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TELEWORKING: THE LANDSCAPE, ATTRACTIVENESS AND CONTOURS IN THE LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: This paper investigated the landscape, attractiveness, and contours of teleworking in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted purely qualitative techniques. The sample size was 40 participants purposively selected in 25 work organizations in both private and public sectors. Study instruments were Key Informant Interviews conducted with 20 Human Resource Practitioners and In-Depth Interviews conducted with 20 senior staff members of the selected organizations. Most organizations in Lagos were forced to adopt teleworking during or after the 2020 lockdown and its landscape in Lagos state has become wider and smoother. Study also revealed that teleworking is attractive to employees in terms of avoiding road/traffic challenges, enhances work-family balance and a viable option for individuals living with disabilities, pregnant and nursing mothers. To employers, it enhances business continuity, saves cost, and reduces concerns about disease and illnesses. The study identifies poor technological and infrastructural base, absence of labour policy framework, organizational policy, capacity building, data security issues as contours hindering effective teleworking in Lagos State. The practice of teleworking has been firmly established in Lagos State, Nigeria. Governments and Employers of labour stand to gain immensely from the adoption of teleworking if relevant social and organizational policies are made available, as well as making the operating economic and technological environments more conducive.

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INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, organizations have begun to adapt innovatively to changes in the industrial and economic work environment with factors such as globalization, increased competition, internationalization, expatriation, and technological advancements playing greater roles in such changes (Wojcak, Sajgalikova & Polakova, 2016). There has been a gradual shift to organic orientations which allow for creating flexible structures (Pulley & Sessa, 2001) and, since the beginning of the 21st century, work has become increasingly detached from on-site locations to aid provision of better services to end consumers (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Work in general, has been critically affected and impacted by the introduction and consequent progress of Information and Communications Technology, often abbreviated as ICT. ICT enhances work in several ways and impacts greatly on the performance of workers in remote locations through improvements in telecommunications which involves the continuous transmittance and receiving of information through digital and electronic means. A form of work that is derivative of this advancement is teleworking, also known as telecommuting, remote work, virtual work and so on (Baruch, 2000).

Teleworking has been in existence from way back but is recently becoming a norm in many organizations. Telework is coined from two words: 'tele' and 'work' Tele is a Greek word which means 'far' or 'distant' Work on the other hand means carrying out a task. Putting the two together, telework can simply be defined as carrying out a task from a distant. The term teleworking was coined by Jack Nilles in the 70s. It refers to work done remotely, away from the standard office premises, through the aid of ICT. Olsen (1988, p. 77) broadened the definition of telework as "organisational work performed outside of the normal organisational confines of space and time, augmented by computer and communications technology". In this definition, it should be noted that teleworking cannot flourish without technology

Teleworking can be in three patterns namely: full-time telework which involves workers carrying out all their duties outside physical workspace; part-time teleworking which requires employees to carry out part of their

activities away from office locations on specified number of days in a week or month; and situational teleworking which involves work organizations adopting the practice as a coping strategy in the face of a pandemic, insecurity in the society or other critical situations (Obong, 2021).

In 1993, it was estimated that those involved in teleworking were about 1.27 million in the United Kingdom and up to 5.89 million in the United States of America (Gray, Hodson & Gordon, 1993). Survey from *clutch.com* revealed that 17% of US employees worked from home five days or more per week before the 2020 pandemic, and the number increased to 44% during the pandemic. According to OECD (2021), recent surveys confirm the high increase in the adoption of teleworking in reaction to Covid-19 measures. Specifically, evidence from *Eurofound* (2020) indicates that as much as 40% of workers in European Union (EU) in April 2020 started to telework full time due to the pandemic, compared with just about 15% who had ever involved in teleworking before the 2020 pandemic. This means that substantial majority of workers and firms who transitioned to teleworking from March 2020 were almost new to this new work arrangement (Sostero et. al., 2020).

In Nigeria, statistics were hardly available on teleworking before Covid-19 pandemic. This was the situation in most African countries where there was paucity of statistics on teleworking pre Covid-19 pandemic (Lebopo et.al., 2020). The major reason for the paucity of data was the low adoption of this mode of work, hence the low interests among scholars and researchers. Emphasis was all along on the physical mode of work. However, the Covid-19 brought a radical change in the narratives of teleworking in Nigeria. The first index case of Covid-19 in Nigeria was detected on an Italian Businessman on the 27th of February 2020, who flew from Italy and travelled from Lagos to Ogun State within two days of his arrival in the country. Subsequently another reported case of someone who had contact with the Italian citizen in Ewekoro, Ogun state on 9th March was identified; 44 confirmed cases were reported by March 24, 2020; and by March 29, 2020, the figure had jumped to 111 confirmed cases (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, NCDC, 2020). Lagos state by virtue of being the commercial nerve centre of the country, heavily populated and having land, sea and airport, make it an easy target for the spread of the novel Disease.

With the increasing rate of those who tested positive, there was a state of emergency which resulted in two phases of lockdown in the country. The initial lockdown was effected on the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), Lagos and Ogun States effective 30 March, 2020. The second phase affected all the states of the federations with closure of all borders and internal restrictions of movement within the country. All work organizations were forced to shut down. Therefore, to ensure reduction of losses, enhance productivity and profitability as well as survival, teleworking became the attractive choice. Although teleworking has always been in existence, but it was mostly for freelance workers and private entrepreneurs prior to this period.

