



Foodstuffs High Cost and Household Resilience Strategies of Ahoussabougou and Tegueré's Neighborhoods in the Commune of Korhogo (Northern area of Côte d'Ivoire)

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Abstract

The food crisis is increasingly becoming a problem of global security issue, since no country is immune to it. Regular responses are provided by various governments and global financial and economic institutions without achieving real results. Faced with the failures observed at the governmental and institutional level to stem the risks and disasters induced by climate change, actions are resolutely turning to local solutions. These include resilience strategies adopted by households to address the problem of high food prices. It is in this perspective that this study contributes to understanding the causes of high food prices and to highlighting the strategies developed by the urban households in the Ahoussabougou and Tegueré neighborhoods in the Commune of Korhogo. To meet that objective, this study used a mixed-methods approach, which involved both an interview guide and a questionnaire that served in interviewing all stakeholders. The results show a drastic increase in food prices for urban households in Korhogo. Households in Ahoussabougou and Tegueré are developing various and differentiated adaptation strategies that vary according to the type of household in order to respond to this inflation, which is a real "headache".

Keywords: *Food Crisis; High-Cost Foodstuffs; Urban Households; Resilience Strategy*

Introduction

Inflation has become a concern for governments and the populations of all countries around the world. Indeed, with globalization which recommends the erasure of customs borders and the connection of states in an integrated and globalizing economy, requirements are emerging. These include quality assurance, certification, etc., which require additional costs in the production and manufacture of foodstuffs. This observation led M. N. Boulif and A. Souaré (2009, p.2) to assert the following: "the generalized increase in the prices of basic foodstuffs and essential foodstuffs in most countries of the world, especially in developing countries, is the result of the process of globalization and planetary

interconnection”. This situation is not without consequence on the living conditions of the world population and especially on social stability, within the States, as specified by M.N. Boulif and A. Souaré (op.cit.).

The rise increased the risk of starvation and exposed the poor to malnutrition, [...] in 2008 [...] the scale and severity of the crisis were such that a number of countries came close to political instability, economic and social, following the “hunger riots”, [...] in Senegal, Egypt, Cameroon, [in] Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina-Faso, and Madagascar in Africa, even in Malaysia and the Philippines in Asia, or even in Bolivia, Peru and Haiti on the American continent (M. N. Boulif and A. Souaré , *ibid.*).

The picture painted by these authors remains alarming and no continent escapes this social reality, which is of concern to the FAO. It is with good reason that in 2009, with the aim of providing assistance to member countries severely affected by the issue of food crisis, FAO developed a policy of mutual assistance in favor of countries in distress. This policy initiated by FAO "consists of assisting governments in the development of their policies, programs and projects intended to combat hunger and malnutrition, to develop the agricultural and fishing sectors and to use in a sustainable way their natural and environmental resources" (FAO, 2009a, p.19). However, despite the actions carried out by the FAO, Côte d'Ivoire, like many developing countries, has not managed to curb the food crisis, which is raging in the world in general and in Africa particularly

In addition to the effects induced by food crisis, there are also societal issues, which have contributed to the impoverishment of the Ivorian population, especially those living in rural areas. Indeed, “the military-political crisis of September 2002 had a negative impact on household living conditions” (IMF, 2009, p. xii). Also, this armed crisis has led to a low level of education, a low level of access to health care, the impoverishment of family units, a low level of access to drinking water and electricity and a high rate of people of working age (IMF, *ibid.*). Thus, the combined effects of the military-political crisis and the food crisis have made households vulnerable through the increase in food prices on the market. This price inflation on the market has spread throughout the national territory, like the town of Korhogo which is experiencing a continuous rise in the price of basic foodstuffs such as corn, rice and oil.

In Korhogo, rising prices are a real problem for urban households. During the armed crisis experienced by the country, the city of Korhogo was in the CNO zone ¹. As a result, all activities suffered a slowdown. Despite the normalization of the political and economic situation, problems remain.

This study contributes to the understanding of the issue related to the high cost of basic foodstuffs on urban households in Korhogo and the resilience strategies developed by them.

