

## Original Research Article

# Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Cote D'ivoire: Analysis of the Political-Hospital System

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**Abstract:** This study analyses the factors that explain the dysfunction in the management of the COVID-19 coronavirus in Côte d'Ivoire. The study was essentially qualitative, using appropriate survey tools such as documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews with a category of actors in Abidjan. This enabled us to arrive at the following results: the dysfunctional management of COVID-19 in Côte d'Ivoire is linked to the failure to comply with the normative framework issued by the authorities of the Ministry of Health through the persistence of lifestyle habits that are proof of the restrictive measures announced in view of the seriousness of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Thus, the actors develop strategies outside the normative framework to redefine new types of lifestyle relationships.

**Keywords:** Health policies, Management, Covid-19 pandemic, Côte d'Ivoire.

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## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has created human casualties, the COVID-19 coronavirus is impacting the economy of African countries with 30 million jobs at risk' (A.J. Agobe, K. G. J-C, Koffi & A. P-C, Vonan, 2020).

Faced with this situation, many countries have adopted contingency measures to contain the spread of the virus: a state of health emergency, closure of land and sea borders, ban on gatherings, closure of universities, schools, places of worship, restaurants, curfews, establishment of a sanitary cordon, etc., but the severity of these measures varies from country to country.

In Benin, for example, the President assumes the impossibility of imposing a general long-term lockdown in a country where the majority of Beninese have a non-wage income and cannot wait several weeks without working. In both Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), all incoming and outgoing flights have been banned, bars, restaurants, schools, places of worship, etc. are closed. Rwanda is among the countries that have taken the most draconian measures (closing of borders, confinement of its population, systematic temperature taking, closing of schools and non-essential businesses). In South Africa, general

containment was imposed and police sometimes intervened by opening fire with rubber bullets to disperse the crowd or to enforce distance with whips. Containment in particular involves keeping individuals in a confined space in order to contain the spread of the disease in the population. When total containment is used, individuals must remain inside their homes 24 hours a day. It can also be partial, in which case a time frame is defined by the government. For some experts, 'containment is an important public health measure, generally defined on the basis of epidemiological tools, but which must take into account the sociology of the environment, the country or the area in question', as Professor Birane Faye of the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar points out (L. Rey & M. Dare, 2020, PP.3-4).

In light of the above, on 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (OMS) Emergency Committee declared Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) a pandemic. The COVID-19 outbreak is becoming the largest health and mobility crisis ever. As the number of cases continues to rise rapidly, it is also changing mobility and trade patterns as well as immigration and border management regimes. In addition, due to travel restrictions imposed to slow the spread of the virus, many migrants are distressed and suddenly at risk of becoming irregular (IOM, 2020). In response to this

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situation, IOM's Immigration and Border Management (IBM) division works closely with the Migration and Health Division (MHD) and other departments to provide immediate and medium- to long-term technical assistance to immigration, border and consular officials in the relevant Member States to help people on the move - as well as frontline health and border officials - stay safe and healthy (IOM, idem).

It also identifies and provides immigration, consular and visa support for the development of recovery programmes that respond to changing immigration procedures. IOM's COVID-19 programming contributes to WHO's Strategic Plan for International Preparedness and Response and to the and the United Nations Global Humanitarian Response Plan. IOM programming is designed to respond to population mobility and cross-border dynamics while taking an inclusive approach to all travellers and migrants - regardless of their migration status - and countering misinformation that can lead to anti-migrant sentiment and xenophobia. This approach is anchored in the IOM Health, Border and Mobility Management (HBMM) framework (idem).

In Côte d'Ivoire, a study by A. J. Agobe, K. G. J-C, Koffi & A. P-C, Vonan (2020) showed that: the contamination curve of COVID-19 climbed exponentially. In contrast, authors A.J. Agobe, K. G. J-C, Koffi & A. P-C, Vonan (idem) found unchanged practices in terms of observance of WHO prevention measures against the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus by the populations. Mr Christoph Vogt, Head of the Regional Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Abidjan, said: "The pandemic that is affecting the world is unfortunately not yet over. We must try to return to a more normal economic and social life, learn to live with COVID-19 while minimising its impact. This is a marathon, not a sprint. This indicates that the policies for managing the COVID-19 pandemic that do not translate into real actions on the ground lead to the passivity of the populations as regards barrier measures in such a situation of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic in Africa in general and in Côte d'Ivoire in particular. What are the explanatory factors of the dysfunction observed in the management of COVID-19 in Côte d'Ivoire? This study analyses the factors that explain the dysfunction in the management of COVID-19 in Côte d'Ivoire. It aims to: (i) Describe the management system of the COVID-19 pandemic; (ii) Identify the factors that weaken the management process of COVID-19.