Many of the existing studies on teleworking were conducted in western economies and researchers continue to question the applicability and relevance in solving workplace challenges in Nigeria and other African countries. As of January 2020, literature was scanty on teleworking in Nigeria and the level of adoption was low. However, by October 2021, the level of adoption has shot up, thereby attracting scholarly attention (Obong, 2021). Therefore, a few questions readily come to mind: Was it due to a well-planned process of adoption following globalisation and modernisation processes? Was it due to exponential change in the Nigerian technological landscape? Was it due to emergence of any policy at organisational or national level? Etc A lot of study have been carried out in recent times, but as good as they are, they only limited themselves to effects of teleworking on organisational productivity, inter-sectoral comparison across the nation, with little or no attention on the extent of adoption, benefits to both employers and employees and the challenges mitigating against its effectiveness in Nigeria. This research, therefore, set out to fill the lacuna in knowledge in industrial sociology, sociology of work and so on, by exploring the landscape, attractiveness and contours of teleworking using Lagos State, Nigeria as study location. The specific objectives were to:

- a. examine the landscape (reasons, rate, sectors, types, class differences etc) of teleworking in Nigeria
- b. examine the attractiveness of teleworking for both employers and employees.

- c. identify factors that stand as Contours (constraints and challenges) impinging on the teleworking practices in Nigeria

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The study is anchored on two theories namely the world system theory and the theory of business innovations. The world system theory views the world as a social system which is self-contained with a set of boundaries held together by a variety of forces (Offiong, 2001). Wallerstein (1974) identifies two major world forces: the metropolis (developed countries) and the periphery (less developed countries). To him, the countries of the world belong to either of the two categories. The more developed countries (metropolis) are more advanced and more capable of responding to their internal needs, whereas the less developed countries (periphery) have a reflex type of development and are constrained by their incorporation into the global economic system. This constraint results from adaptation to the requirement of the expansion of the metropolis.

The core or metropolis, according to the theorists, are technologically advanced, utilize modern technology for their production, exchange and consumption, pay higher wages, have relatively free markets and have higher standard of living. The periphery on the other hand is characterized by low technology, low wages, weak and fragile states and lower standard of living. The above situation therefore tends to increase economic inequality and sustain the digital divide between the rich and the poor countries of the world. Nigeria and other African countries belong to the periphery and are dependent on the core for their technological needs. This is why teleworking, which relies on technology was not a popular mode of work before the year 2020 global pandemic.

Although the theory provides explanation for the inequality of nations in terms of technological advancement and transfer of technology, it does not explain what specific technologies are used for, hence the need for adoption of the theory of business innovation discussed here under.

In general, an innovation is the use of new technological and business-related knowledge to offer new products or services to customers (Afuah,

2003). To understand the scope and impact of an innovation, it is necessary to organize them systematically. Abernathy and Clark's (1985) innovation model classifies innovations based on the impact on the existing technological and business capabilities of the adopting organization. To them, an innovation can be placed anywhere on a continuum from incremental, transitional, radical, to disruptive depending on the extent to which the innovation impacts the technological knowledge and business model of an organization. An innovation is incremental if it preserves the existing technological knowledge and business model; transitional if it destroys technological knowledge but preserves the business model, radical if it destroys the business model but preserves the technological knowledge and disruptive if both the technological knowledge and business model become obsolete. Technological knowledge in the context of this study refers to the technical capabilities to mobilize and deploy the new ICT in ensuring that organisational works and activities are carried out as usual across the globe. Teleworking is an innovation that is incremental because it preserves the existing technological knowledge and the business model of work organizations hence the ability to ensure continued production and services even in the face of economic lockdown and other challenges in the operating environment.

The two theories, synthesized together, provide an explanation on the dependence of Nigeria on other nations for her technological needs (explaining why teleworking was low before Covid-19 pandemic) and also explain the incremental adoption of technologies to guarantee business survival during and after the year 2020 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted purely qualitative technique using Key Informant Interviews (KII) and In-Depth-Interviews (IDI). This was to enable the researcher probe deep on various aspects of the topic under study. Study location was Lagos state of Nigeria which was chosen by virtue of being the commercial nerve centre and hub of industrial activities in the entire the nation. It is heavily populated with traffic jams almost everywhere and

every time. Study population comprised Human Resource (HR) practitioners and workers of 25 selected work organizations in both private and public sectors. Sample size was 40 individuals who were all purposively selected based on their official responsibilities or involvement in teleworking in their organizations. Instruments of data collection were: Key informant interviews conducted with 20 Human Resource (HR) practitioners, and In-depth-Interviews conducted with 20 senior staff of various organizations in both the private and public sectors. Data collected were analysed using content analysis and ethnographic summaries. Verbatim quotes were provided where necessary to drive home the point under discussion. The researcher observed relevant ethical principles and standards designed to protect study participants and the information they provided.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

a. Brief Socio-demographic information

On the sex of the 40 study participants, 31 were male while 9 were female. Majority of them fell between the age range of 40–50 years and have served between 10 and 15 years in service, while 24 of them had post graduate qualifications including professional qualifications. Among the 40 participants, 28 of them were in the private sector leaving 12 who were in the public sector. Out of the 25 work organizations, only 4 were practising teleworking before Covid-19 pandemic while the remaining only adopted teleworking when the pandemic broke out.

