

Chapter 70

From Rural Majority to Urban Majority Africans: Where Will They Work?

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ABSTRACT

Africa is experiencing triple processes of high population growth, rapid urbanization, and digital transformation. The undercurrents of these processes suggest that the continent is turning from rural majority to urban majority, and this situation raises the question of where will this majority work? Arab Spring and the turbulent situation in the Middle East suggest what could be the result of inaction. This chapter attempts to answer this question by using exploratory research method to highlight the potential role of mainly young entrepreneurs to define, through online questionnaire responses, their preferred terrain of workplace creation in local areas, cities, rural areas and in the diverse regions of Africa as well as on the ubiquitous online work environment extending from home to anywhere in the continent. The chapter ends with a review of the observations and suggestions about future research.

INTRODUCTION

Africa is experiencing triple processes of high population growth, rapid urbanization, and digital transformation. In all these processes it is noteworthy that youth are actively involved; the United Nations predicts that by about 2030, Africa's population will be changing from a rural majority to an urban majority (PRB, 2013). The demand for jobs by young people exceeds job supply by far (Dalberg, 2013) and millions of young job seekers are tapping their entrepreneurial skills and turning to tech hubs and similar places to create jobs for themselves and others. They are supported in these efforts by multinational investors as well as African entrepreneurs, but have little or no government support or guidance. Youth-focused employment discourse within the development community is urgently needed not only to appreciate the dangers of inadequate action but also to search for the appropriate solutions. Much has been written about the role of information technologies in triggering the Arab Spring (Stepanova,

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2011; Castells, 2012) but it also should be pointed out that youth employment experiences have lasting spillover effects for social and political stability as well as for the effects of a productive legacy for future generations (Pieters, 2013). Thus, the questions of where these jobs could be created and by who have so far been neglected issues, which this chapter seeks to explore.

To answer these questions, this chapter first reviews the literature to identify the opportunities and challenges posed by the three processes in developing adequate and stable workplaces for the changing workforce. A distinction is made between place-based and non-place-based workplaces but these are not mutually exclusive. Thus the workplaces could be online from anywhere at any time and/or offline in local, urban, regional or continental settings. Second, the exploratory research methodology using desktop searches and an online questionnaire survey is briefly explained. Third, the research results are presented and discussed in response to the question of where Africans will work as they become an urban majority in about 2030. Lastly, in line with the exploratory nature of the research, the chapter summarizes the findings and suggests possible directions for future research.

BACKGROUND

This section surveys the literature on the four main processes that form the focus of this chapter. First, the process of workplace creation is surveyed according to its place-based and non-place-based components. Second, population growth dynamics are discussed in the context of the transformation into a general and a digital workforce; similarly, the emergence of the middle class and its role as a force producing and consuming goods and services is addressed. Third, is a survey of rapid urbanization within the African historical context which aims to strike a rural-urban balance in the hope that history will repeat itself, similar to what the scholars of Timbuktu was able to achieve in the 14th and 15th centuries (Benna, 2013). Finally, a survey of the rapid penetration of information technologies and their high potential for creating digital jobs for inclusive growth is considered.

Processes of Workplaces Creation in Place-Based and Non-Place-Based Environments

The process of creating workplaces in the course of Africa's transformation from a rural majority to an urban majority population is a complex one that requires careful consideration of the key processes that are affecting the speed and direction of change toward a sustainable and inclusive society. The process has many opportunities as well as challenges but with careful selection and effective application of the growing range of development tools, the African public, the private and social sector actors may be able not only to seize the opportunities available but also to turn the challenges into the potential for development.

- **Workplace Development Actors:** The development of effective physical and digital workplaces in Africa will need the vital support of both the individual and the institutional development actors. Each of these has significant roles to play in the workplace development process: from the definition of relevant workplace development goals to the creation of the mechanisms for accomplishing the goals.

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