

Covid-19 crisis is far from over - Thieme

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The Ohlthaver & List (O&L) Group, one of Namibia's largest private sector companies employing about 6500 Namibians and contributing almost 4% to GDP, said the impact of Covid-19 on Namibia and the rest of the world are not yet fully understood but will be felt for many years to come.

Sven Thieme, executive chairman of the O&L Group said: "This crisis is far from over, and at this time, we have no idea how deep the impact will be. Taking into consideration how the global travel and tourism industry collapsed virtually overnight, and that many Namibian businesses across various industries were already struggling to survive amidst the economic crisis, it is inevitable that the prolonged local lockdown and global impact of Covid-19 will have wide-reaching economic and social consequences that no one will escape". Like many other Namibian businesses, already before Covid-19, the O&L Group had commenced with strategies to right-size the business in response to the current economic downturn. Thieme continues: "With O&L being a 100-year-old family business

with an intense love and passion for Namibia and her people, our focus has always been on people, and therefore when we launched our Vision 2025 a year ago, we took a stand to create 10 000 jobs. It was, therefore, an extremely difficult decision at the end of last year to right-size operations in the short term for the sake of future sustainability and job creation. At that time, we did not yet know that the situation would deteriorate further as Covid-19 was not yet on the horizon.”

Wessie van der Westhuizen, O&L CEO added: “Covid-19 has compounded an already grave situation.

Not only do social distancing and other restrictions such as lockdown, impact our ability to optimise operations, but furthermore, with the drastic reduction in revenue, and our desire to save as many jobs as possible, we have no choice but to adapt and implement various measures to survive this crisis. As far as possible we are encouraging employees to work from home during the lockdown, and where this is not possible, we are doing our utmost to ensure our people still receive a decent income to care for their families. Measures to support this include drastic changes in operational ways of working, and cost-cutting measures throughout the group, including pay cuts for the Top Leadership. We need to be bold and realise that the businesses we once knew no longer exist, the reality we were accustomed to, is now in the past, and the future we seek is dependent on our ability to gear our businesses in line with our purpose. We need to become even better at soliciting ideas, unlocking innovation, collaborating, solving problems, finding opportunities and compromising and making sacrifices.”

In conclusion, Thieme said: “The world has changed and everyone needs to adapt rapidly. Salary cuts across businesses as well as government are but some of the basic measures that must be implemented as of yesterday. Nobody says these measures are easy, but we have no choice. It is our moral obligation to our people, our communities and our country to do everything possible to get through this crisis so that we collectively create the future.”

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