b. The Landscapes of Teleworking in Lagos State

The study confirms earlier views that before Covid-19 pandemic, teleworking was not a popular mode of work in Nigeria. In Lagos State, the commercial nerve center of the nation, only very few companies were involved in this practice and were all in the private sector and in service sub-sector. The prevailing mode of work was physical where every worker commutes to his place of work in the morning and goes back home in the evening whatever the situation might be on the streets. Although the study also revealed that many top executives and others such as sales executives,

logistic officer and others in ICT sub-sector used to report back to the office in virtual mode due to availability of ICT, but this was only so to enable the head office to receive feedback from the fields; and this was not based on any clearly and fully designed/defined pattern of work.

The study revealed further that with the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown of the Nigerian economy, many work organizations in Lagos Nigeria had no choice than to plunge into teleworking as the only way to remain in existence and in business. The originally narrow teleworking landscape in Nigeria gradually became wider with more work organizations in both sectors of the economy joining the system. Many of such organizations, after the economic lockdown, have retained teleworking as part of their mode of operation while some reverted to the physical arrangement. The prevailing types of teleworking adopted by various work organizations in the study locations include multi-site teleworking (relocated back-office functions, tele-homeworking, freelance teleworking, and mobile teleworking with slight variations depending on each Organisation. What therefore is being emphasized is that adoption of teleworking was largely borne out of emergency in Nigeria and, not on any well thought out plan and this has implications for the smooth running of the process and the employment relations (Obong, 2021).

While it has been reported earlier that the landscape has become wider and smoother, the study went to establish the opinion of the participants on variations according to sectors and sub-sectors. All the study participants indicated that the rate of adoption is higher in the formal sector than in the informal sector. This was expressed by a participant as follows:

It is certain that the informal sector is known for disregard for taxes, laws, and government orders in Nigeria. So, locking down their business was not a popular option for them, talk less of asking their staff to telework **(IDI/Female/ Senior Staff/Private Sector)**.

Because of the nature, size, and mode of operations of the actors in the informal sector in Nigeria, they may not be willing to obey such order to lock down completely more so that they operate in nooks and crannies of the society. Also, taking a decision to make their workers embark on tel-

eworking may not be a popular option for them for a number of reasons including costs, the technology involved, and so on.

Further probing reveals that the rate of adoption is lower in the manufacturing sector than in the service sector. This was of course expected. As service providing organizations, they are more at liberty and better positioned to provide their services at no-fixed locations unlike the manufacturing firms who must of necessity operate in a fixed location and will need to convert their raw-materials into finished goods for onward distribution to end-users. A study participant puts it this way:

Do you expect organizations providing tangible goods to lock down their business and go teleworking? They cannot compare their businesses with those providing services for their customers. That is why the level of adoption of teleworking differs. **(IDI/Male/ Senior Staff/Private Sector)**

The rate of adoption of teleworking is also reported to be higher in the private sector than in the public sector as expressed thus:

Teleworking cannot work in the public sector as in the private sector. Private sector generally is concerned about profit making and their bureaucracy is minimal. But in the public sector in Nigeria, nothing. The private sector is more willing and ready to embrace changes, adopt new technologies and that is why they are more efficient and productive **(KII/HR/Male/Public Sector)**.

A lot of factors may be responsible for the above finding including the fact that the private sector firms are profit-making and are more willing to adopt available technologies for their smooth operations, especially if such will aid their business in terms of profitability and survival. Also, they are less constrained with the bottle necks associated with bureaucracy in the public sector. This supports Omolawal (2014) and Obong (2021) who argue that reasons why there is greater efficiency level in the private sector in Nigeria include the facts that private sector firms are more willing to adopt new technologies, they are less constrained in their decision making, and they are after profit making.

The issue of class difference in teleworking is also evident in the present study. While all workers are important in the profitability and survival of organizations, the middle class which consists largely of skilled professionals are more involved in teleworking. This class of people are characterized by high educational attainment, I.T skills, mobility and are multi-skilled, which makes them to be more involved in freelanceship. On the other hand, the lower-class workers are more concentrated in menial, manual and factory jobs requiring less IT skills and high educational attainment. Consequently, they are less involved in teleworking. The above finds support in the views of OECD (2021) where it was argued that across the globe, teleworking was mostly common in the ICT and knowledge intensive sectors, and more largely among the skilled employees.

