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DISCUSSION N°9 "IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS ON FOOD SECURITY" - SYNTHESIS

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The Covid-19 pandemic, especially with the various movement restrictions and prevention measures that have resulted worldwide, has a serious impact on the West African economies, which are among the most open to international trade in the world.

Added to this is the fact that most West Africans do not have a guaranteed fixed income, so the drop-in income raises fears of a major food crisis.

And finally, even though peasants make up the majority of the population, public food distributions to the poorest are insufficiently backed by measures to support local production, leading to fears of agricultural disinvestment and medium- to long-term production declines.

DIRECT EFFECTS ON FOOD CHAINS

Difficulty of production

The crisis has complicated or even prevented the peasants and other workers in the food chains to go to the fields, to the processing units and to the sales outlets (Ceedd, Cicodev, Enda Pronat, Rikolto).

Access to inputs and small equipment has also been severely disrupted (ANPDI, Cicodev, Enda Pronat, Soungalo Ouattara). This represents enormous challenges that producers must face in finding alternative solutions to maintain production levels.

Marketing difficulties

Markets, the only large-scale commercial activities in rural areas, have ceased to function on a regular basis. Restrictions on opening, difficulties in moving around (fear of contamination and/or lack of means of transport) are reducing activity very sharply (ANPDI, Apess, Cicodev). Some commercial opportunities are literally blocked, as are the many markets, businesses, hotels and restaurants that are closed (Acting for life, Cicodev). There is also a ban on festive gatherings. Results: some producers such as salad producers in the Diourbel region or chicken producers in the Fatick region made only 20% of their usual turnover (Cicodev).

As in the province of Bam in Burkina Faso, where rotting vegetable production for export to Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire was noted (Fugcom-Bam), many agricultural losses are to be deplored. These losses are amplified by the absence of storage centre (Cicodev). Agreements are not honoured due to various restrictions and credits at banks cannot be repaid (Cicodev, Rikolto).

"Herder families depend on weekly markets for income from the sale of animals. But livestock markets are closed, which affects the purchasing power and therefore the food purchase of many families." Cécile Broutin and Mame Coumba Faye (Gret)

Regarding downstream activities in the food chain, street restaurateurs (who are mainly women) have difficulties in obtaining supplies and also face mistrust on the part of customers for health reasons. Many of these restaurateurs use microfinance loans that they can no longer repay (Cicodev).

Pastoral livestock farming and the local milk sector particularly affected (Apress)

The movement restrictions, accompanied by the suspension of veterinary services and the issuing of the international transhumance certificate, are a disaster for pastoral livestock. In the absence of access to fodder resources, animal mortality is high, breeding nuclei are diminishing, and the supply of weakened livestock is increasing on the markets, leading to a gradual deterioration in prices.

Due to the high perishability of fresh milk, movement restrictions have strongly affected the local dairy industry. The drop-in income observed among both farmers and processing units has put many actors in the sector out of work. **In The Gambia, it is feared that the local milk sector will disappear altogether.**

Cross-border movements are essential to the pastoral system and the lives of agropastoralists. Insecurity had already drastically reduced them. With the closure of the borders, the pure and simple disappearance of this type of livestock farming is to be feared, putting families in a situation of extreme poverty.

The measures taken favour large operators and imported products

Most people shop in large, dense open-air markets that have been closed or have reduced their opening hours. The financial health of the economic players operating there is threatened, while, at the same time, existing supermarkets such as Auchan in Senegal can remain open until 9pm, laying the foundations for unfair competition (Ceedd).

Moreover, since supermarkets are more likely to comply with hygiene and social distancing measures, their turnover is increasing (ANPDI). The populations of large coastal cities such as Dakar have easier access to imported products than to local products grown by family farms (Enda Pronat).

"Supermarkets have scored points in this crisis" (Karfa Diallo). It is also true that "most of their products are sourced outside the continent" (Oumy Seck) and that "the poor can only walk the halls of supermarkets" (Braima Biai).