1. Methodological Considerations

This study is part of the general theory of resilience, which postulates that “It is not the nature of adversity that is most important, but the way we deal with it. When we face adversity, misfortune or frustration, resilience helps us bounce back. It helps us survive, recover and even thrive in the face of misfortune (C. Moore, 2020)”². Specifically, it draws its legitimacy from the family adaptation theory developed by JM Patterson (1988), which states that this model of analysis "describes the process by which families balance demands and capacities when interacting with family meanings. The result is either family adaptation or adaptation³. The empirical part of this study took place in the urban Commune

¹During the armed crisis of 2002, Côte d'Ivoire was divided into two zones. A so-called government zone and another called Center-North-West (CNO), under the control of rebel forces.

² <https://www.proudpen.com/book/la-resilience-socio-economique-et-ladaptation-entre-covid-19-risques-de-guerre/la-theorie-de-resilience-et-son-cadre- conceptuel/>

³*Ibid.*

of Korhogo, precisely in the Haoussabougou and Tégouéré neighborhoods. There are two basic reasons for this. Indeed, Haoussabougou is the neighborhood with the highest density rate estimated at 25,280 inhabitants according to the general census of 2014. The choice of Tégouéré neighborhood is justified by the population rate, which amounts to 1,826 according to the same census. Tégouéré neighborhood, once a village, has gradually become a neighborhood, with new habits both in terms of houses and social aspect.

Data collection techniques such as participant observation and interviews were used in this study. To this end, four tools have been developed for data collection in the field. These included an observation grid, a questionnaire addressed to households and an interview guide for officials of the Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Trade, traders in popular markets, shopkeepers, shopping centers managers, and the heads of the Korhogo consumers' association. Two types of sampling were considered relevant in carrying out this study. The choice of people selected for the collection of qualitative data was made by contrast sampling. Thus two resource persons per category of actors were selected per neighborhoods. To this end, two (02) resource persons were interviewed at the level of the Regional Directorate of Commerce, against four (04) traders from popular markets, four (04) managers of shopping centers, four (04) neighborhood shopkeepers and four (04) consumer association leaders. With regard to the household survey, the network sampling technique was deemed relevant given the mistrust and refusal of some households to participate in the study.

Thus eighty (80) households were interviewed during this study. A total of 98 people took part in carrying out this study, between April 2020 and June 2020, as shown in Table 1.

Table n°1: Summary of people interviewed

Used tools	Number of participants
Interview guide	18
Survey	80
Total	98

Source: Our field survey, 2020

The processing of the data collected was carried out using the statistical software Sphinx Plus, which made it possible to proceed with the crossing of the variables, the production of tables and figures. With regard to the qualitative analysis, all the interviews were fully and systematically transcribed.

2. Presentation of Study Results

The presentation of the results of this study focuses on four (04) key points. These include: (i) the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, (ii) the strategic analysis of household adaptation, (iii) alternative foodstuffs, (iv) involvement of authorities in the regulation of food prices.

2.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents or Interviewee

Respondents were exclusively heads of households. In the context of this study, the term head of household means any person endowed with physical, moral and mental capacities who is responsible for the daily expenses. As such, the husband and wife are heads of household. In addition to these characteristics, the heads of households eligible for participation in this study are social actors in constant contact with popular markets, neighborhood shops and shopping centers in the city of Korhogo. Thus 80 heads of households, including 5% men and 95% women were interviewed.

The data from the study suggests a high rate of participation of women in this survey. The high representation of women can be explained by the fact that they were available and responsible for making purchases. Therefore, they have an idea of the evolution of the prices of different foodstuffs in the city of

Korhogo. The heads of households interviewed are relatively young. Indeed, the data in Table 3 show a predominance of respondents whose age range varies between 26 and 35 years.

The age group [26-35 years] recorded a rate of 61% against 19% for the age group [18-25 years] and 20% for [36 years and over]. This representativeness of the population surveyed fits perfectly with national statistics, which state that the general population of Côte d'Ivoire is essentially young.

Field data show that the majority of respondents are married with a rate of 39%. They are followed in order by single people, with a rate of 27%, against 23% for cohabitants, 6% for divorcees and 5% for widows. In terms of socio-professional situation, field data show 44% of traders. Alongside these, there are the unemployed with a rate of 26%. Students represent 11% of the surveyed population, against 13% of employees, and 6% of farmers.