The study also noted that a new organisational culture, with reducing human face/ social relations has emerged and permeated most work organizations that have adopted teleworking. With the bulk of work done online or from home, workers now have reduced chances to meet at central work locations to interact. In a congested place like Lagos state, most colleagues may not have the opportunity to see each other for some time to come and so the process of social relations has taken another dimension, in the sense that it largely takes place through the social media. Therefore, that culture of work defined on social relations is losing its strength of social bonding. This disappearing informal relation is a major component and culture of work organizations and constitutes a major factor in the performance and behaviour of workers in the workplace (Adisa, 2008). Some of the study participants expressed their views as follows:

The assessment of the remote work in Nigeria during and after the lockdown is like gate-crashing into a terrain that is alien, unprepared for and not supported by work policy and cultures that are prevalent in most workplaces in Nigeria (**IDI/Male/Snr Staff/Private Sector**).

It was established from the study that differences exist in the landscape of teleworking adoption between the few organizations that had teleworking practice before Covid-19 on one hand, and those that adopted it dur-

ing/after Covid 19 on the other hand. All the four organizations practising teleworking before Covid-19 adopted this new mode of work for three major reasons namely: the size and nature of their business (service oriented); attempt to save costs associated with office space, rents, various levies and taxes that could eat deep into their profits; and need to save their workers from daily commuting to work in a city notorious for traffic congestion and other road challenges. A key informant puts it this way:

From the beginning, we chose teleworking for about 90% of our staff for three or four days in a week for our staff, because we provide services and not physical products. So why spending so much money on office space and maintenance in Lagos? Why putting our staff on daily road risks with the problems in Lagos? **(KII/Male/HR/Private Sector)**.

To them, in designing the patterns of work from the beginning, they have adopted various policies relating to provision of telecommunication gadgets and incentives for their staff, proper training on assumption of work, feedback mechanisms, documentation of working conditions and terms in the appointment letters and so on. Therefore, to them, teleworking was smooth from the beginning. On the other hand, this was not the case for most organizations that plunged into teleworking during the pandemic, as no policy was put in place, neither was any reference made to the subsisting terms and conditions of employment, including the fact that no gadgets were made available, and no training was provided. Some of these findings confirm the findings of OECD (2021) in their studies on EU Member countries. All these factors therefore have implications for the results and effectiveness of teleworking in Lagos State.

Telework is highly dynamic and its types, patterns and general applications differ. A lot of factors contribute to the style of teleworking that would be adopted by organizations, governments, and educational institutions; the most important factor is the technology available to aid it. Also salient to the fruition of teleworking is the nature of the work; some works, for instance, computer programming readily supports the integration of teleworking in its process, while workers in tourism, hospitality, and leisure sectors may not find it easy to telework, as their jobs greatly involve

physical interactions with stakeholders, especially the customers of such services (Gould & Shierholz, 2020).

Since the methods of telework differ and are contingent on certain influences, it can be said that there is no universal approach that can be deemed ultimate for all others to emulate. Lamond, Standen, & Daniels (1998) cited in Obong (2021) classified telework according to its processes, stressing that telework can be further understood and classified from the dimensions of its processes rather than its generic categorization of the nature of work, and location of teleworker.

As indicated earlier on, the landscape of teleworking in Lagos State, and Nigeria in general is getting wider and smoother. This study reveals that the smoothness and width are not just about increased level of adoption alone, but also about the changes being engendered in the social and economic lives of workers and more interesting, the increasing scholarly attention it is receiving in the academic circle especially in the areas of organisational studies and sociology of work. This was captured in the words of a study participant thus:

Teleworking? It has opened the door for discussion and empirical studies among scholars and researchers in Nigeria, particularly in the areas of industrial sociology, human resource management, industrial relations, organisational studies and so on. New literature is emerging, and interests are still increasing. **(KII/Male/HR/Private Sector)**.

From the above, it could be seen that the research frontier on the subject matter is expanding to accommodate findings in various aspects of teleworking, and this is a good development capable of enhancing the socio-economic development of the nation.

c. Attractiveness of Teleworking in Lagos State

The management of organizations play a key role in adopting teleworking and other policies. Teleworking has proved over time to get work done in an efficient manner and is also cost effective. Once management invests in it, and ensures its smooth implementation, it brings about numerous benefits to the organisation as well as the employees themselves (Nicholas,

2016; Onyenkwu, 2020). Findings from this study reveal some of the benefits to both sides as follows:

I. EMPLOYERS

The prevalence of teleworking in Nigeria today is enhanced by the national economic lockdown supported with mandatory curfews and social and physical distancing measures set up by the government. Following the above, teleworking allowed for business continuity in Lagos State during the period of the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic. This was well captured in the views of a key informant:

Teleworking was a major escape route for our organization and many others during the lockdown in 2020. Very many businesses would have collapsed if not for the technology to telework. It promotes business continuity (**KII/Female/HR/Public Sector**).

Apart from enhancing business continuity, it is also a good strategy to survive during bad weather, social conflicts, and unrests among other common features in Lagos state. During these periods, employers can effectively continue doing their work without having to shut down. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations that allowed their workers work remotely from home benefitted greatly from this, as production continued, thus promoting profitability and low fatality for such organizations. It can be said that teleworking has mitigated impending economic crisis that started during initial lockdowns and curfews and the finding buttresses other scholars in their studies in other societies (Alon et al., 2020; Alstadsæter et al., 2020; Bick, Blandin & Mertens, 2020).