## **1-THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

Based on Robert King Merton's (1965) structurofunctionalism. This theoretical approach applied to this study allows us to understand that the management of COVID-19 as defined by the

institutional framework of Côte d'Ivoire is a form of bureaucratisation that does not really take into account the way of life of the populations. These incidents of bureaucratic management of the COVID-19 pandemic influence the way people live. This forces people to undermine the measures recommended by the institutional authorities and redefine another space for the construction of production, consumption and food relations. The entry through this theoretical framework is all the more founded on the epistemological level that the management of COVID-19 in a context where the populations in Côte d'Ivoire are living in poverty contrary to the double-digit economic growth brandished by the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire. Clearly, the higher the contamination curve of the COVID-19 populations climbs, the more the populations fall into survival with only psychological and moral resilience to comfort them. The management of COVID-19 should take into account the social and cultural values of the population (the relationship of the population to production, food and consumption, etc.). This allows us to focus on the process of managing the pandemic through a field survey conducted in the city of Abidjan. This study is based on a qualitative approach. It was conducted in the city of Abidjan from 3 August 2020 to 30 August 2020 inclusive. To do this, non-probability sampling was used to test our interviews in order to collect information until saturation, according to the criteria of (B. Glaser & A. Strauss, 1967). This sampling method resulted in the application of certain selection rules in the field, such as the status and role of actors in the management of COVID-19. To this end, we interviewed: political leaders in charge of managing COVID-19(2), health workers (40) and relatives of COVID-19 victims(30). In total, we interviewed sixty (72) people. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with these actors to understand the process of managing COVID-19 in Côte d'Ivoire.

## **2-RESULTS**

Within the framework of this study, two considerations guide the analysis of the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte d'Ivoire. These are the analysis of the management system on the one hand and the identification of factors that weaken the COVID-19 management system on the other.

### **2-1-Diagnosis of the COVID-19 pandemic management system**

Nalysis of the management system for the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte d'Ivoire shows that the actions of the political authorities in the process of combating the COVID-19 pandemic by acquiring a tool for combating or building a system for preventing and combating the pandemic can be seen through an awareness of the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic and the commitment by political and institutional actors to fight the pandemic effectively by setting up a COVID-19 pandemic management protocol.

Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the population has been subject to this COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control protocol. This posture of the populations provides the COVID-19 pandemic management system with resilience to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. These values contained in the COVID-19 pandemic management protocol reflect, on the one hand, the political authorities' desire to guarantee social and health stability for populations already weakened socio-economically by the COVID-19 pandemic. This illustrates: "Efforts must be combined with the understanding and participation of all social strata for an effective fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This implies the respect of barrier measures upstream. The technical facilities of our hospitals are mostly deficient. The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated the already existing problems of the equipment of public hospitals in Abidjan. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are all exposed to the risks of contamination, but the medical profession is even more exposed to the risks of COVID-19 contamination."

On the other hand, the observance of the prevention measures contained in the prevention plan dictated by the State of Côte d'Ivoire, reflects the manifest will of the populations to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This attitude on the part of the actors helps to highlight the values that can be.

This attitude of the actors contributes to highlighting the values likely to be put forward in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, this attitude of the people of Côte d'Ivoire is culturally rooted and reflects the long accepted perception of the population to develop resilience in the face of social crises. However, this cultural disposition of resilience is increasingly tending to be reversed within the category of producers and consumers of alcoholic products on the one hand, and on the other, within the category of individuals who consume street products. Indeed, such a perception leads to a reinterpretation and redefinition of the spaces of production, consumption and food. Thus, many paradigms are conveyed: the more confined one is, the less likely one is to survive. It is in this perspective that: "I work in the informal sector in order to take care of the family load. So I have to go out and look for financial resources to fulfil my duty as head of the family. That is, to provide for the meals and schooling for my children. In my opinion, keeping people confined or creating severe restrictions is not the solution to eradicate the pandemic. The restrictions should be a bit flexible. Because I don't think that the state will be able to help the whole population with food and school fees. And even when the authorities are working to provide assistance to the population, there is unfortunately irregularity and discrimination in the choice of families to receive assistance. This is the case of the attempt by the State of Côte d'Ivoire to help poor families following the advent of COVID-19".

In this respect, the ideology of awareness of the dysfunction observed in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic actually makes it possible to question the credibility of the actors in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte d'Ivoire. This indicates that the management system for the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte d'Ivoire is marred by irregularities that call into question the quality of the COVID-19 management process in Côte d'Ivoire.

### **2-2-Population engagement as an affirmation of irreversible commitment to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic**

The non-inclusion of the populations in the management process of the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte is recognised by the populations as the result of discrimination or handicaps that affect the transparency of the management system of the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte d'Ivoire. The damage of the non-inclusive participation of the populations in the management of the pandemic directly affects the way of life of the populations. The COVID-19 pandemic management process highlights a synergy of action based on the participation of institutional and individual actors. To this end, one of the most important actions in the management of COVID-19 is the active integration of populations in order to overcome certain stereotypes of discrimination or alienation in the process of managing the COVID-19 pandemic. This case illustrates: "Managing the COVID-19 pandemic is everyone's business. The political authorities managing the health crisis must integrate the populations so that together we can fight the pandemic effectively. Unfortunately, for reasons of funds granted by developed countries to help affected low-income countries, political leaders do not want to include the population in the pandemic management process. In my opinion, this discredits the COVID-19 pandemic management system in low-income countries and in Côte d'Ivoire in particular".