The results of the study indicate that 46.3% of the population belong to large Gour group. The Mandé group comes in second position with a rate of 30%, against 17.5% for the Akan Group and 6.3% for the Krou Group.

The statistics reveal a strong presence of interviewees from the Gour ethnic group. This predominance finds its justification by the simple fact that the study area is the Poro region which includes the Senufo subgroup, originally from the said region (Northern Côte d'Ivoire).

2.2. Situational Analysis of Places and Purchase Prices

At this level of presentation of the results of the study, it is a question, on the one hand, of making the situational analysis of the places of purchase and the prices of foodstuffs and, on the other hand, of proceeding with the analysis of households adaptation strategies face with the high cost of foodstuffs in the city of Korhogo.

The results related to the places and prices of foodstuffs purchases show that the households in Haoussabougou and Tégouéré obtain most of their food from popular markets.

Data indicates that 40% of the population regularly buy their supplies from popular markets, compared to 31% from supermarkets and 29% from neighborhood shops. It should therefore be noted that the regularity of the place of purchase for households varies according to income. This diversification in the place of purchase of foodstuffs is partly justified by the retail or wholesale prices posted in the various places where households buy food.

The data show that 88% of the households surveyed say that the foodstuffs sold in the various places of purchase were expensive, while 7% thought they were very expensive, and 5% thought they were less expensive. Taking into account the variables "expensive" and "very expensive", it appears that 95% of households in the Haoussabougou and Tégouéré neighborhoods think the prices of foodstuffs in the various markets are high. According to these households, the high cost of foodstuffs is due to three main reasons. First, there is the abandonment of food crops in favor of cash crops. Then, the latter think that the changing weather conditions have a significant impact on the cost of food. And finally, poor roads condition cause additional costs in the transporting of goods from production areas to consumption areas. The inflation that households in Haoussabougou and Tégouéré in the town of Korhogo are facing is confirmed by 91% of respondents, who say that prices have increased, against 9%, who think they are not affected by the said inflation.

The majority of households recognize unprecedented food price inflation. This inflation is corroborated by the words of a head of household, who asserts the following: *"The increase in the price of foodstuffs is due to the strong demand. The price of foodstuffs has increased due to the condition of the*

roads. This increase is due to the strong demographic pressure of the city with the arrival of several infrastructures". These comments are confirmed by an official from the Ministry of Commerce who gives the following explanation: "This is due to several factors including, the strong dependence on external products, the low production of local foodstuffs, the poor condition of the roads, racketeering, the distribution circuit and finally, customs-tariff barriers". In addition to respondents who recognize a drastic rise in food prices, there is a fringe of households who do not share this opinion. Looking closely, the opinion of the latter is influenced by their membership in the ruling party (the RHDP). For them, recognizing the high cost of foodstuffs constitutes a kind of admission that the Government has no control over price regulation. The results of this study show that several situations explain the increase in food prices. Despite this price increase, households in Haoussabougou and Tégouéré are developing several strategies to cope with soaring prices.

2.3. Analysis of Household Adaptation Strategies of Haoussabougou and Tégouéré Face to Foodstuffs High Prices

Faced with inflation and the negative effects of rising foodstuffs prices, households in Haoussabougou and Tégouéré are developing several coping strategies. This is reflected in a change in behavior within households. Under these conditions, heads of households are more rigorous in the management of financial resources. Some heads of households engage in additional income-generating activities or sometimes disengage themselves from certain domestic responsibilities. Some heads of households therefore opt for reducing the quantity and quality of meals and the food ration, while trying to maintain the number of meals per day. In almost all households, three meals are usually taken per day (morning, noon and evening). However, with the high cost of food, the morning meal, that is to say breakfast, is disappearing from adults diet in many families.

Alongside this adaptation strategy, households are also opting for food substitution. It is in this perspective that Mrs. F.K affirms that: "I prefer to cook with a lot of leaves and *denikachia*⁴rice. I am obliged to pay, otherwise how will my family and I feed ourselves ". This strategy is popular with large families, made up of more than six (06) people and/or with low incomes, living on less than 60,000f CAF per month who have no choice but to review their standard of living. Conversely, small to medium-income households opt for wholesale supplies in supermarkets and popular markets. "I wait for the different market days to get my bulk supplies", as one head of household puts it.