Another attractiveness of teleworking for employers in the study location is that it enables organizations to save on real estate such as costs for renting office spaces, thereby opening up space on the budget for more innovative expenses; The savings also include operational costs such as the cost of electricity, municipal levies, office supplies, papers, pins and staplers which are drastically reduced. Also, in a country like Nigeria,

where the power situation is far from stable, where the company would require diesel/petrol to run its daily operations which costs a lot, teleworking is seen as a favourable alternative to standard working conditions. This was buttressed by study participants in their own words thus:

Lagos? High rents, taxes, maintenance of offices and relevant infrastructure? Teleworking is the way out for many work organizations. With our system, my company is working seamlessly and is making our profits. **(IDI/Female/Snr Staff/Private Sector).**

Thirdly, the study also revealed that teleworking is attractive to employers in the sense that it saves costs on medical expenses and nuisances associated with medical issues. To the participants, since employees' physical presence at work is reduced or removed, attendance at the staff clinic has also reduced thereby making employers to spend less in stocking the clinics with drugs and other supplies. Although staff still attend the medical retainers at different locations in Lagos State, but the costs are largely borne by the national health insurance scheme. Furthermore, it was established that cases of sick leaves and absence from duty for medical reasons have reduced, meaning that HR practitioners are saved some stress in the areas of deciphering genuine and fake absenteeism. Related to the above is the reduction in the incidents of pregnant women and nursing mothers who are by law and at times, for compassion reasons, are allowed time off for both pre- and post-natal care. This is a difficult issue for most employers and that is why some may go to the extent of discriminating against women in terms of employment because they see periods of pregnancy and post-natal care as times women's productivity and attendance at work decline. The following express the direct quote of some of the participants:

You can't believe it that costs of drugs and medical supplies have gone down in our clinic. It is a plus for organizations since their staff don't need to be physically present all the time, so attendance at the clinic has dropped, so spend less now to stock the clinic. For example, do you expect a staff to come from his house at Agege just to attend our clinic at Marina? **(KII/Male/HR/Private Sector).**

From another key informant:

We are at times worried by the rate of sick leave our staff take. Some of course are genuine, but workers also play pranks, but with teleworking, the rate has dropped, and this is a relief to us, and am sure to many organizations. **(KII/Female/HR/Private sector)**.

These are some of the nuisances associated with medical issues as revealed in the course of this study. Also worthy of note is the view of participants that teleworking also reduces the chances of the spread of contagious diseases that may at times break out in work organizations.

Other attractions for the employers in the study location are that teleworking reduces employee turnover and increases their retention, it leads to attraction of highly skilled pool of employees, makes their staff to be computer savvy, and promotes organisational and management flexibility. From the above, teleworking is seen as being beneficial to work organizations in Lagos State, provided all supports and interventions are put in place.

II. EMPLOYEES

A major appeal of teleworking to workers in Lagos State of Nigeria is that it decreases commuting time and the challenges associated with public transportation in a place like Lagos State; As opposed to conventional work arrangements, teleworking enables employees to work from anywhere/home, and avoid waking up early to beat traffic and return late because of traffic. Lagos metropolis is noted for a very heavy traffic congestion. On daily basis, thousands of workers must leave their houses as early as 5 am in order to arrive at office promptly and return home as late as 10 or 11pm. During the regular traffic congestions, commuters are further exposed to risks of being attacked by miscreants, touts, thieves, and even armed robbers while in hold-ups. Teleworking also becomes a well-accepted option in the face of crises such as fuel shortage. Private car owners become serious victims because of their inability to get fuels to run their cars, while such period is an opportunity for commercial

drivers to inflate their transportation charges which commuters have no choice than to pay. The situation becomes worse during raining seasons as many roads are flooded with workers arriving home as late as midnight. With teleworking, all these hazards are reduced or completely removed depending on the pattern being adopted. The above was captured further by participants:

Working life in Lagos is hazardous and stressful. Spending about 16 hours commuting and working is not easy. That is why people are dropping dead and families are collapsing. Parents hardly have time for their children and spouses (**IDI/Male/Snr Staff/Public Sector**).

Another participant speaks thus:

Working remotely is a way of avoiding these problems. Come and see the lives of workers in Lagos state, even when there is no crisis in town. What happens during the incessant fuel shortage, civil unrests, rain and floods is terrible for most workers. The plight is unimaginable for some families (**KII/Male/HR/Private Sector**).

Another major appeal of teleworking to the study participants is the opportunity provided through teleworking to be more involved in family and domestic responsibilities thereby promoting work-life balance. To numerous workers in the study location, many parents spend about 15 to 18 hours of their day at work and on the road, thereby leaving no time for the family. Many leave their homes while their children are still sleeping and return after their children have slept, thus leaving the care of their children to nannies and caregivers. Some contract out cooking bulk quantities of soups, and other food items to caterers because of lack of time. A participant explains it thus:

To cope with work and family is near impossible in Lagos state especially when you work with the organized private sector in the island, and you live in the mainland. I have a nanny who does everything for me. It is not convenient for my husband, but we have no choice except if I resign from

my job. It is well with working women in Lagos (**IDI/Female/Snr Staff/Private Sector**).

