

Towards a Living Country Brand

By Junie del Mundo

EON Chairman and CEO Junie del Mundo shares the opportunity for the Philippines to showcase and redefine its global brand presence through MANILA 2012: The Philippine Hosting of the 45th Annual Meeting of the ADB Board of Governors ([originally published last 14 February 2012 at the MAP Insights column of the Management Association of the Philippines, at BusinessWorld](#)).

On the first week of May—when over 4,000 top executives, government ministers and bankers from 67 countries come to Manila for the 45th annual meeting of the Asian Development Bank—the Philippines will have the opportunity to showcase and redefine its country brand by taking it beyond mere promises and rhetoric.

ADB's Annual Meeting, called Manila 2012, unfolds at a most opportune time for the Philippines. For a change, there is much that the country can show off. After years of drifting listlessly, the Philippine economy is finally showing signs of sustained dynamism and vitality, as captured by the optimism and confidence of the people. Our economic gains were achieved against tremendous uncertainty and volatility in the global environment, and better still, under the mantle of good governance. Across the archipelago, Filipinos are beginning to believe, once again, that they can dream. Hope is not as elusive as it used to be, and people are working together to achieve their aspirations for the nation and themselves.

It makes me proud that in preparing for this important event, the Philippine government, through the Department of Finance (DOF), has chosen to work with the Management Association of the Philippines (MAP), which it formally appointed as its lead private sector partner. An organization with 749 member-companies, MAP represents a cross-section of chief executives and other top management practitioners from the largest local and multinational companies operating in the Philippines. No less than SGV founder and chair Washington SyCip, who is respected for his views, is providing advice on how to push the partnership forward.

Coincidentally, MAP is also one of the biggest advocates of the initiative to create a Philippine country brand. Its members, all of who understand the power of marketing and see beyond mere promotions, fully recognize that a country brand is essential to have, and that it can make a major difference for the Philippines in this increasingly competitive and interconnected world.

For me, the DOF-MAP partnership is akin to breaking new ground. Although our government has declared that private-public partnerships will be a key pillar of its economic program, it is not always that we see these two actors come together to focus on a single event, with the understanding that their efforts will be for the good of the country. Thanks in part to Manila 2012, government and the private sector have begun to regard each other as true partners, trusting each other and nurturing ties—knowing that the Philippines stands to gain much if it can show a united front to investors and bankers who will be joining Manila 2012.

Certainly, this is a relationship that should be further cultivated and anchored on the aspirations of the Filipino people.

Let me illustrate the great value of this partnership by way of the Philippine Corporate and Investment Pavilion, a sub-event and one of the highlights of Manila 2012. The government and the private sector are working together to make sure that the pavilion captures the Philippine country brand and communicates its pride in hosting the Annual Meeting. It will be housed at the SMX Convention Center and will feature programs and activities parallel to the event. Key industries driving inclusive growth and development in the Philippines, including tourism, infrastructure, information technology and business process outsourcing, and food and agribusiness, will be cast in the spotlight. Seminars, industry networking activities, an exhibit, and socials will bring people together.

Here, the colors of the Philippines will come alive – from the mouthwatering fruits and delicacies that will adorn the food hall to the majesty of the archipelago's 7,000 islands which will be showcased at the tourism expo. Adding depth to this burst of color is the Pinoy's inherent creativity and innovative spirit which brings vibrance to industries here and all over the world. These traits are reflected in Filipino-propelled industries which offer real solutions to pressing and emerging issues. Our business process outsourcing firms, for example, have provided a lifeline to many companies around the world who need our competence, our customer orientation, and commitment to our tasks. Their promise contributes to the Philippine country brand, which, in turn, influences the branding of these individual organizations and their people.

Yet what makes the Philippine country brand distinct, as those who will visit the Pavilion will realize, is that it comes with a lot of heart. Through the activities, guests will experience the caring and cheerful nature of the Filipinos—whether through their smiles that are quick to come by or their naturally happy dispositions that stem from an innate strength and goodness that is quite hard to find anywhere else in the world.

In sum, the PCI Pavilion captures images and the potential of the most valuable asset of our country—the Filipino people. By showcasing the creativity, resilience, and innovative spirit that defines the Filipino spirit, the government and the private sector successfully brought the Philippine country brand to life – all in one sub-event. Imagine, then, how this partnership can be taken forward to communicate the country brand, not only during the ADB Annual Meeting, but beyond that.

Of course, Manila 2012 itself is a great testament to the strength of the Philippine country brand. That the government offered

to host the Annual Meeting here, and that the private sector pitched to help without hesitation, shows that the country brand's promise is real not only to the country's self-professed marketers, but to all of us. Moving forward, that is what we should aspire to create and nurture – a living country brand that we can understand, cherish, and share with the rest of the world.

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