Faced with the high cost of food, some households have no choice but to practice urban agriculture and adapt according to their purchasing power.

In view of the above, it should be noted that the prices of basic foodstuffs are on the rise for more than half of households. This surge in prices is the result of the strong dependence on imported products, such as Thai rice, etc. Also, the results of this study show that there are several factors that justify the high cost of foodstuffs in the city of Korhogo. For this, several strategies have been developed by households to deal with this crisis. The most common strategies are to engage in income-generating activities, the reduction of the daily ration, the consumption of low-quality rice instead of high-quality rice, the practice of urban agriculture and bulk supply.

3. Discussion of Study Results

The results of this study show a real increase in the prices of basic foodstuffs in the city of Korhogo. Explaining the adaptation mechanisms put in place by households in the city of Korhogo face to

⁴Ivorian neologism for poor quality rice

the high cost of foodstuffs is the general objective assigned to this study. Thus, this study has succeeded in showing that inflation is a social reality experienced by the populations of the city of Korhogo.

The results of this study indicate a growing increase in the cost of foodstuffs, which is a real “puzzle” for households in the neighborhood of Haoussabougou and Tégouéré. This social reality is legitimized by a rate of 95%. Several factors are at the root of this situation, namely: the strong population growth, which constitutes a mismatch between supply and demand, the poor condition of roads and the military-political crisis, which has negatively impacted the economic activities and household standard of living. For this reason, different strategies have been put in place by households to adapt to the high cost of foodstuffs.

The results of this research join other scientific work carried out on the question. Indeed, one of the adaptation strategies of households consists in adapting according to the risks and disasters caused by climate change, as considered by the (FAO, 2011, p.vi) in order to allow the practice of agriculture in West Africa and the Sahel.

In this context, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has developed a new Strategic Framework (2010-2019) which sets out the objectives of improving the preparation and response to threats and food and agricultural emergencies through specific actions before, during and after a crisis.

The adaptation of the strategy in the face of change implies the participation of each actor, which refers to the concept of eco-citizen. This strategy draws its legitimacy from the objectives of sustainable development, with a view to preventing the risk of deforestation and, by extension, combating global warming. Also, a study by FAO and its development partners carried out in 2021 showed that without a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, climate change will lead millions of households to hunger and especially in poor countries (FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP and UNICEF, 2021).

At the household level in the neighborhoods of Haoussabougou and Tégouéré, the most widely used adaptation strategies are: reduction of the daily ration, consumption of substitute foodstuffs, the practice of urban agriculture and bulk supply. The resilience strategies developed by the people of Korhogo are similar to those developed by FAO (2009b). Indeed, FAO (b) (op.cit.) mentioned in its report that: “To cope with the burden of these consecutive foodstuffs and economic crises, the poor are reducing the diversity of their diets, as well as their expenditure on basic needs such as education and health care” (FAO (b), op.cit., p.2). The results of this study are also in line with those of F. Akindès carried out since 1995. This author essentially specifies that households create forms of solidarity in order to reduce the cost of supplying basic foodstuffs, such as: rice, meat, etc. He also points out that adaptation strategies are diverse and differentiated according to the purchasing power of each household (F. Akindès, op.cit.). The notion of solidarity is also developed by LO Kibora et al. (2014), but in another form in which the man and the woman help each other with the daily expenses within the household.

Conclusion

The study on the high cost of foodstuffs and the resilience strategies of urban households in the Tégouéré and Ahoussabougou neighborhoods of Korhogo has made it possible to understand the causes linked to this situation and consequently to put in place differentiated adaptation strategies according to the type of household. Indeed, the food crisis and its effects on the populations of the city of Korhogo have enabled households to deconstruct and reconstruct new types of relationships in relation with the various markets. It should therefore be noted that the rise in food prices faced by the Ivorian populations and those of Korhogo, in particular, recommends and imposes on all citizens a collective awareness so as

to fight effectively against deforestation induced by uncontrolled urbanization and to encourage the development of food crops instead of cash crops.

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