Conventional workers generally find it difficult in Lagos Nigeria striking a balance between their work and their family life, with the family life often taking a second place due to obligations from work. All these scenarios have serious implications for the socialization process of children, the stability of the family and the society. Teleworking bridges this gap quite efficiently. The flexibility it affords enables workers to effectively plan their schedules and devote enough time to work, life and family.

The study also revealed that physically challenged, pregnant mothers, and new mothers also benefit from teleworking greatly, as they do not have to leave the comfort of their homes to perform work tasks, and they also feel included in the organisation which boosts their commitment to the organisation. The quote below is from a participant:

Special people like the disabled, the nursing mothers, pregnant women and so on suffer to keep their jobs in Lagos. There is nothing specially made available for these categories of people, so they have to compete with the able bodied, to get public transport. This shows government's failure. Teleworking therefore is a wonderful opportunity for these people to work because they are capable and qualified (**IDI/HR/Female/Private Sector**).

The infrastructural facilities are hardly enough for the able-bodied individuals in Lagos State especially public transport, one could then imagine the plights of individuals such as those living with disabilities, the pregnant mothers and new mothers who may have to compete for the inadequate facilities in order to keep their jobs. Teleworking provides them with the opportunity to carry out their responsibilities and keep their jobs with greater ease. The finding is in tandem with Keinen (2018) where he found that the issue of lack of infrastructure is a major challenge facing people living with disabilities in Addis Ababa University.

Finally, the study also revealed other attractions for the workers which include flexibility, autonomy and freedom from strict supervision and

monitoring, employee satisfaction, cost cutting from transportation and expensive lunch and so on. Necessity, which is the mother of invention forced so many work organizations to rush into teleworking, tapping in on the existing technologies with the benefits associated with them as explained by the theory of business innovation. But the question is whether organizations have the wherewithal to migrate to full teleworking option in a country like Nigeria where the level of development is low as explained by the world system theory, and further bedeviled with inadequate policies, lack of infrastructure and other social supports in the employment relations.

d. Contours of Teleworking in Lagos State

Despite the numerous benefits of teleworking to work organizations and their staff, it is not without its contours. (Gajendran et.al. 2007; ILO, 2016). Contours in the context of this study refers to challenges or limitations inhibiting effective adoption of teleworking in the study location. The study identified the following challenges:

I. INFRASTRUCTURE BASE AND SUPPORT

A major contour or challenge affecting teleworking in Lagos is poor infrastructure base and support. Nigeria is still bedeviled with lack of basic infrastructure needed to power various aspects of the economy. Poor power supply and unreliable internet access (major ingredients for successful teleworking) are major challenges within the work environment. Teleworking requires high speed internet broadband to be effectively carried out. In some locations, there could be power outage for days and weeks, a situation many are able to adjust to by using personal generators, and other alternatives. The problems of petrol or diesel to power such generators or maintain the alternatives also arise and who bears the cost? The internet connectivity is also poor and erratic, and where it is stable, the tariffs are high. All these are issues of concern in Lagos state and Nigeria in general. Study participants explain more directly:

Regular power supply? The epileptic power supply continues to hamper our development in this country. It is one of our major problems and reason why we cannot catch up with others (**IDI/Male/Snr Staff/Private Sector**).

Another participant says:

Nigeria is still far away from celebrations when it comes to effective utilization of ICT for organisational activities. Where is the smooth internet for connectivity? We are not ripe for effective teleworking and not there yet. Still a long way to go (**IDI/Male/Public Sector**).

In Nigeria, the necessary infrastructure needed for teleworking and other digital operations are not readily available, because the country depends on other more developed societies for her technology needs. The level of adoption of teleworking was low in Nigeria and most African countries, pre Covid-19 era, as most of the work organizations lack or could not afford the needed technologies to utilize due to their dependence on the more developed societies. This reveals the dichotomy that exists between nations categorised under the world system theory, in terms of their levels of development. To key into the digital world fully, teleworkers and Nigerian organizations in general, might have to spend their personal money on acquisition of IT infrastructure. Technology dependence therefore has implications for effective service delivery which teleworking is expected to engender and consequently, the development of the country as a whole as indicated by Otonti (2006).

II. ORGANISATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

The study also revealed that almost all organizations that rushed into adoption of teleworking in Lagos State following the national economic lockdowns had no clear organisational policy for their teleworking process. During the commencement period, most organizations merely ordered workers to work from home giving them instructions on what to do and how to go about it. Workers welcomed the idea, because it, at least,

provided a means of keeping them busy from the prevailing idleness, and more largely an indication that their job was still available. The focus to them was not on questioning the rationale or policy guidelines, but on compliance and retention of their jobs. The Unions who could have waded in, also kept quiet firstly for their members' job security.

For example, a key informant raised the issue of transport allowance which workers continue to earn, despite not being physically present every day of the week. Should the allowance be reduced or removed from the employment contract since workers are no longer required to commute to their places of work on daily basis? This has to do with terms and conditions of work which are subsumed under collective agreements and industrial relations. No worker will be ready for any employer to unilaterally remove an allowance he has been enjoying over the years. This may, therefore, require the signing of new collective agreements and incorporation of such in designing new HR policies. The following provide more details:

Yes, we have adopted teleworking in all areas of our activities. Good, but as I talk with you, there is no documented policy for it. We rely on the opinions and recommendations of some of our IT experts. We also make changes as we deem fit along the way (**IDI/Male/Snr staff/Private sector**).