Innovations to overcome barriers to commercialization

The crisis can also represent an opportunity for small local producers and processors. They are adapting with innovative sourcing strategies with online sales and home deliveries in Dakar (ANPDI, Cicodev, Enda Pronat). Another example: in Benin, a "Bénin Restoo" application has been created to develop the sale of home prepared meals (AFL). In Burkina Faso, producer organizations in the Cascades region, which can no longer sell their products in school canteens, have set up a new virtual network (WhatsApp group) to make themselves known to other public buyers (prisons, hospitals) and sell their products (AFL).

Difficulties exacerbated by the extroversion of sectors

West African countries are highly integrated into the global economy, particularly the world food market, as shown by the 2008 food access crisis (Ceedd, Soungalo Ouattara). The slowdown in trade (restrictions, increased transport prices, lack of resources to pay for imports) is therefore seriously affecting the region.

On the one hand, many large cities are dependent on the world market for basic necessities such as rice, wheat, oil or sugar. Even inland towns and villages are affected because a growing share of staple foods are imported products transported from ports to the countryside (ANPDI, Soungalo Ouattara, Gret).

"Senegal is suffering from an extroversion of its agri-food consumption model that translates as follows: it does not consume what it produces, and does not produce what it consumes. This disconnection places the country in a state of perpetual stress that leaves it vulnerable to the volatility of a totally unstable market" (Oumy Seck, Ceedd).

On the other hand, exports, especially agricultural exports, have been reduced. In Burkina Faso, for example, cotton and sesame (Rikolto) exports contracted by 16 per cent. This drop-in export revenues further exacerbates the difficulty of obtaining essential commodities on the world market.

Decrease in supply in the medium term

The direct impacts on the commodity chains make decreases in agricultural production and supply difficulties for traders foreseeable. The use of seed stocks for domestic consumption also risks causing a shortage of farmers' seeds for wintering (ANPDI).

Another more indirect consequence of the health crisis: added to other phenomena (war in Yemen), it has made it impossible to prevent the formation of swarms and the multiplication of locusts. Their migration is likely to have major consequences in West Africa, especially as control in the Sahel zone is made difficult by the prevailing insecurity (Cirad).

*"We will therefore see a considerable drop in production, bearing in mind that the pandemic occurred at a time of intensive production."
(Michel Tougma, Rikolto).*

In the absence of strong State support for farmers, the consequences of disruptions in the agricultural sector are very strong for the entire economy and population. All the more so as governments have chosen to act on the consequences by distributing food rather than on the causes by allowing peasants to produce and maintain their purchasing power (Fongs).

The State of Senegal, as part of its economic and social resilience program, is, for example, distributing food, mainly imported, for the benefit of one million vulnerable households (Gret). In April, the Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux (CNCR) regretted the absence of horticultural and poultry products in these food kits. It seems to have been heard because the Horticulture Directorate has carried out an inventory of unsold stocks (onions, potatoes, carrots, cabbage) and a line of credit of one billion FCFA has been made available to traders to buy them (Cicodev).

A CRISIS IN ACCESS TO FOOD IS FEARED

Three new viruses have appeared in Senegal, Pochevid-20 ("Empty-pocket-20"), Frigovid-20 ("Empty-refrigerator-20") and Ventrevid-20 ("Empty-belly-20"), which are more virulent than Covid-19 (Enda Pronat). Two thirds of the African population live in a situation of food insecurity (Cicodev). In West Africa, Ecowas figures show that, in the current pandemic crisis, around 51 million people are likely to fall into the crisis phase by June-August 2020 (Soungalo Ouattara).

Rising prices

Food products are becoming more and more expensive (QNCOCPA). In Senegal, where prevention measures have been particularly severe, a survey conducted by the Cicodev in all 14 regions of the country reports significant increases in some products. Fresh products, which have become rare, are the most affected¹. In Burkina Faso, the government intends to regulate the prices of basic food products such as cereals (rice, maize, millet, sorghum, etc.), cowpeas, salt, oil, sugar, etc. Despite these measures, prices are increasing due to intermediaries (Rikolto). By mid-2020, this increase is slight for most commodities and in most areas, but many commodity chain operators anticipate a price surge in the coming months.

Decreases in income

In mid-2020, the main difficulty is the drop-in income. "Money is no longer flowing" is the general feeling.

¹ In Kédougou, for example, the price per kilogram of fish has risen from 2,000 to 3,500 CFA francs.

