

SYMOP SYMPOSIA

Bâtir des ponts et améliorer les échanges commerciaux entre l'Afrique du Sud et la France

Building bridges and improving trade between France and South Africa

In early June, SYMOP (the French Association for Manufacturing Technologies) and Business France (the French Trade Commission) hosted two one-day technical conferences in Durban and Johannesburg respectively to showcase the technology that French companies and their South African agents can offer local pulp and paper makers.

The focus of both symposia centred on innovation and new technologies in the pulp and paper industry. From equipment and machinery to stock preparation, from smart monitoring to e-learning, from roll covers to sludge dewatering system, there was literally something for everyone.

Through these events SYMOP rallies a wide array of French businesses along with academic and technological partners around a common ambition: to widen their global reach and to develop sustainable partnerships with local industries.

Backed by the French embassy and its trade wing Business France, it was only natural to have the welcome address at the Johannesburg session delivered by French Ambassador to South Africa, Madame Elisabeth Barbier.

Madame Barbier spoke on the economic relationship between South Africa and France, admitting that while the economic relationship between South Africa and France is satisfactory, it could be better.

“With R33 billion (1,9 billion €) worth of imports from France, South Africa was last year France’s top market among the 49 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.” She adds that the number of French companies established in South Africa has increased steadily over the last few years. “Nowadays, there are approximately 350 French company subsidiaries operating in South Africa.”

On the other side of the trade scales, South Africa exported R16 billion (0,9 billion €) in goods to France during 2015 while less than 30 South African companies operate in France. The Ambassador indicated that she would love to be contradicted. “There is not enough reciprocal knowledge and intimacy between the business circles of our two countries.”

She was unequivocal that France is one of the best technology partners in the world, founded on the best research and development in many fields.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP: Franck Rettmeyer, SYMOP; Iain Kerr, TAPPSA; Madame Elisabeth Barbier, French Ambassador to South Africa.

In terms of the paper industry, the Ambassador believes that the French paper industry enjoys an excellent reputation internationally and particularly in machinery. “So now is the time to talk!” she said, opening the session of nine technical presentations by French experts.

SYMOP represents 250 companies operating in three core sectors, namely machinery for paper, wood, printing and packaging; metal machinery, equipment and components; and automation and control. It is aligned with ATIP (the French Technical Association for Paper), CTP (Technical Centre for Paper), PAGORA (the French Engineering School of Paper) and BPIFRANCE (the French public investment bank).

Representing TAPPSA and PAMSA, Iain Kerr presented the delegates with a South African perspective. While our pulp



Seen at
SYMOP Durban

and paper sector is relatively small in global terms, it has transformed considerably over the past five years with tissue, paperboard and speciality grades showing steady but positive growth.

Kerr added that the SYMOP Symposia were ideal opportunities to get to know the offerings of French pulp and paper industry suppliers and to get to know the French businesses better through direct interaction with their representatives. "It was a very worthwhile and informative exercise and I congratulate SYMOP on a well-organised and successful initiative."

Interesting, in July, President Jacob Zuma concluded his State visit to France and talks with his French counterpart, President Francois Hollande. The engagement sought to boost trade and investment relations along with the signing of various agreements to intensify cooperation between the two countries in the fields of energy, agriculture, higher education and training, as well as arts and culture.

Bilateral relations are rich and cover a wide variety of fields, especially in education and training, environment, health, transport, energy, research and science, arts and culture. This was emphasised when President Zuma met French CEOs and addressed the South Africa-France Business Forum.

On the agricultural front, France and South Africa has signed a protocol regarding the establishment of the French South African Agricultural Institute (FSAGRI) at Fort Hare University in an effort to boost skills in agriculture and agro-processing.

Further to this a new programme of cultural cooperation was endorsed as well as a declaration of intent to strengthen cooperation in the field of higher education, training and skills development and accelerating student mobility between the two countries.

The two sides also signed the renewed Partnership Framework Document on development cooperation for the period 2016-2019, which makes provision for collaboration in the promotion of national priorities. ■

ABOVE LEFT: Steve Gething and Dale Gething from Fixturlaser chat with Christian Freneat and Jonas Johakimu.

ABOVE RIGHT: Zama Cele and Nzuzu Kunenes join Donovan Naidoo and Kevin Govender (Mondi Merebank).

RIGHT: Theo de Koker (DUT) and Gladys Naylor (Mondi Merebank).

BELOW: Bruce Sithole and Jonas Johakimu from CSIR (Forestry and Forest Products Research Centre).



Seen at
SYMOP Johannesburg



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Isabelle Baret from IBC Paper Training; Jay Maharaj of H&M Rollers; Bob Heimann; dti's Tafadzwa Nyanzunda chats to Jane Molony (PAMSA) and TAPPSA Chairman Iain Kerr.