

STRATEGIC REPOSITIONING FOR THE POST-COVID-19 JOB MARKET

SPOTLIGHT ON THE AFRICAN YOUTH

IMPACT BORDERLESS DIGITAL

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EDUCATION 4.0

REPOSITIONING FOR STRATEGIC CAREERS IN THE POST-COVID-19 ERA

FOR STUDENTS & YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

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Globalising the job market and garnering a borderless talent pool

COVID-19 has not introduced the centrality of digital transformation in shaping the future of work and workers any more than the **Fourth Industrial Revolution** has introduced the centrality of the Internet in facilitating borderless collaboration in a hyperconnected world. The vast and borderless opportunities of digitalisation and the Internet have been with us long before COVID-19. It is our culture and limited worldview that have not done justice to the prolific privileges.

Modelling scenarios using the growing COVID-19 data at various spatial scales, a mathematical projection shows that the end of June 2020 is likely to record more than **ten million total cases globally**, between **360,000** and **500,000 total cases in Africa**, and about **550,000 total cases** in India. In Kenya, the data-driven mathematical modelling approach projects **5,606 total cases** on June 27, an outcome which would set Kenya's COVID-19 curve on a trajectory lower than a presumed exponential curve of 4.5% in daily growth rate. Henceforth, any development policy dialogue devoid of post-COVID-19 perspectives risks degenerating into a meaningless engagement that treats the masses to a truncated view of the future.

A hyperconnected world hiding inequalities and gaping digital divides

Knowledge- and technology-led influence on the development priorities of the post-COVID-19 era cannot be overemphasised. Years ago, the World Economic Forum foresaw the emergence of a hyperconnected world, a world of innovative value creation through systemic connections between information capital, human capital, and technology infrastructure.

Recent satellite-based mobility reports generated by Google to assess the impact of COVID-19 containment measures have been a fair proxy measure of regional digital divides. In Kenya, for example, only 12 out of the 47 counties returned sufficient data for analysis of the changes in mobility trends in at least three sectors. This outcome is also representative of the uneven distribution in access to online resources across Kenya.

Post-COVID-19 worldview and new cultural perspectives

Besides the obvious economic, social and political concerns, the post-COVID-19 era unearths systemic cultural perspectives that deserve urgent and important attention as technology takes centre stage in modifying the global job market: *attitudes towards remote working, new work ethics, and moral self-discipline in a democratised work environment with little physical supervision*. A key post-COVID-19 challenge facing nations lies in embracing a new worldview to exploit new horizons of opportunities in online connectivity, hitherto obscured from short-sighted cultural and policy perspectives. Strategic action towards enhancing technology infrastructure with equity of access is a critical policy objective.

The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics recently established a rising unemployment rate during the pandemic, with a heavy toll on the youth. This finding is a key policy concern not limited to Kenya but widespread across the continent. Learning has stopped for students from basic to tertiary levels, only sparing a tiny minority from private learning institutions. This reality has dawned at a time when several major institutions have liberalised access to their otherwise proprietary digital contents. If the post-COVID-19 era will exacerbate the deprivation of opportunities for youth in Africa, it won't be because African nations fought and lost the battle, but because they never empowered youth to enter the battlefield of innovative ideas in a competitive and democratised online environment in the first place.

Post-COVID-19 youth agenda for Africa and the centrality of education

It is 32 in Asia, 38 in the USA and Australia, and 43 in Europe: we are talking here about the median age in these regions, a sharp contrast to Africa's median age of barely 20 years.

Globalisation of the job market, therefore, emerges as a key point of interest to the dominantly young African population. How can African youth reposition themselves for strategic engagement and careers in the post-COVID-19 era? The emerging reality is that the post-COVID-19 era is introducing a borderless global competition for talents.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution or Industry 4.0 has been gaining currency in modern discourse as part of the transformative agenda for a new development paradigm empowered by online connectivity, big data, digitalisation, and automation. This irresistible digital transformation wave has inspired derivative discourse on contemporary agenda such as Globalisation 4.0, Education 4.0, Mining 4.0, among others. Education as a sector has received a major beating from COVID-19. In Africa, inadequate technology infrastructure has been a critical bottleneck.

Recognising the need to empower the African youth with a keen focus on the post-COVID-19 future of work, our Impact Borderless Digital ([IBD](#)) youth-empowering series on June 12, 2020 culminated in a virtual forum on the topic **“Education 4.0: Repositioning for Strategic Careers in the Post-COVID-19 Era”**. The guest speaker was **Prof. Washington Ochieng**, Head of the Centre for Transport Studies and the Chair of Positioning and Navigation Systems in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Imperial College London. He is a renowned Kenyan expatriate in the UK.

Speaking to the youth drawn from all over the world, Prof. Ochieng acknowledged the Fourth Industrial Revolution and discussed the lingering gap in leveraging the biological and human dimensions of the revolution. His exposé gave a fitting reinforcement to the key message on the wave of convergence as technology advances. It is worth noting that **Convergence 1.0** had more to do with the seamless integration of physics and engineering. **Convergence 2.0** now deals more with how engineering systems can learn from the masterpiece architecture and efficiency of biological systems. He finally shared with the youth the research funding opportunities available in the UK through various agencies.

Post-COVID-19 competition for talents and job security

Kenyan youth, the majority being friends, students, and alumni of Taita Taveta University, appreciated the need to develop transferable skills to face the future global competition for talents in a borderless environment. The post-COVID-19 era will redefine job security as online democracy takes centre stage. E-citizenship and e-migration will grow into mature and widely accepted digital concepts, no longer a reserve for pioneers such as the Republic of Estonia. Talent management and lifelong skills development through project-based learning, digital fluency, and youth mentorship programmes came out as the strategic points of entry into rewarding career paths for the youth.

Participants from universities in Germany, Russia, Spain, and the UK contributed to the virtual forum by sharing their coping strategies during the pandemic. The robustness of communications infrastructure came out as a key differentiator for their educational institutions. From the ensuing plenary session, the evident challenge for African governments was to enhance the digital infrastructure for educational institutions, as a fast lane to bridging the digital divide and effectively integrating African students, teachers, and researchers into the post-COVID-19 global marketplace of jobs and innovations.

Post-COVID-19 business models and new work engagement equations

New questions arise on what will constitute a viable business model as more workers shift to working remotely. Thought leaders and futurists have raised similar questions, **Bernard Marr** among them. Twitter, Facebook, and Google have shown the way in setting policy directions which will see their employees work from home as a routine.

The direct and indirect expenses related to travel time and travel costs formerly catered for by employees on the one hand, and the office-related overheads formerly borne by employers on the other, will have to change in a new equation that will reward and tax both parties in various ways. The millennial generation and their successors will find this mode of work motivational and supportive of the gig economy. Arriving at a win-win equation of compensation may well set apart progressive organisations from moribund ones.

Post-COVID-19 security landscape

As remote working gains irreversible momentum, so do the critical questions around security in online virtual environments. **Cybersecurity** is the archetype of the security concerns in the post-COVID-19 virtual landscape of work. The number of cyberattacks, for example, has been increasing as COVID-19 has forced an increasing uptake of remote work and virtual meetings. A familiar example has been Zoom Bombing, a highly offensive cyberattack of video calls. I recently experienced it myself as an intruder managed to displace me as host and relegated me to a helpless participant in my own meeting.

As African nations get simultaneously excited and anxious about the future of work and economies in a post-COVID-19 world, they must pay keen attention to empowering the youth through innovative support programmes, robust and agile technology infrastructure that supports quality education, training and collaborative international research, and enhanced cybersecurity to protect the surging volumes of online activities.

By

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