



PANEL 5: IMPACT OF COVID ON THE ORGANISING OF BUSINESS ACTIVITIES IN THE METROPOLITAN AREA

Moderator : François YATTA

Panelists:

- **Dr KOFFI Bouadi Arnaud**, Jean Lorougnon Guédé University (Côte d'Ivoire);
- **Mrs. Gisèle OUEHI**, Chairwoman of the Cocody Food Crops Traders' Cooperative (COCOVIDO - Côte d'Ivoire);
- **Mr Roger TAFAM**, Mayor of Bafoussam-Cameroon;
- **Mrs. Monique AYI**, Mayor of DZENG- Cameroon.

Following the presentations, the floor was turned to the panelists to share their views on the topic.

The first intervention came from Mrs. AYI Monique, mayor of the commune of Dzend (Cameroon), and head of the network of Cameroonian mayors for social and solidarity economy. Her comment was organized around three (3) points.

The first point was centered on the general backdrop of the socio-economic impact of the pandemic in Cameroon. Likewise, other countries in the world, Cameroon has been severely hit by the pandemic both from a health and socio-economic point of view. Referring to the statistics from the Cameroonian Ministry of Finance, she mentioned the drop in the number of employees to 52.8%, the decline by 82.60% in the production rate and the fall by 94% in the demand for commodities on the market due to the closing of borders; thereby affecting 56% of industrial companies. She has equally reported that 44% of companies have seen their purchases and supplies hit by the pandemic. The disease also had an adverse impact on business activities. In addition, she noted the increase in public

and private debt, the weakening of partnerships between suppliers and customers due to untimely deliveries and the increase in the cost of products on the market.

The second point was on strategies to organize commercial activities in response to the restrictions connected to the covid-19. This was about the rise in innovative solutions: Digital strategies for e-commerce, the development of purchasing and sales in networks, organizing in cooperative groups and provision of land for cooperatives.

This equally involves strategies for organizing business activities to secure the supply chain; inter alia, strengthening weakened social and economic ties with customers and renewing relations with suppliers.

She wrapped up with some recommendations:

- Develop a strategic multi-stakeholder partnership approach;
- Improve the business financing mechanism to better withstand the pandemic ;
- Promote the emergence of social innovations to better meet the needs of the population;
- Foster synergies and assets by different actors.

The second panelist, Mrs. Gisèle OUEHI, Chairperson of the COCOVICO food market, reported that the Government has introduced a series of measures to cope with the pandemic, namely: the ban on trips between the greater Abidjan area and the rest of the country, the closure of restaurants, pubs, bars, schools and all borders.

Regarding the market under her leadership, the measures taken include: the introduction of a hand washing system at the gate of the market, downsizing of staff, rotation of traders on the stalls, the partial interruption of the food chain and the closing of the market at 4pm.

Such measures resulted in a hike of the cost of food products, abandonment of commercial activity, along with a drop in the number of clients in the market, and challenges in the sale of goods. All this came with an adverse impact on the

income of traders. However, Covid-19 was not only a set of drawbacks. The health context made for the COCOVICO market to get online through Internet. This has led to a new way of marketing food products, namely e-commerce.

At the end of her presentation, Mrs. OUEHI made some recommendations. She recommended that the Government set up a fund to help traders cope with the decline in their income. She also spoke out for the exemption of the municipal tax for a period of two months.

The third panelist, Mr. Roger Tafam, mayor of Bafoussam (Cameroon) reported that his constituency is the third largest city in Cameroon with 1.5 million inhabitants and the country's largest agricultural basin. This makes it a business city.

He also stressed that Cameroon's agriculture, employing 50% of the country's population, is the primary resource on which the country's economic growth is based. This agriculture has been severely hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. The health crisis has equally caused a huge loss to poultry farmers. Some of them have been forced to slaughter their poultry.

The city council has adopted several strategies to deal with the pandemic. It has introduced rotating sales in the markets, disinfection of the markets, exemption from market fees and the dematerialization of stalls (bringing traders closer to their customers), as was the case at the COCOVICO market in Cocody. We have also seen the emergence of artisanal manufacturing units and the increasing use of traditional medicine by the population to deal with Covid-19.

Regarding the future, he recommended continuous sensitization of the population to respect the barrier measures. He also called for the promotion of mass vaccination.

The fourth and last panelist Dr. Koffi BOUADI of the University Jean Lorougnon Guédé has at the beginning of his presentation stressed that Daloa is the 3rd city of Côte d'Ivoire by its population estimated at 245 thousand inhabitants according to the RGPH of 2014.

His study on the impact of Covid-19 on business activities has reached conclusive results. Indeed, he mentioned that the pandemic has caused a decrease in activities up to 66% and a cessation of activity estimated at 29% between March 29 and April 15, 2020. He also noted the difficulties for the payment of charges and the repayment of creditors.

He recommended the establishment of a fund to support women in the informal sector who have been affected by the cessation of activities.

He advocated sensitizing women on the adoption of barrier measures because "a sensitized woman = sensitized family = sensitized society".