Another participant:

Oh, no. We have nothing written down for now. We adopted partial teleworking during the lock down. Thank God almost all our staff are computer savvy because we emphasized possession of IT skill during recruitment. They were able to adjust quickly (**IDI/Female/Snr staff/Private Sector**).

Furthermore, with the gradual easing of Covid-19 restrictions, most work organizations, especially the public and civil service, ordered their employees on level 12 below to work from home while only officers on levels 13 and above were to resume physical work. The question is: what exactly were the officers below level 12 expected to do at home? What tools

were they provided with? With the poor level of digitalization and computerization in Nigeria, public and civil services largely work on files passed from one table to another. What were such workers expected to do from home? This was therefore nothing, but mere extension of holidays for the bulk of Nigerian public and civil servants because the order to sit at home was meaningless as argued by Obong (2021).

III. LABOUR LEGISLATIONS

The study also identified lack of relevant labour legislations as a contour capable of inhibiting effective teleworking system especially in the study location. In Nigeria, the workplace is governed by the Trade Union Act (1973), Labour Act (1974), Factory Act (1987), Workmen Compensation Act (1987) and their amendments. These and other legislations provide the basis and patterns of relationships among the workplace actors, and also define their rights and responsibilities. Such laws are built on employment relations involving physical location of offices with all the attendant manifestations. Findings from this study suggest that many of the laws are not relevant to teleworking as the method of work adopted by most work organizations in the current dispensation. For example, if an employee is working remotely and is involved in an accident at home, can such an accident be classified as a domestic accident or industrial accident? Would there be claim for compensation? Obviously, the Workmen Compensation Act (1987) and subsequent amendments have no provisions for these and other possibilities. Participants put in their own words as follows:

New method of work but no new legislations to govern the new method. Labour Law 1974, Workmen compensation act and amendments? None of these covers teleworking. They are all about physical location of works. There may be need for some new laws to take care of this new model of work (**IDI/Male/Public Sector**).

In line with the above, Vargas Llave & Weber (2020) also identified the issue of labour legislations as a major issue that needs to be re-addressed in order to have a legal backing for the employment relations in various soci-

eties. Legislations provide a pertinent bedrock for effective labour and work systems, and absence of such legislations or weak legislations have implications for work relations and industrial relations in general. This may also lead to possible agitations on new employee benefits and allowances such as internet data allowance, electricity allowance and others to enable workers work effectively from home. The employers also have the choice to demand for withdrawal or reduction of transport allowance since workers are no longer required to be physically present at work. The industrial relations climate may therefore experience some disturbances in the near future.

IV. CAPACITY BUILDING

The study also revealed that most of the organizations that jumped into teleworking during the 2020 pandemic had no training programmes designed for their workers. or even provided any incentive for self-learning for their workers. As argued by OECD (2021), the level of digital skills and opportunities for training provided for workers to upgrade their skills are fundamental and vital to the success of teleworking. Most public and civil service workers only received public announcement from the news media to work from home., while in the private sector workers were contacted by their bosses to work from home. There were no concerted efforts to provide any training for the new system of work. Workers put it clearly as follows:

It was not possible for us to embark on any prior training before we adopted partial teleworking in June 2020. We only gave instructions to our staff and thank God, most of them adjusted and had to learn on their own. **(KII/Male/HR/Public Sector).**

Another participant supports thus:

Since we started in August 2020, we have not designed any specific training programme for our employees. We only arranged for our IT Support manager to available to attend to complaints from our staff working from outside the office **(IDI/Female/Snr staff/Private Sector).**

The above buttresses the findings of OECD (2021) who argues that Covid-19 pandemic has, all of a sudden, thrust millions of workers into telework, a situation where workers had to adjust to new digital and collaboration equipment, and to new ways of communicating with supervisors, co-workers, and even clients. Unfortunately, such workers had to make this transition quickly, often with little or no training, and in some cases, with no adequate digital skills and a suitable working space at the home level; while within this same context, workers with previous experience with remote working find it easier to adjust to the new order of work.

V. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND APPRAISAL ISSUES

Opinions of participants are divided over whether teleworking leads to improvement in the performance of workers. Some argue that it does, basing their arguments on the fact that since workers deliver results as at when due, then they are doing very well and so questions about poor performance do not arise. The other group however, counters that the fact that workers deliver on time does not necessarily mean they are doing well, or they actually carry out the job. Because it is virtual work, there are no performance measurement metrics needed to identify the exact performance of workers, and this may make effective performance appraisal and its consequential organisational favour very difficult. Teleworking requires a change from evaluating employee performance in terms of their inputs, i.e., time worked to their outputs and in principle can create opportunities for workers to be lazy. Put more clearly, Obong (2021) argues that with teleworking, organizations lose control over their workers and hinder managerial oversight thereby promoting shirking. This unsupervised autonomy may not augur well for organizations. Key informants put their views more succinctly thus:

We could not carry out the annual performance appraisal end of last year because of Covid and the translation to partial teleworking. But we just contracted a consultant to help us design a performance appraisal model for our teleworking staff. **(IDI/Male/Snr staff/Private Sector).**

The above was buttressed further thus:

Performance management has been one of the issues we are battling with among our teleworkers. Although they most times deliver on the assignments given them, but how, we don't know. So we are not being able to manage their performance effectively. Are we even sure they don't have someone beside them helping them to do their works? (**KII/Female/HR/Private Sector**).

