

COVID 19 health crisis: an unprecedented challenge, an opportunity for a new dawn

Policy note of ActionAid Senegal and its partners

The appearance of the coronavirus in China in December 2019 and its rapid spread to the rest of the world has ended up causing widespread panic and psychosis. The virus, which knows no borders, no races, no religions, has infected **3,444,236**¹ people around the world and caused the death of more than **244,084** people, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). This number could be revised upwards in the coming days. Thus, in spite of the important means in terms of human resources (health and auxiliary staff, security and civil protection services) and financial resources, the virus seems to have gotten a head start because no vaccine to cure the disease has yet been found, making the task very difficult for health professionals and States.

A spread of the virus on an already vulnerable continent

Julia Sánchez, Secretary General of ActionAid International says: *“Both the coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis have revealed a deeply flawed global economic model that puts the profits of corporations before people and the planet. Africa is being crippled by a new debt crisis. With the looming threat of COVID-19 fast become a reality, developing countries can’t wait for international processes to decide on debt relief. Unprecedented collective action is needed to immediately free up cash to tackle this urgent health emergency.”*²

The rapid spread of the virus in Africa is causing great concern because of the weakness of the current health systems, the shortage of personnel in the most disadvantaged areas and the weakness of the available social protection systems. The virus impacts all other sectors, both social and economic - food insecurity threatens the most vulnerable segments of our society. It has shifted the lines between rich and poor and redefined the very notion of poverty. Families who live from day to day

¹ Source : MSAS <http://www.sante.gouv.sn/>

² [Who Cares for the Future: finance gender responsive public services!](#)



through daily activities have found themselves without resources to meet their immediate needs. To this must be also added the drastic reduction in financial transfers from migrants to Senegal that affects directly the resilience of these families. ActionAid Senegal and its partners are concerned about the risks of a rapid spread of the virus in these already fragile areas despite the awareness campaigns for the respect of hygiene rules. The restrictive measures taken by governments to stop the spread of the virus are certainly to be welcomed. However, all experts in all fields recognize that these measures, if continued without strategic adjustments, could "wipe out" already fragile economies.

Since the first case was detected in Senegal on March 02nd, 2020, the authorities have shown a reassuring serenity and at the same time have taken health and safety measures commensurate with the threat posed by this pandemic. ActionAid Senegal and its partners welcomes these measures and invites the Senegalese people to scrupulously respect the measures taken by the authorities to ensure health security to preserve Senegal from an uncontrollable situation with deviant economic and social consequences.

This pandemic has certainly caused panic and psychosis in the country, as in other countries of the world, but it has above all led to a deep reflection on the need to build our own economic, political, social and health independence.

ActionAid Senegal and its partners encourage Senegalese citizens who have embarked on creativity and innovation to continue this search for endogenous solutions and alternatives to our problems. This is the case with the manufacture of masks, hydro-alcoholic gel, hand washing machines, artificial respirator, etc, (made in Senegal). We strongly request that the State financially support these young talents. This same support could also be extended to the agricultural sector to ensure our food sovereignty by boosting our local production and processing.

ActionAid Senegal and its partners would also like to commend the measures taken by the government of Senegal to relieve the most vulnerable households, the national private sector, and those directly or indirectly affected by the restrictions in the context of COVID19.

However, they invite the government of Senegal to ensure that the measures are applied with strict respect for human rights and transparency.

Our propositions

1. Response and recovery plans must not reinforce gender inequalities.

ActionAid's new report shows how the global economy relies on women's unpaid care and domestic work – which will rise exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Response and recovery packages must provide women with income support and special measures to protect them from gender-based violence. The economic and social resilience programme for vulnerable households in the context of COVID 19 is a good response to alleviate the suffering of 1 million households that are in semi-confinement following the state of emergency and curfew decreed by the State of Senegal and recommends :

- Set up a committee to monitor the distribution of food supplies, including state authorities, civil society, local authorities, defense and security forces to expedite and monitor all stages of the process.
- Conduct distribution with the greatest transparency while respecting human dignity. The donation must not be used as a weapon to perpetrate violence or abuse of power against women or the most vulnerable (children, displaced populations and returning migrants).
- To continue these efforts to distribute food and various forms of support to vulnerable populations until the end of the hunger gap estimated at the end of August.
- If possible, encourage the purchase of food at the local level in order to revitalize the local economy, which has been so badly affected by the crisis.
- Pay attention to the families of migrants who are no longer able to send financial resources to Senegal, as well as to migrants passing through or returning to Senegal who may be in a situation of extreme vulnerability with the closure of the borders and who need protection.

- To associate the competent structures that have direct interventions with communities to ensure good targeting and geographical coverage of information collection from the analysis of the level and impact of the vulnerability of populations in the short, medium and long term to the identification of the types of responses adapted to the real needs of the populations in each area.
- Give priority to local and endogenous solutions that will be vital for the sustainability of initiatives rather than imported solutions that would be limited in scope and non-contextualized.
- Guarantee the correct supply of markets with food products in quantity and quality and ensure that food prices are kept under control to avoid speculation that could have harmful consequences on vulnerable households.
- Consider and promote the establishment of food security stocks to prevent food insecurity and facilitate the supply of markets with basic needs while ensuring the hygienic rules laid down by the Ministry of Health and Social Action.
- To make available to NGOs and social actors all information essential to support and strengthen State action in a coordinated, complementary and effective manner.

