



## JCGS POLICY BRIEF

# Digital Transformation for Southern Countries in the time of COVID'19 Global Pandemic

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### Introduction

As we continue to experience the new normal of “work from home”, during the global pandemic, we can significantly notice the huge contribution made by technology in our societies during this period, helping us to save our economies without risking exposure to the virus. Hence, this paper highlights and discusses the importance for a country to build e-infrastructure and provide better access to connectivity; the current and future state of technological involvement; as well as some inspiring steps taken by Southern countries to combat COVID'19 global pandemic through providing a variety of e-services

### Importance of building E-infrastructure within Southern countries and allowing better access to connectivity

Building e-governments can bring wealth to nations and following are some ways by which we can gain from building such an important asset. By reducing costs, emphasizing the delivery of high-quality services to all parties and fighting corruption through online portals, governments can share valuable information with the citizens and the latter can share their ideas and thoughts about tackling certain issues which will bring more transparency within societies. Consequently, these



measures enhance the decision-making process and bring better technology involvement in a society, which can set the country in a better position leading to better innovation, R&D and improved sharing of research information.

### **The situation before and after the global pandemic**

- It is noticeable that our usage of e-services has taken a different route. We have become more dependent on e-services to continue with our lives during the pandemic, starting from paying bills online, to receiving educational certificates through e-devices, as well as for shopping and even connecting with doctors for diagnosis and consultations.
- There is a noticeable increase in searches for “study from home”, traffic on websites and application downloads since February 2020, according to Google Trends Data.
- “Whenever these restrictions are over, it’s not going to be the same...it’s like we’ve been put into a time machine, and digitalization has been accelerated. The way we work, the way we learn, the way we buy has totally changed, and therefore we need to be prepared for that,” (Palette, 2020, para.6). Alvarez-Pallete, CEO of Telefónica Company, highlights the importance of digitalization from now on.
- It can be inferred from the positive trend in percentage change in stock price showcased in the graph above, that Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft, Google and Apple (FAMGA) are achieving massive success since the pandemic started. This reflects that the usage for social media platforms and e-portals witnessed a great increase as well as investments made by FAMGA and price of their stocks.

### **Showcasing the current situation for technology involvement in the light of COVID’19 global pandemic in Southern countries:**

- We can’t ignore that almost 50% of the world is still not active in the digital world, so fostering access to e-services by asking for simpler license requirements will help better

access and attraction for the FDI (Foreign direct investments) which will help southern countries to flourish and scale-up their economies. “These regulatory issues may gain increased significance in light of next generation wireless networks” (OECD, 2019, p.7).

- “While over 70% of individuals use email and search for product information online, less than 40% engage in digital content creation and use cloud computing” (OECD, 2019, p.11)
- So, we need to direct our efforts in the next phase to eliminate burdens to e-access, allow effective implementation between policy makers and all sectors to increase awareness about the importance of digitalization, increase the percentage of digital literacy and allow proper access in poor areas within a country for all e-services

### **Inspiring initiatives from Southern countries towards digitalization:**

Now, a brief about many southern countries’ valuable moves taken to fight COVID’19 global pandemic using technology and more involvement for digitalization within their countries.

**Pakistan:** It paved a path towards paperless hospitals like Indus hospital, offering telehealth/telemedicine services to citizens. Pakistan didn’t stop its services at this, rather, its aim was to benefit all citizens. So, both private and public sectors worked on e-health organization to provide the needed information about the pandemic, the needed precautions and the steps to take to fight the infection. Further, it is noteworthy that a Southern country such as Pakistan is offering smart health cards that include the medical history of the patient. The administration is able to take such steps because of the significant cooperation between both private and public sectors with respect to the health authorities and IT companies.

**Indonesia:** It has proven that digitalization is a must. Nearly 530,000 schools have closed due to COVID’19 global pandemic, leaving 68 million students with no education. So effective steps were taken to help these students receive quality education without exposing



their lives to the dangers of the infection. Indonesia aimed to offer EdTech platforms like Harukaedu, Ruangguru and Cakap by Squireline, to cater to online degrees, primary education and teaching languages.

**Africa:** Countries like Kenya, Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda, Sudan, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia were able to take effective measures with the help of telecom companies by speeding up internet services for citizens to be able to work/study from their homes; offering special home data bundles. Also, they promoted an inspiring campaign by Google Loon to educate the audience about precautions and more information about COVID'19 global pandemic and how to deal with it

1. **South Africa and Kenya:** In the light of taking the steps needed to fight the negative side of technology and access to connectivity, these two countries have set regulations to declare misinformation on the pandemic a criminal offence punishable with imprisonment for up to 6 months or a fine or both. This is considered as a positive step to fight corruption and misinformation that can lead to negative consequences on the local and the international levels. Additionally, South Africa is using WhatsApp services chatbot to answer all of its citizens' questions and provide a 24/7 service to disseminate knowledge regarding symptoms and the required steps to take before and after the infection.
2. **Nigeria:** Adeosun's company in Nigeria created an amazing tool to combat COVID'19 through online services. It is a tool available online to assess an individual's coronavirus risk category from their homes. It has been used by more than 380,000 people globally since March 19.



There are yet other countries in Africa that are still far away from better access to e-services because their governments are not supporting the citizens through increased digitalization.

- **Ethiopia** is preventing citizens in the Oromia region from getting access to critical information online.
- **Uganda** is creating a burden on citizens like paying taxes on using social media as 0.05 USD per day which is a real barrier for the poor in Uganda. This is also applicable to many other poor areas in Africa at the moment do not have proper access to online portals preventing them from spreading word and awareness and sharing ideas and thoughts as well

## Conclusion

- As we can see that any achievement cannot be attained using only a single means. Rather we need to collaborate together both in the public and private sectors in areas such as health, education and IT institutions and companies to be able to apply effective measures towards digitalization.
- Promotion of both online and offline campaigns to eliminate digital illiteracy from both rural and urban areas and enhance the development of strong e-infrastructure in poor areas in the southern countries.
- Allowing access to connectivity is no longer a luxury, it's a must for better education and business services, to help reduce cost and allow better sharing of valuable information, promotion of R&D and innovation to take a larger place in our Agenda in the Southern Countries.



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