

Challenges of the Work from Home Model Work in Africa

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The world is undergoing a significant change in terms of how work is conducted. *With the rise of the highly infectious coronavirus, the world of work as we know it has to evolve to suit the new environment.* The concept of working from home has come to the forefront as a possible solution to how work will be conducted going forward.

The coronavirus has made a significant portion of the world's working population remote workers overnight as companies seek to remain afloat and continue operations. But whilst that is a small victory for advocates of the work-from-home trend, the transitioning process has not been without its challenges and has also exposed the shortfalls of the system.

Although Africa has recorded a low fatality rate from the coronavirus, the bulk of countries have still taken the prudent measure of banning public gatherings and enforcing quarantine of the greater part of the population.

The basic tenets of the work from home model is that one needs to have the required hardware for work to be completed at the same standard as if in office. Challenges faced by developing countries in this regard include but are not limited to expensive but intermittent internet services, unreliable power supply and the distribution of workable equipment.

According to the World Bank, whilst the number of broadband connections in Africa crossed the 400 million mark in 2018 (nearly twenty times 2010 levels), the regional average broadband penetration—including 3G and 4G connections—is only 25% in 2018. Mobile broadband coverage in Africa is still at 70% of the population. This is representative of the challenges that most workers who are suddenly expected to work from home are experiencing.

The GDP per capita of a sizeable number of sub-Sahara African countries is below the US\$ 1000 mark which can remotely translate to a relative lack of affordability of IT equipment as opposed to workers in developed countries. This can mean that workers may not have access to reliable personal laptops and other gadgets needed to execute work from home. Although some companies are lax enough to allow organizational property to leave the premises in light of the circumstances, some equipment e.g secured desktops are physically immovable which leaves the onus on the employee to find the relevant equipment needed.

So that Africa does not fall behind again in another revolution of how work is conducted, African governments and the private sector must join hands to level the playing field as it is also in their best interests.

African governments should invest heavily in its internet infrastructure, reliable power production and

actively work with the private sector to subsidize equipment needed to successfully execute work from home. By doing this, not only are they freeing up space in the overcrowded cities but also lowering pollution levels and the demand for fuel.

Given that the COVID-19 pandemic happened almost overnight and caught most companies and governments by surprise, the solutions captured above may speak more to the long term as opposed to immediate solutions. The fair thing to do for organizations that insist on still getting work conducted during these trying times is to provide the affected employees an allowance that caters to data costs and any other necessary expenses.

One day, we will all look back at this period and see the turning point that occurred to how work is conducted. This time around, Africa should not be caught flat-footed and embrace the new way of the world of work.

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