of the websites of the

LGUs based on the criteria set by DILG. Interview with key informants (KIs) was conducted to identify the challenges encountered in establishing the web presence of the LGUs.

Key Informants

A total of 16 KIs were included in the study. They were the Planning and Development Coordinators and the ICT designate or ICT focal persons of LGUs. The 75% of the KIs were the Planning and Development Coordinators and 25% of the KIs were IT focal persons of the LGUs. In terms of sex, 81% are male and 19% are female. In addition, 19% of the KIs have served their institution for one (1) to ten (10) years, 56% of them have rendered 11-20 years of government service, and 25% have also rendered 21-30 years of service in their institution. The researcher chose them as the KIs of the study because they have solid understanding and background of the programs, projects and activities of the LGUs.

Research Instrument

The instruments used in the study were checklist and interview guide. The checklist consists of the criteria on stage one compliance to UN-ASPA five stages of e-government per DILG MC No. 2009-19. The interview guide was used to determine the challenges encountered in establishing their websites. First part of the instrument tackled the KIs profile. Questions regarding their names, designations, and number of years in the service were included. The second part of the interview guide included open-ended questions regarding the challenges met by the LGUs regarding web presence.

Data Collection

Letters requesting permission to conduct the studies in the LGUs were prepared and forwarded to the offices of the Local Chief Executives. Upon their approval, face to face interviews with KIs and website evaluation of LGU websites were conducted.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The statistical tool used in the study was mainly descriptive in nature. Frequency count and percentages

were used in analyzing the profile of the key informants. A scoring system was utilized to interpret the results of the website evaluation. Adjectival descriptions such as “very much compliant, compliant, not compliant” were used to describe compliance to the circular. The term “very much compliant” was used when nine to 12 features per circular were present in the website. “Compliant” was used when five to eight features per circular were present in the websites of the LGUs. Meanwhile, the adjectival description “not compliant” was used when zero to four features only were present in the website.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation of the Websites of LGUs per DILG MC No. 2009-19

As of October 7, 2021, only eight LGUs namely Sorsogon City, Barcelona, Castilla, Irosin, Magallanes, Pilar, Sta. Magdalena and the Provincial Government Unit of Sorsogon have their websites. There were also eight LGUs which do not have websites during the date of evaluation including Bulan, Bulusan, Casiguran, Donsol, Gubat, Juban, Matnog, and Prieto Diaz.

Table 2 shows the compliance of LGUs to UN-ASPA stage one of e-government per DILG MC No. 2009-119. The website of Sorsogon City has the following features: (1) agency name and logo, (2) mandates and functions, (3) historical background of the agency, (4) plans/programs/projects, and (5) policy pronouncements/official statements/rules and regulations issued, (6) products, services, reports, publications, and statistical information, (7) agency contact details, and (8) link to Philippine Government portal and other government offices. With a score of 8, the website of Sorsogon was compliant with the circular set by DILG. The website of Barcelona has the following features: (1) agency name and logo, (2) mandates and functions, (3) historical background of the agency, (4) plans/programs/projects, (5) agency contact details, and (6) link to Philippine Government portal and other government offices. With a score of 6, the website of Barcelona was also compliant with the circular set by DILG on stage one of e-government.

Table 2. Compliance of LGUs to UN-ASPA Stage One of E-Government per DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2009-119

LGUs	Website Features												Score	Description
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L		
Sorsogon City													8	Compliant
Barcelona													6	Compliant
Castilla													8	Compliant

Irosin																			8	Compliant	
Magallanes																				6	Compliant
Pilar																				7	Compliant
Sta. Magdalena																				6	Compliant
Provincial Government of Sorsogon																				5	Compliant

Website Features:

- A - Philippine national flag graphics image
- B - Agency name and logo
- C - Mandates and functions
- D - Organizational aims and objectives
- E - Historical background of the agency
- F - Organizational structure and the responsibilities of each unit
- G - List of key officials and their responsibilities
- H - Plans/programs/projects
- I - Policy pronouncements/official statements/rules and regulations issued
- J - Products, services, reports, publications and statistical information
- K - Agency contact details
- L - Link to Philippine Government portal and other government offices

Legend:

-  Feature included in the LGU Website
-  Feature not included in the LGU Website

The website of Castilla contains the following features: (1) agency name and logo, (2) mandates and functions, (3) historical background of the agency, (4) plans/programs/projects, and (5) policy pronouncements/official statements/rules and regulations issued, (6) products, services, reports, publications, and statistical information, (7) agency contact details, and (8) link to Philippine Government portal and other government offices. With a score of 8, the website of Castilla was compliant with the circular set by DILG.

