Interview: Stanislas Camart – President, French Chamber of Commerce & Industry in the Philippines



"We have many French companies that are bringing in innovation and transferring their know-how to the country ... French companies are not only participating in the economic development of the country but also the social development."

15.11.2016

Tags: Philippines, French Chamber of Commerce, France, Chamber of Commerce, Investment, Trade

Stanislas Camart, President of the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the Philippines, discusses the chamber's rapidly expanding membership and how they continue to evolve and adapt their services to truly add value to their members. He also discusses the unique aspects of Filipino business culture and exciting opportunities for future growth.

To begin, could you give us a brief overview of the chamber's history and current activities here in the Philippines?

The French Chamber was founded in 1988 and is a non-profit and self-sustaining organization with the goal of making a bridge between the French and Filipino communities. The objective is to facilitate business relationships between the two communities to have a better understanding of the Filipino market for the French actors and vice versa, working to promote the Philippines in France, to attract new investors and new companies. Additionally, we work to promote French companies to settle down here in the Philippines and contribute to the development of the country.

In terms of our operations, we have many events and networking activities, which we organize alone or together with other chambers. The idea is to interact, to get to know each other. We also host business advocacy events, providing more added value to our members, organizing business lunches on specific topics, conferences and economic briefings. We belong to a network of 115

chambers around the world, operating in 85 countries, and through this network we are also able to conduct various trade missions.

When you stepped into the leadership role here at CCI France, what were a few of the key objectives that you had?

In the past 2-3 years we have already significantly transformed the chamber, translating into more membership. Today we have more than 130 members, 40 percent of whom are local Filipino members. As President, I would like to continue to leverage on our DNA, continue to highlight our networking events and provide added-value to our members. I also hope to develop further by increasing the relationship with local players, local chambers, and partner more with Filipino companies. I believe that these partnerships could help us have more insights to provide to our French companies.

To foster this relationship, we will work in developing further local partnerships with the different government agencies, associations, local chambers of commerce, and other institutions

You mentioned that 40 percent of the companies in your membership are local. Could you give a general overview of the sectors that your members are most active in?

Generally speaking, we have a broad membership base, with members active in almost all sectors, especially in banking, where our biggest partner is BDO. We have local players in real estate as well, as they are key in helping one settle down in the country, and many companies active in the food and beverage and infrastructure sectors.

How important of a role does the healthcare sector play within your membership?

In healthcare, you have the two main French companies, Sanofi and Servier, as well as Metro Dental, who are active in the Philippines. Today, healthcare is not one of the major sectors of the economy; however the industry is still well represented by companies that are bringing innovation to the market.

With such a diverse portfolio of members, how do you adapt your services to both large and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs)?

[Featured_in]

There are not conflicts within our membership, as we provide varying services that meet the needs of all ranges of companies. The larger companies are more interested in economic briefings, benchmarks and luncheons, whereas the smaller players are more interested in assistance in how

to set up their business here locally. The French Chamber is having a joint impact on SMEs and large companies, our services benefit both.

How important of a role do your members play looking broadly at the Filipino economy, and do you have any examples of how your members are working to further develop the Filipino economy?

French companies are mostly present in two main sectors: infrastructure and food and beverage. Food and beverage because of the French identity and French know-how. Going beyond this, I believe that we have many French companies that are bringing in innovation and transferring their know-how to the country. I have two excellent examples of how French companies are not only participating in the economic development of the country but also to the social development.

Recently, Ubisoft has begun to settle down in the country, and they partnered with the La Salle University in order to create two academic programs. They will graduate new students each year and create new knowledge in the Philippines, and after graduation these students will then work on development projects here in the Philippines. Another example is the Youth Inclusion Network which is a partnership between the NGO and 10 French companies, with the goal of lifting young, talented people victims from extreme poverty. As you can see, French companies are working to not only help develop the economy, but the population as well.

Given your experience here in the country and regionally, what do you see as being some of the biggest benefits as well as challenges of the Filipino business culture?

The biggest asset of the Philippines is the people. Filipinos speak English perfectly, which is a huge asset in this region. You do not have to deal with the language barrier that you do in many other countries in South East Asia. On top of it, in terms of salary rate, it is very reasonable. Special Economic zones incentivizing foreign investors are another asset to the country, providing the opportunity to accelerate the growth of the country, boosting the development of the economy. There is still a lot of work to be done, the Philippines is a bit late in terms of developing infrastructure and innovation.

In the latest World Economic Forum report, the Philippines dropped 10 spaces on the global competiveness scale. The reason why is that other countries have developed quicker than the Philippines. The main challenge is that the Philippines has a lot of bureaucracy and red tape. Infrastructure is also something that has held them back, as well as taxes. However, shortcomings on infrastructure, technology and innovation represent an opportunity for companies to enter the market further develop and advance in the future.

Looking at other countries in the South East Asia region, how does the Philippines compare in terms of doing business?

[related_story]

The WEF highlighted the Philippines as one of the three most improved economies in Asia and Pacific since 2007, along with China and Cambodia

With 7% GDP growth in Q2 2016, the Philippines continues to accelerate and has become one of the fastest growing economy in the world and in the region

Today, the Philippines is overtaking the leadership role in terms of outsourcing. If you really look at the economic fundamentals of the Philippines, most of the activity is focused on their internal market.

However they have an important trade deficit but the Philippines has been recently accredited to the EU GSP+ which is boosting the Made in the Philippines to access EU market. They are doing well in selected sectors, but there are still many opportunities for growth.

Looking forward, what is your vision for the French Chamber?

As an organization we will continue to grow. Today there are 70 French companies established in the Philippines, and we have more than 130 members, so our membership goes beyond simply French companies. The idea is to continue to grow this number, and continue to facilitate the establishment of new companies in the Philippines. In the last 3 years we increased in size by about 50 percent, and I have challenged our managing director to continue that level of growth in the future. As we grow we also will work to ensure that the services we are providing for our members will be value-added and beneficial to their operations. Continued growth will mean continuing to improve and expand our services.

Do you have a final message from the Philippines to our readers in France and around the world?

I do believe that this country will continue to grow in the coming years. They have to overcome challenges, but there are many opportunities for growth. The future is very bright for the Philippines, and I am confident that the healthcare and life science sector will also benefit from this growth. The French Chamber will be here to support any actor and continue to offer services to all members.

See more interviews