VI. CONCERNS ABOUT PRIVACY AND DATA SECURITY

Another contour in the teleworking landscape of the study location is the issue of data and privacy concerns as well as lack of effective IT devices and adequate support: Since most of the work done is over the internet, teleworkers are susceptible to online hackers and several data and privacy breaches, which is further exacerbated by ineffective IT tools and sufficient support. There is also the issue of members of the family having free access to official information especially where family members freely share available computers at home, and this may not be good enough for official information. The above findings support Greer & Payne (2014) and ILO (2020) on some of the challenges associated with teleworking in various economies and societies in the contemporary times. Onyenkwu (2020) and Obong (2021) emphasize the need for effective IT unit and infrastructure to guarantee effective teleworking system and confidentiality of official data.

The above findings also support some of the positions of OECD (2021) about the challenges associated with adoption of teleworking among EU member countries. Their study, as well as the present study, emphasize the need to provide adequate equipment for the workforce in terms of software and digital devices to work virtually, the need to ascertain connections to the business network and access business critical applications through high quality broadband and wireless network even in workers' home, the need to put in place guidelines for teleworking either at the national level or organisational level, adjustment of human resource management practices and policies to adjust supervision and communica-

tion to remote working, and to adjust work processes and improve networking and collaboration tools. Their study concluded that many organizations especially in the less-developed countries certainly find it difficult to readily meet these needs and keep their organizations operating remotely in an efficient way. In general, Otonti (2006) and Obong (2021) have also argued that for Nigeria to catch up in terms of development, governments must be ready and willing to invest in infrastructure coupled with good leadership.

However, these challenges are not being experienced by work organizations that adopted teleworking before the 2020 pandemic. To them, teleworking was a well-thought-out programme fully supported by their organisational policy and with adequate tools and incentives provided for their workers. A key informant explains thus:

As for us, we use to train our workers for virtual work when we employ them, and even in the course of their work if any new technology comes up. That is part of our policy. It is even written in their appointment letters. That is why they are doing well for us. **(KII/Male/HR/Private Sector)**.

These organizations are therefore working seamlessly with the digital platform of teleworking unlike those that were not prepared for the new world of work.

This study contributes significantly to the field of industrial sociology, sociology of work, human resource management, organisational studies and so on, by identifying issues relating to the transformation of work from onsite to online, the level of adoption of the new mode of work, the benefits derivable by both organizations and work employees as well as factors inhibiting the adoption of this prevailing mode of work. This will serve as a basis for organisational managers and national policy makers to move with the global trends by infusing necessary policy framework that can improve the conduct of work and enhance performance in the workplace and the society.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings from this study, it is obvious that there is dearth of policy frameworks for teleworking both at the organizational level and societal level. As at the time teleworking became the only survival strategy for work organizations during and post covid-19 era, many work organizations in Nigeria had no defined policy on this mode of work, neither did their terms and conditions of work cover this system of work. What they did was to plunge their workers into it with minimal or even no training. At the level of the larger society, the government's labour laws had no provision for this new mode of work, and also as an employer of labour, governments too plunged their workers into it without adequate preparation. No effort seems to have been made, up till now for relevant laws to be enacted to cater for teleworking. This has implications for the success of teleworking even in the absence of pandemics.

CONCLUSION

Work is no longer defined by where people work, but by what they do, and telecommuting arrangements are intended to foster new ways of working. In Lagos |State and Nigeria in general, the landscape is getting wider and richer, providing benefits for both employers and employees but there are many contours along the way, inhibiting effectiveness. However, despite the contours in Nigeria's teleworking landscape, it has been realized that virtual or remote work is an innovative form of work that is gradually replacing traditional and conventional work patterns, and projections are that in as much as ICT progresses, teleworking will continue and may become the dominant form of work in the nearest future. Therefore, a wide, comprehensive and full understanding of both the benefits and downsides of telecommuting may help shape and guide organisational practices and public policy. Teleworking is also a consensus between organizations and their employees, hence, both parties need to participate, cooperate, and support each other in order to address questions, uncertainties and consequent management of the programme. Also, clear goals

need to be set and measurement should be put in place to assess the progress and performance of workers, and guarantee productivity. Organizations should also provide the necessary training and tools needed to telework. Governments at all levels in Nigeria, should, fix the erratic power supply in the country; engage the telecommunications sector to increase their internet broadband services to accommodate the increasing demand of teleworkers; managements and employees of organizations should agree on policy and terms of teleworking that will benefit all parties involved in teleworking arrangements. Finally, there is need for the national government to review existing labour legislations with a view to expanding their scopes so as to accommodate teleworking arrangements as an indispensable and prevailing mode of work in the labour market in the contemporary world.

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