

Electric Cooperative Switches on Telepresence to Improve Communication and Efficiency



Executive Summary

Customer Name: Agusan del Sur Electric Cooperative, Inc. (ASELCO)

Industry: Energy

Location: Agusan del Sur, Philippines

Organization size: 94,854 members (as of May 2015)

Challenge

- Difficulty meeting attendance criteria for Annual General Membership Assembly (AGMA)
- Ballooning costs due to transporting over 4,000 attendees to AGMA location
- Less efficiency and productivity as too much time and money spent on coordinating transport

Solution

Cisco Telepresence® SX20 Quick Set:

- Cisco® TelePresence MultiSite technology
- Cisco TelePresence Multipoint Switch
- Cisco Unified Communications Manager

Results

- Easier, more effective member participation and communications
- Higher efficiency, productivity and transparency in daily operations
- Better utilization of funds and resources to serve member needs

ASELCO in the Philippines can better serve its members' electrification needs with Cisco SX20 video conferencing solution.

Business Challenge

For 94,854 low-income families in the Philippine province of Agusan del Sur who are not connected to the grid, living in light instead of complete darkness is all because of Agusan del Sur Electric Cooperative (ASELCO).

Since it began in 1977 with the mission of energy equality by empowering every home with electricity access, ASELCO's number of member-owners has expanded across 13 municipalities and one city in the 8,568 square km province. As a not-for-profit cooperative, ASELCO is run and owned entirely by all paying members who have equal say in the decision-making.

Every year the cooperative holds an Annual General Membership Assembly (AGMA) to discuss, pass and approve projects. At least five percent of members must be present at this meeting—a requirement set by the country's National Electrification Administration—or proposals will be considered invalid.

Gathering 4,742 people in one place to meet the minimum figure was a costly logistical juggernaut, given the area's geographical sprawl and limited transport infrastructure.

“The SX20 system enables direct communication and helps us conduct more productive, efficient and transparent meetings. Projects are approved quickly in one meeting because all required parties are present even though they are in different locations.”

— Leah Fe. F Estillore
Manager, Corporate
Communications and Affairs
at ASELCO

ASELCO's main branch, which hosts the AGMA, typically sees a turnout of 500 members. To fetch the other 4,242 from further afield, it hires over 90 buses and pays each person 300 Philippine pesos for the commute. Thousands of lunch packs for attendees are also purchased.

“Meeting the five percent was difficult enough,” said Leah Fe F. Estillore, Manager, Corporate Communications and Affairs department at ASELCO. “And we were overspending on one event that isn't necessary for all members to attend.”

Solution

The idea of members meeting virtually without traveling long distances soon took shape. ASELCO's team decided a video conferencing solution would reduce travel costs and more importantly boost AGMA attendance. The technology would also benefit the cooperative's other meetings and conferences, Estillore noted.

The team chose Cisco Telepresence® SX20 Quick Set, a flexible solution that can convert any flat panel display into a high-definition (HD) video conferencing system. This lets ASELCO get the same user experience and performance of a more expensive system without the massive investment upfront.

The system was rolled out at four key locations including the head office. Each was selected for its convenient proximity to members and ability to easily fit around 1,200 people or more to join a video conference.

Implementation was completed in May 2015. It was carried out by Cisco partner DC Tech, which also laid the underground fiber optic network connecting all four locations—each one being several kilometers away from the other—that was crucial for the optimal transmission of telepresence.

“DC Tech provided us thorough IT support: conducting test runs and setting up alternative video deployment options such as Cisco WebEx, so as to preempt any chance of delays or service disruptions due to Internet failures,” said Estillore.

Results

Using the SX20 telepresence solution has yielded positive outcomes for ASELCO and the communities it serves.

Increase in member participation at meetings

Because the four strategic locations are more conveniently accessible by members all over the province, the last AGMA attendance rate jumped to 29 percent with over 25,000 participants. That's nearly five times the mandated requirement.

Regular meetings, other than the AGMA, also see higher attendance, thanks to SX20's ease of setting up a multi-party conference and its reliable and crisp video quality. It enhances overall communication among members and staff, so matters are addressed faster and more transparently.

More efficient operations and faster turnaround

With easier communication, daily operations run more smoothly. “SX20 improves direct communication for more productive and efficient work processes,” said Estillore. “Projects are approved quickly because all required parties are present even if they are in different locations.”

“The time saved from less traveling due to telepresence is key to helping us work more efficiently to accelerate rural electrification and ensure our members have reliable power supply even in remote areas.”

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For instance, clearing applications of new members now takes a few hours instead of a few days. Less than a year since deploying SX20, ASELCO’s membership has risen to 105,986 as of March 2016. The increased efficiency in turn sparks wider social change. Once people in remote villages receive electricity, it helps level other socioeconomic hurdles. Students have light to study at night, and micro business owners can use electrical appliances to boost their income.

Better utilization of funds and resources

Now that setting up meetings via video conferencing is fast and hassle-free, ASELCO can interact with other electric cooperatives and government agencies more efficiently without incurring significant travel expenses. The total savings generated, including savings from smaller telephone bills, then go back to serving other needs of its members.

“The time saved from less traveling due to telepresence is key to helping us work more efficiently to accelerate rural electrification and ensure our members have reliable power supply even in remote areas,” Estillore noted.

Next Steps

According to Estillore, the successful deployment of SX20 has prompted ASELCO to extend the solution to reach more locations beyond the current four. It is also eyeing including other Cisco networking solutions to expand the partnership with DC Tech and help accelerate rural electrification in the Philippines.



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