### **2-3- Factors weakening the COVID-19 management process**

The participation of the population in the management of public affairs is still a difficulty experienced by the population in the management of public affairs. Hence the need for the population to reconcile the vision of those in power with the interests of the population. In this respect, the difficulty of reconciling participatory development action and private life is a major obstacle to access to livelihood opportunities. It is in this perspective that: "Politicians, for economic reasons, i.e. misappropriation of public property and illicit enrichment, always exclude the population from the management of public affairs. The proof is that when the developed countries decided to provide financial aid to poor countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the political leaders of our African countries and those of Côte d'Ivoire were constantly giving us statistics on the COVID-19 contamination curve. The issue here was to reach a

certain quota in order to benefit from subsidies from developed countries for the management of the pandemic. As soon as these funds were granted, there was less and less talk of raising awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic. That said, the management of public health and other affairs are endogenously managed by political actors for their own purposes. All this would not be subject to misappropriation if the populations take an active part in the management of crises”.

It emerges from this statement that there is little representation of the population at the macro and meso levels in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte d'Ivoire. Efforts must be made to involve the population in the democratic governance of the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte d'Ivoire. The representativeness of the populations is a social issue with multiple stakes which is measured at the macro, meso and micro social levels in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To add to this, a study carried out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2020, P.7) indicates that: "Today, concern is growing about the continuing rise in the number of COVID-19 infections in some parts of the world, while in others the concern is about the ability to maintain a decline in the number of cases. Governments, employers, workers and their organisations face great challenges in trying to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and protect occupational safety and health. Beyond the immediate crisis Beyond the immediate crisis, there are also concerns about resuming operations in a way that In addition to the immediate crisis, there are also concerns about resuming operations in a way that maintains the progress made in stopping transmission.

### **3-DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

All in all, the results of this study reflect the actors' strategies for managing the pandemic. They are explicitly perceived through the actors' engagement in the different spheres of social life. In order to deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, this commitment refers to the ideological productions of awareness, commitment and actions linked to the synergy of action based on the supervision of health workers in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, training, and the financial support of vulnerable households through donations of food and protective materials against COVID-19. First of all, as a contribution to the protection of the population against the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the analysis shows that the lack of equipment in the medical technical platform and the democracy of the management of public goods by the authorities in Côte d'Ivoire is rooted in the long-standing perception of the actors. However, the creation of awareness-raising centres through religious denominations and social groups tends to reverse this political trend in the

management of the COVID-19 pandemic by promoting new, more dynamic paradigms through awareness-raising and the development of resilience ideologies. This analysis is thus close to the work of L. Rey & M. Dare (2020) showing the constitutive elements of the protocol for prevention and control of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa.

Secondly, the study showed that the participatory logic of the populations in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic is quantitatively weak. It must be said that even if the gap between the perception and the reality of the fight against the disease is proven, it must be recognised that the political authorities are more committed than ever. To justify this state of affairs, they have drawn up a protocol for the control and management of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this protocol show a renewed approach to changing the strategies for fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, which are being carried out slowly but surely with the expectation that a solution (vaccine) will be imported from the West or found locally by researchers in Côte d'Ivoire.

Furthermore, the power of intervention of the political authorities in the prevention and management of the COVID-19 pandemic gives them the power and position to guarantee the health security of the population. To this end, the solutions envisaged by the political authorities are intertwined with issues related to the interests and values to be promoted for the preservation of social capital in Côte d'Ivoire. Finally, the results reveal that the leadership of the political authorities in Côte d'Ivoire is the result of a struggle that is part of the historical dynamic of breaking with the old tradition of health crisis management by emphasising a more deterministic perspective with participatory policies for managing the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte d'Ivoire. The discourse of legitimisation and actions to manage the COVID-19 pandemic are reinforced by the sensitisation of religious leaders and the self-sensitisation of the population through the media and the new channels of sensitisation and communication.

### **CONCLUSION**

The management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte d'Ivoire is the subject of in-depth analysis, and it can be noted that the strategies for managing the COVID-19 pandemic are emerging rather timidly, and that complaints are increasingly being heard in the various spheres of social life. The inclusion of participatory democracy in strategies to combat the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be dissociated from the social logic and issues underlying the concerns of the population. In Côte d'Ivoire, the population is all the more convinced of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic because the adoption of a participatory policy that aims at the good management of the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be more enlightened on the issue. Finally, the population-policy relationship is understood

as a system of relations in which the strategies for combating the COVID-19 pandemic, the social practices and the issues that legitimise them cannot be separated in the optimal management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte d'Ivoire.

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