2. Respect for the right to Education for All everywhere at all times

Faced with the closure of classes until 02 June 2020, ActionAid Senegal recommends to :

- Initiate alternative educational programmes such as: school on radio, educational programmes on television, virtual learning spaces targeting different levels through accessible and free digital platforms.
- Varying alternative spaces and models that enable children with limited access to conventional communication channels to realize their right to education.
- Adopt an inclusive and non-discriminatory approach to the care of children with special needs, including daaras.
- Increase the speed of connectivity in rural areas to enable higher education students to access online courses more easily.

- Pursue dialogue with the teaching profession to agree on a rearrangement of school calendars to enable learners to reach the school quantum with respect for human rights and the principle of equal opportunity and equity.
- Ensure that the burden of domestic care does not fall disproportionately on girls so that they can follow the available educational programmes.

3. COVID 19 could be an opportunity to boost "local consumption" and ensure food sovereignty.

Faced with the closure of weekly markets and the restriction of urban and interurban mobility, ActionAid Senegal and its partners propose:

- An assessment of the potential risks that would lead to food insecurity and malnutrition in order to prepare an effective response that meets the needs of the victim populations.
- To envisage as soon as possible endogenous alternative solutions for the marketing of products such as: sweet banana, mango, mahogany nuts, market garden products, melon, potato and other horticultural and cereals products to avoid a general bankruptcy.
- Integrate the local processing units for local products available at the community level into the alternative models envisaged in order to strengthen the resilience of the communities through an effective contribution to the local economies.
- Initiate exchanges with producer organizations to anticipate the winter season in order to identify a endogenous mechanisms with a participatory approach for the supply of agricultural inputs (seeds, organic fertilizers, etc.) and price regulation.
- Engage in an in-depth and inclusive reflection on our current agricultural model and production methods that depend largely on the use of chemical inputs, thus increasing greenhouse gas emissions into the environment. This crisis is an opportunity to focus on the use of Clean Energies, the promotion of agroecology, which are alternatives capable of limiting the impact of climate change on the environment and especially on the land, which is and remains the first indispensable resource.

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4. Promote equitable access to basic social services for women, children and the elderly in rural areas (health, drinking water, transport, agriculture, energy, etc...) and respect the fundamental rights of all citizens: finance Public services!

- Conduct a public awareness campaign to enable people suffering from pathologies other than COVID19 not to abandon hospitals and community health structures in order to avoid creating a secondary health crisis during or after COVID19.
- Protect health personnel who are on the front line against COVID19 and provide health structures with the means to enable them to meet the specific needs of all patients.
- Ensure the protection of migrants in Senegal and migrants of Senegalese origin in countries affected by COVID 19.
- Do not neglect, as a result of COVID 19³, other important social and medical services, especially those addressed to the most vulnerable people. In particular, continue and even strengthen services for women who suffer gender-based violence, which is likely to increase with stress and confinement.
- Invest in teacher training for education and health sector in particular.
- Reflect on a more inclusive social protection model that allows workers in the formal and informal sectors to benefit from social security coverage that strengthens their resilience to shocks.

5. Strengthen our economy by relying on the national private sector and national champions to break the chain of economic dependence with industrialized countries, international financial institutions (IMF, WB):

ActionAid's research found that the IMF holds down public spending by imposing unnecessarily low inflation targets (in 80% of countries). It also imposes strict deficit targets (in 96% of countries) even where there is a compelling case for countries to spend more on public services. And most worryingly the IMF advises a freezing or

³ Source : https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331935/SITREP_COVID-19_WHOAFRO_20200429-eng.pdf

cutting of public sector wage bills (in 78% of countries) which actively prevents countries from employing more teachers, doctors, nurses or care workers. Even where the IMF makes exemptions for health and education spending, the effect is a usually a freeze, which is deeply problematic for countries with desperate shortages of teachers and doctors. With the gloomy economic prospects that Senegal could face in the coming months according to some economists, ActionAid Senegal and its partners:

- Support the position of the state of Senegal and other African states to call for the cancellation of bilateral debt and also invites to negotiate the reduction of the private debt service of these states hard hit by COVID19. According to ActionAid new report about financing public services (Who Cares for the Future: finance gender responsive public services!), For Senegal which has around 701 millions USD as external debt service, while in need of only 358 million USD to build a solid health System, cancelling debts due to the current context will highly impact quality gender responsible public services⁴.
- Also encourage the State of Senegal to make efficient and transparent use of the resources freed up through the various facilities to allocate them to basic social services but also to economic sectors that are growth drivers.
- Recommends the revision of the projections for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Strengthen protection of the rights of workers and their families, who have been severely affected by the health crisis.

The Covid 19 crisis, as painful as it is, made it possible to experiment the limits of established systems that seemed unshakeable. It reveals the major role of women and the informal sector in the social and economic balance of our country. It calls for a thorough rethinking of the agricultural, economic, educational and social systems. Above all, it calls for social action to be refocused on the human factor through the adoption of innovative models that respect people and resources.

⁴ Who Cares for the Future: finance gender responsive public services!