

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY



Policy Response for Côte d'Ivoire

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Côte d'Ivoire was announced on March 11, 2020; the number has since risen to 4,181 as of 11 June 2020. The number of deaths increased from 1 as of 29 March 2020 to 41 as of 11 June 2020. The country continues to institute measures to contain the spread of the pandemic.

Impact of COVID-19 in Côte d'Ivoire

Measures taken to combat COVID-19 have affected most sectors of the Ivorian economy, and although it has not yet been explicitly stated, will undoubtedly impact the presidential elections scheduled for October 2020. Alongside other measures, the government has instituted a ban on unauthorized trips between Abidjan and the rest of the country to prevent the spread of the virus.

Impact on GDP

Côte d'Ivoire is an economic powerhouse in West Africa, posting average growth of 8% between 2011 and 2018. However, according to the Oxford Business Group, 2020¹ the rate of GDP growth in real terms fell to 6.7% in 2019; GDP is expected to contract to 2.7% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent widespread shutdowns. Looking to the future, the IMF expects growth to rebound to 8.7% in 2021, highlighting the country's economic resilience. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's growth trajectory was expected to continue, but due to the fallout from the lockdowns and other social-distancing measures, this figure is expected to slow significantly. Basic food prices are relatively stable and therefore no food price inflation has been observed.

Impact on exports and balance of payments

Côte d'Ivoire's agriculture sector is both a key driver of the economy and a primary player in global markets for goods such as cocoa and rubber. Owing to its fertile land, the West African country has established itself as a major exporter of a wide range of raw agricultural products. At the same time, the government aims to secure the sector's economic and environmental sustainability through measures such as expanding local processing to capture greater value added and combatting deforestation.

Impact of COVID-19 on Agriculture

The available data in the country and in country experience indicate that food security in Côte d'Ivoire is stable, with some uncertainties about imported goods and food stuffs. The country's food security relies on a broad range of local foodstuffs that are used in traditional dishes, for instance tubers (cassava, yam, sweet potatoes), plantains, and cereals (maize, millet, rice, etc.). The country has security stocks of all these goods, to limit shortages in the case of unexpected events.

¹ Oxford Business Group is a global research and advisory company producing business intelligence on more than 35 countries. Every business intelligence product is based on in-country research by experienced analysts

Government figures for tuber and plantain stocks indicate that even if the lockdown persisted, the food available in this stock would last the country three to six months.

However, stocks of other foods such as millet, maize and local rice, are limited and may only last for one month. Stock levels of imported rice are not likely to cover more than four months' consumption. The crop harvest at the start of the year will satisfy food requirements until the end of the second quarter (June 2020) but planting that was scheduled for March started late due to the pandemic and may create shortages at the end of the season. As a result, and to support food, market garden, and fruit crop production, the government announced an exceptional support plan totaling 50 billion CFA francs (\$86 million).

Government Policy Response

The Ivorian government has put in place business support measures, economic support measures, and social measures for the general population to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and to preserve the key sectors of the economy. As efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic continue, Côte d'Ivoire is one of many countries that have turned to technology to facilitate e-learning and provide digital health solutions. The government has designed a national emergency response plan and has just established the Public Health Emergency Operations Center (COUSP). A crisis committee to better manage the risk of the disease spreading has been put in place.

All households in the country can access basic foods. The challenge is, however, the inability to guarantee supplies to the country's shops and markets. Since the lockdown was eased, most food markets are functioning normally. Travel between the capital and the rest of the country was banned from 29 March, but a system of permits introduced by the Ivorian government has allowed the country's cities to receive food supplies, and the port in Abidjan is still open.

On March 30, the government announced some tax relief measures to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on taxpayers. These key measures included:

- The suspension of tax audit procedures for a three-month period;
- The reduction of 25% for a transport business license;
- The postponement of payment for three months of flat-rate taxes for small traders including SMEs and agribusinesses;
- Exemption from import duties and taxes on health equipment, materials and other agriculture related products and inputs;
- Allow all traditional markets and modern supermarkets to remain open;
- The establishment of a solidarity fund amounting to CFA francs 170 billion to fund the most vulnerable populations within the framework of emergency humanitarian support.

Policy Response Package for Côte d'Ivoire

In order to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, and based on advice from the Ministry of Agriculture the following are key priorities to support recovery activities:

- a. Support to strengthen the distribution of inputs in the country including support to agricultural extension officers with instruments and tools;
- b. Development and coordination of the COVID-19 response plan with the other sectors of the economy;
- c. Support to design and manage warehouse infrastructure and create strong buffer stocks in the country;

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- d. Ensure the functioning of food supply chains and strengthen market outlets as well as support to post-harvest technologies;
 - e. Development of digital technologies for input distribution and functioning of output markets.

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