

Real work to help small businesses begins after APEC

Channeling innovation, creating a Philippine brand, and focusing on advantages seen to boost local MSMEs

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MANILA, Philippines – The country needs to seize the momentum created by the [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation \(APEC\) meetings](#) that put micro and small to medium enterprises (MSMEs) front and center by adopting measures that create tangible change, said APEC organizers.

“The work begins when [APEC](#) ends, and it's not just the Philippines but the entire region that's thinking this way,” said Doris Magsaysay-Ho, Chair of the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) at a briefing at the 2015 APEC summit held on Tuesday, November 17.

ABAC's role in the meetings was to present recommendations that promote the advancement of inclusive growth in the Asia-Pacific region to its respective leaders. (READ: [APEC initiatives to kick in by 2016 – ABAC](#))

Innovation roadmap

One such initiative is to create a roadmap to connect [micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises](#) (MSMEs) with innovation, which ABAC has identified as the key for small businesses to remain competitive and thrive in what is fast becoming a globalized marketplace.

This was one of ABAC's realizations following meetings with [innovation stakeholders](#), universities, incubators, entrepreneurs, and various groups held to formulate its findings.

“One of the biggest problems we found in the Philippines is that there are a lot of efforts to instill innovation in MSMEs, but they are all doing so separately,” Magsaysay-Ho said. “No one is connecting the dots.”

“We want to gather the group again and set up a roadmap, a set of recommendations, on how to connect all those separate dots and present them to each of the presidential candidates.”

She noted that other countries have installed a chief innovation officer at the minister level to coordinate efforts, a practice which the Philippines could learn from.

“We cannot stay in our silos any longer. Now that we are faced with the opportunity of expanded markets of [ASEAN](#) and [APEC](#), we need to seize it,” she emphasized.

Building the Philippine brand

Given the global marketplace now, another measure that would help develop a unique Philippine brand is necessary – one that MSME products can use as a springboard.

“We have amazing products. We produce the best mangoes in the world, for example,” Magsaysay-Ho said, “but we aren’t focusing on pushing this quality abroad and putting promotional money around it.”

“In short, we aren’t putting our brand out there and saying we have the best mangoes and as a result, some of our neighbors’ products are more well known globally so we need to focus on that,” she explained.

New Zealand is a great example of successful branding. They export dairy products, lamb, and wine, and they do so with clear and distinct branding behind it that really helps each individual exporter firm.

“When people order the fruit they say Kiwi and when you order the lamb chops they say New Zealand lamb chops,” she said.

Identifying comparative advantages and focusing efforts on them would also help spur MSME development.

“Innovation should be cross-functional, with everyone after the same objective. It’s about time that we come together and decide what we should promote and what we should be known for as a country,” said Go Negosyo Executive Director Ramon Lopez.

“We need to identify what would be the product and service winners that we really focus on,” he added. “And once identified, we can let all the separate initiatives support that clear objective.”

“This should be supported at all levels and be championed especially by the CEO, the president,” Lopez said. – **Rappler.com**

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