The table also revealed that the website of Irosin has the following features: (1) agency name and logo, (2) mandates and functions, (3) organizational aims and objectives, (4) historical background of the agency, (5) organizational structure and the responsibilities of each unit, (6) products, services, reports, publications, and statistical information, (7) agency contact details, and (8) Link to Philippine Government portal and other government offices. Upon evaluation, the website of Irosin got a score of 10 described as very much compliant.

The website of Magallanes contains the following features: (1) agency name and logo, (2) mandates and functions, (3) historical background of the agency, (4) policy pronouncements/official statements/rules and regulations issued, (5) agency contact details, and (6) link to Philippine Government portal and other government offices. With a score of 6, the website of Magallanes was compliant with stage one of e-government.

Meanwhile, the website of Pilar also contains the following features and was found to be compliant with the circular of DILG: (1) agency name and logo, (2) mandates and functions, (3) historical background of the agency, (4) plans/programs/projects; (5) policy pronouncements/official statements/rules and regulations issued, (6) agency contact details, and (7) link to Philippine Government portal and other government offices.

For Sta. Magdalena, the following features can be seen on the website: (1) agency name and logo, (2) historical background of the agency, (3) plans/programs/projects, (4) products, services, reports, publications, and statistical information, (5) agency contact details, and (6) link to Philippine Government portal and other government offices.

The website of the Provincial Government has the following features: (1) agency name and logo, (2) historical background of the agency, (3) policy pronouncements/official statements/rules and regulations issued, (4) agency contact details, and (5) link to Philippine Government portal and other government offices. The website obtained a score of 5 interpreted as compliant.

The results showed that although the websites evaluated were compliant with stage one of e-government, some required features are not available. The lacking features in the website of some LGUs include: national flag graphics image, organizational aims and objectives, organizational structure and the responsibilities of each unit, list of key officials and their responsibilities, plans/program/projects, and policy pronouncements.

Siar (2005) lends support to the findings of the study. She revealed that the contents of websites of selected cities in the Philippines were limited to standard information only such as demography, history, and culture, and little political information focused mostly on the composition of the city government.

Likewise, Lagura (2017) disclosed the lack of substantial information and tools on the City Government websites in the Davao Region. Moreover, the study of Dabon ET. al (2014) revealed that most (61%) of the LGU websites in the Province of Cebu were categorized as non-compliant to the UN-ASPAs Five Stages of E-Government. Only 9 (39%) were under Stage 1 and none of the websites reached Stage 2 or Stage 3.

Government communication channels such as websites are often regarded to promote democratic values and public trust in government by helping the government provide the public with information and respond to citizen inquiries (Hong, 2013). LGUs in the province of Sorsogon need to invest more in their websites by providing complete information and complying with the standards set based on the circular.

Challenges Encountered by the LGUs in Establishing Web Presence

Based on the interview conducted, KIs revealed several challenges encountered in establishing the web presence of the LGUs.

These included the following: not updated payment of web hosting services, absence of website manager, lack of staff to handle updating, unavailability of personnel who will provide the design and give technical assistance, no person in charge to maintain the website, no budget allocation for web services, and the LGU not focused on IT developments.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based from the findings of the study, the following are concluded: (1) Only eight LGUs in Sorsogon have websites including Sorsogon City, Barcelona, Castilla, Irosin, Magallanes, Pilar, Sta. Magdalena and the Provincial Government Unit of Sorsogon.

The websites of these LGUs were compliant to stage one of UN-ASPAs five stages of e-government per DILG MC No. 2009-119. (2) The lack of budget for web services and absence of website manager are some of the challenges encountered in establishing web presence.

From the foregoing conclusions, the following are hereby recommended:

1. The LGUs may exert more efforts to establish web presence in order to provide more information and access to government services. They must strive harder to improve from stage one to higher stages of e-government especially in times of pandemic when physical movements are restricted in order not to hamper delivery and access to services.
2. The LGUs should comply with the stages of e-government based on the standards set by the DILG.
3. The DILG should strictly monitor compliance of the LGUs to mentioned memorandum circular.
4. The LGUs must address the challenges encountered by establishing an ICT Office with enough budget and manpower to handle ICT related programs, projects and activities.
5. Coordination with DICT is highly encouraged in order to address technical issues and concerns.

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