Already, the containment measures have strained populations because in most families, urban or rural, food and cash reserves were far from guaranteed. In early May 2020, the CNCR declared at a press briefing that almost all their members had exhausted their family food stocks and were resorting to markets to buy food while waiting for the next harvest. The hunger gap will be longer and more difficult than usual.

Especially since many rural households also depend on remittances from their urban-based members, which are falling due to the global economic slowdown (ANPDI).

In the cities, too, measures taken to prevent coronavirus have severely affected populations. The so-called informal sector provides a daily income that is crucial for access to food. The working class neighbourhoods are veritable powder kegs. Accompanying measures on water and electricity bills, food grants and other aid cannot compensate for the loss of income due to Covid-19 (Enda Pronat, QNCOCPA, Daouda Diagne).

Low-income households could adopt new habits, sustained over time, aimed at purchasing less nutritious and cheaper substitutes to their normal diet (Soungalo Ouattara).

Violence as a corollary of the economic crisis

Rural women who can no longer go to the market to sell their produce and thus bring back essential food for their families find themselves more dependent on their husbands for survival. Mame Cissé Diop, a peasant leader from Casamance (Roprocas), testifies to physical violence against them: "When they ask for money, it is arguments and deliberate assault and battery. Partial confinement is a deplorable situation for the women of Kolda".

Faced with the closure of spaces of exchange essential to the rural economy and the loss of income, Apess fears the emergence of individual and even identity-based survival strategies, the stigmatization of communities by one another, thus threatening social cohesion. Some pastoralists could also be recruited into armed groups because of the loss of their capital.

A food crisis with far-reaching consequences

Soaring prices and rising unemployment will contribute to a drastic reduction in household purchasing power for all socio-professional categories. Michel Tougma (Rikolto) estimates that 70% of families will find it difficult to afford one meal a day. For Khady Ndoye (Cicodev), food vulnerability has never been greater in Senegal. Apess also fears that undernourishment and malnutrition will particularly affect children and breastfeeding women, with long-term consequences: an increase in pathologies linked to nutritional deficiency and child mortality.

ACTING ON LONG-TERM RESILIENCE: FAVOURING LOCAL CONSUMPTION

West African countries seem to have reacted very quickly and effectively to the health aspects. Senegalese economist Felwine Saar responds to the alarmist discourse: "Negative representations of Africa are so entrenched that we no longer even bother to look at reality. And when the present reality goes against the representations, they are then shifted into the future. Even if the continent is doing rather well, we must therefore predict a catastrophe. Anything but admitting that Africa is coping with Covid-19." (article relayed by SOS Faim Luxembourg). Interesting reflection that should not prevent us from warning that, on the one hand, life expectancy remains much lower (55 years for West Africans, which makes the Ivorian writer Gauz say that "the epidemic has no more old people to kill on this continent"), and on the other hand that the economic implications, including measures and restrictions to limit the pandemic, are disastrous for a large majority of the population.

This health crisis shows the extent to which the mechanisms of anticipation and regulation of major crises are fragile and defective (Fongs). It raises the question of the future of the food systems that support 60% of the population and the position of the local consumption in West African markets. The model in a deregulated globalized system, degrades the ecosystems and represents an impasse for the sustainability and the development of family farming. Food systems based on resource-efficient management is a key element of the necessity and a real opportunity for rural economies (AFL).

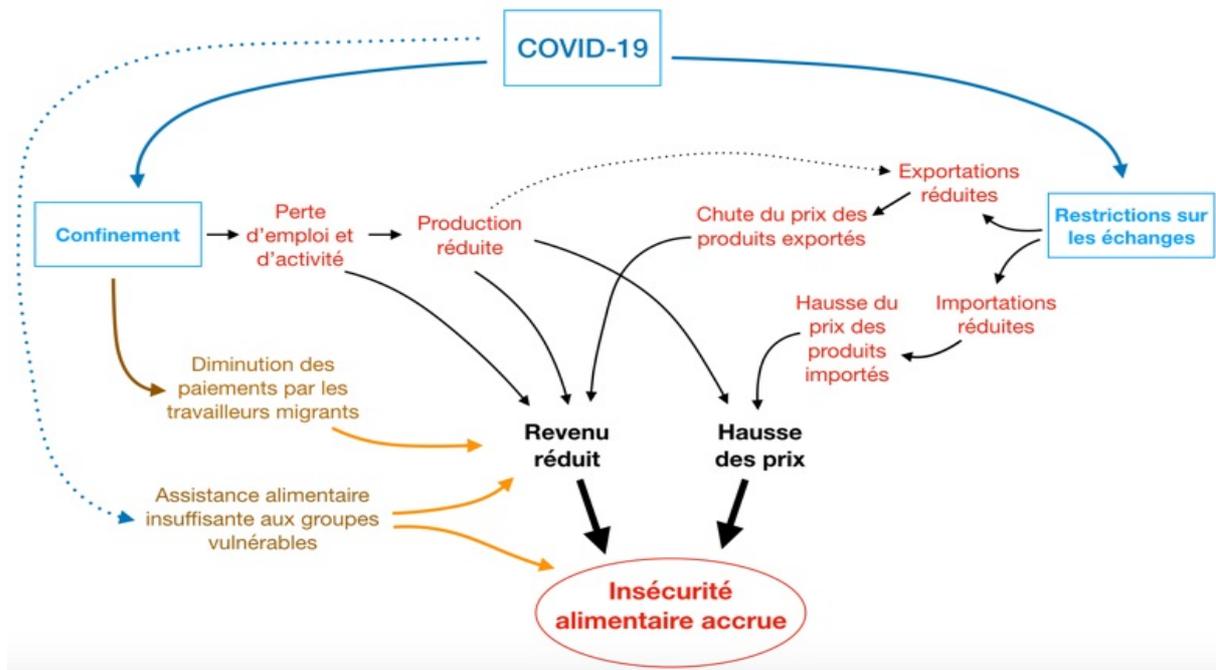
"Our resources must be used to prioritize the search for food self-sufficiency in all speculations where this is possible. There are certainly opportunities for us to build economies that are more resilient to this crisis" (Khady Ndoye, Cicodev)

The breakdown of certain agro-logistics chains and the risks of shortages and soaring prices in the countries importing food commodities, enhance the need to connect local consumption to local production (Soungalo Ouattara).

There is a development of short circuits in the wake of the crisis. And the willingness to produce at all costs in the face of possible international shortages. ADC Ninnaba thus calls for "going massively to the fields and valleys to produce an abundance of cereals this year, while diversifying speculation, in order to cope with the uncertainty of rice availability from outside countries". The mass distribution of local food products is certainly partly determined by the habits of urban consumers. Perhaps it will be necessary to focus on trade policies and social levers (Roppa). And rethink our production methods at the family farm level by emphasizing ecological practices, especially in a context of climate change (Cicodev, Fenop).

Nicolas Bricas (Cirad) relays a press release from Ipes Food which insists on the fact that the crisis "has made it possible to foresee new, more resilient food systems" but that it risks being exploited "by powerful actors to even go further in unsustainable approaches and maintain the status quo under the pretext of responding to the crisis". We must therefore ensure "that the measures adopted to stem the crisis become the starting point for a transformation of food systems that brings resilience".

Hélène Basquin Fané, CFSI, July 2020 – Translation with the help of DeepL free version



Covid-19 and the food crisis: the main mechanisms at work © Materne Maetz

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Useful références (in French):

- [Complete collection of contributions to the discussion #9, 2020](#)
- [Analysis note of the first impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on family farms](#), Apess, 2020
- [Covid-19 and food crisis, main mechanisms at work](#), Materne Maetz, juin 2020
- [Kako Nubukpo, L'urgence africaine \(African emergency\)](#), CFSI, décembre 2019

Find information on "consumption of local production in West Africa" on www.alimenterre.org : « [Celles et ceux qui font](#) » (Pafao Network) et [Carte du réseau Pafao et de ses alliés](#) (Pafao and allied networks' map)

Also see previous synthesis of the discussions held on the discussion on-line forum :

- [Supply of processing units](#), July 2015
- [Conditioning and packaging](#), January 2016
- [What legal form for downstream units in the food chain?](#), May 2016
- [Public procurements](#), December 2016
- [Marketing of agroecological products](#), October 2017
- [Laleling of local and regional products](#), April 2018
- [Monitoring of women's incomes](#), September 2018
- [Capital raising](#), September 2019